

## Building Evidence for Family First Programs and Services: *Screening Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT)*



### Background

The [Family First Prevention Services Act](#) incentivizes child welfare approaches that prioritize keeping kids safe and families together. This legislation authorizes federal reimbursement to states for the delivery of evidence-based programs and services that prevent the need for foster care. In October 2022, the Administration for Children and Families approved Colorado's bold [Five-Year Family First Prevention Services Plan](#) (Colorado's Plan) to maximize prevention investments in child welfare that help Colorado's children, youth, and families thrive, together.

The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab) to serve as the [Family First Evidence-Building Hub](#). In this role, the Colorado Lab ensures strategic investments in evidence building for Family First programs and services. The Hub coordinates evaluations that are designed to both meet Colorado-specific learning goals and advance [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#) (Clearinghouse) evidence designations.

### Why SBIRT?

[SBIRT](#) is a widely adopted approach by healthcare and behavioral health providers that uses motivational interviewing, brief intervention, and referral to treatment. It aims to reduce and prevent health consequences related to risky use of alcohol and other substances. SBIRT was prioritized because it fills a gap in Colorado's [substance use service array](#) by providing early support without need for a diagnosis and is available for use with both caregivers and youth. Colorado has recently expanded its investment in SBIRT to focus specifically on serving adolescents in Colorado schools. For example, the [SBIRT School-Based Health Center program](#) helped establish over 25 SBIRT sites to reach students in 30 Colorado schools in 2023-2024.

### Evidence Building for SBIRT

SBIRT has received a "promising" evidence designation from the Clearinghouse and is not yet in Colorado's Plan. Aligned with Step 4 on the [Steps to Building Evidence](#), [OMNI Institute](#) proposed a quasi-experimental design (QED) with the goal of achieving a "supported" evidence designation. [Current research evidence](#) shows effectiveness of SBIRT on adult well-being outcomes.



**This study explores the effects of SBIRT on child well-being (substance use or misuse and behavioral and emotional functioning) outcomes, such as alcohol consumption and depression severity, for adolescents in school-based settings.**

The OMNI Institute began a feasibility study in May 2024 to identify the most effective methods for follow-up data collection with adolescents. If study is feasible, the full QED will launch in 2025.

*The evaluation is being conducted by OMNI Institute on behalf of CDHS, under the coordination of the Colorado Lab's Family First Evidence-Building Hub.*

