Overcoming Language Barriers in Mental and Behavioral Health Care for Children and Adolescents—Policies and Priorities

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“It isn’t a good fit.” The patient, a child who had fled armed conflict and persecution, had been diagnosed with a severe behavioral health problem. The family was overwhelmed. On behalf of the family, we sought help from multiple behavioral health services and heard the same thing: “Therapy won’t work with an interpreter.” “We don’t know how to complete intake for a child who doesn’t speak English.” “We can’t start treatment until we hire a bilingual therapist.” Our health system failed this family, and the social and emotional consequences were devastating.

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