

# Community Clinical Systems Integration – Early Childhood Education Supports

## Statement of Problem

There is clear evidence demonstrating how early child care environments can have long-term benefits for children, including increased cognitive abilities, improved language development, better peer relationships and less conflict with caregivers. Early childhood education (ECE) is a crucial part of these supportive environments for a young child and is a critical and complementary community support service to pediatric health services. Without access to quality child care, including center- and home-based care, and friend, family, and neighbor care, families are at risk for missing out on positive socioemotional supports for children and children are at risk for safety hazards from unprepared or inadequately trained caregivers.

As trusted care providers of infants and young children, both home visitors and pediatric primary care providers are frequently called upon to help families with decisions about quality child care. Beyond endorsing ECE as a healthy, safe, and developmentally appropriate learning environment, both sectors have struggled to provide more practical and comprehensive support. This is in part because ECE is not a single system, but a system made up of thousands of individual providers with complicated regulatory and funding policies.

## Description

With the generous support of the Vanguard Strong Start for Kids initiative, PolicyLab developed and began to pilot Community Clinical Systems Integration (CCSI), an initiative focused on reducing fragmentation to build a more efficient system and address the structural barriers that exist to build a higher-quality and more collaborative and trusted network of care for families across all family-serving systems. We also launched the CCSI ECE support strategy—a strategy that aims to create an integrated cross-sector early childhood support system for families that includes evidence-based home visiting services, pediatric primary care, and quality child care to improve the health, well-being, and service delivery to families with young children in Philadelphia

Over the last two years, CCSI has worked to identify and assess the gaps that create barriers to providing adequate ECE support and education to families and develop resources and infrastructure necessary to close those gaps. We have actively engaged families, leadership of early childhood systems across Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, the early childhood advocacy community, and an advisory council to ensure the framework developed for the CCSI model can be adequately supported by the various family-serving systems and sustainable long term. In this process, we learned three valuable lessons that have shaped CCSI's continued work:

1. Families often serve as intermediaries between systems, which not only creates undue burden, but jeopardizes communication workflows that could best support children's health needs.
2. Families and providers (pediatricians, home visitors and child care providers) find communication challenging and duplicative, creating inefficiencies and additional burden.

3. Families, as well as family-serving systems (including pediatric primary care and home visiting organizations), find the child care system incredibly complex and difficult to navigate.

## **Next Steps**

Through the development of a multi-layered approach and continued engagement with critical stakeholders, we aim to build stronger coordination between systems and improve efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of accurate, timely and trusted ECE information to families.

Over the next three years, we aim to:

- Establish processes to build and maintain the knowledge and skills of staff from Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia’s (CHOP) health system and Philadelphia home visiting providers to improve their capacity to serve as an informed, trusted resource for families regarding access and participation in quality ECE
- Help families enroll their children in quality child care, with a special focus on high-needs children and/or families prioritized by the health system and families
- Operationalize strategies that improve communication, exchange of health information, and workflows between primary care providers, families and child care

CCSI recognizes the unique perspective and voice that the health system brings to raising awareness about the importance of a robust, quality child care system. Our hope is that this work will be used to 1) influence policy, practice, and stakeholder support to expand the availability and accessibility of child care, 2) build out a more robust system of communication between systems that has the potential to improve overall quality of the child care system, and 3) positively influence family understanding of and decision-making towards quality, safe caregiving environments.

*This project page was last updated in January 2022.*

## **Suggested Citation**

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## **PolicyLab Leads**

**Tara Dechert**  
**MS**

**Clinical Research Program Manager**

Tara Dechert (she/her) is a clinical research program manager at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. She oversees the implementation of initiatives that bridge care between home and community-based services with office-based pediatric preventive care delivery systems to positively impact child health. Ms. Dechert's work aims to ensure that pregnant women and their children receive the best possible care by providing a holistic approach to their overall health, well-being and education. To be successful, a goal of this work is to improve efficiencies across service delivery systems by focusing on intentional coordination of obstetrical and pediatric care with that of community health nursing and early childhood efforts.

Throughout her professional career, Ms. Dechert has worked to improve policies, services, research and outcomes for vulnerable children and families—all with an emphasis on quality and public/private resource efficiency. She has extensive experience in the not-for-profit and government sectors conducting assessment and evaluation of policies and government-funded programs as well as advocacy and strategic planning. Areas of expertise include evidence-based program development and implementation and community health nursing through home visiting. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from Elizabethtown College and a Master of Science in Administration of Justice from Shippensburg University.



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## **Meredith Matone**

### **DrPH, MHS**

#### **Director**

Dr. Matone's research interests include maternal and young child health, as well as family well-being. She focuses on building community and public agency research partnerships to support improvements in policies and programs that serve mothers and infants in under-resourced communities. She is experienced in large-scale program evaluation, mixed-methods research designs, and use of administrative data for observational study designs in areas of child and caregiver health.

Dr. Matone is a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics, a faculty affiliate at The Field Center, and a board member of the Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Youth Children. Dr. Matone received her Doctor of Public Health, specializing in child and adolescent health and development, from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She is an alumnus of the Doris Duke Fellowship for the Promotion of Child Well-being program and a former Stoneleigh Foundation fellow.



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## Team

### **Sherita Williams** **MS, PHMA**

#### **Clinical Research Coordinator/Child Care Navigator**

Sherita Williams (she/her) is a clinical research coordinator and child care navigator at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). She is currently working on a research project titled “Community-Clinical Services Integration: Leveraging Pediatric Primary Care to Enhance Home Visiting and Early Childhood Supports”, which aims to create a systems-level collaborative approach to improve patient and family care while also identifying opportunities for intentional integration of services. This project provides enhanced support to home visiting and primary care providers as well as families aiming to improve understanding of and decision-making processes around quality child care.

Previously, Mrs. Williams served in a leadership capacity at Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC) as the enrollment and referral coordinator for the PHL preK Intermediary. Prior to that, she served as health and family services manager for PHMC's former Head Start Program. In both roles, she focused on streamlining and coordinating enrollment supports for low-income families' access to quality preschool and child care options in Philadelphia, as well as coordinating comprehensive and preventive health care supports for children ages three to five who are enrolled in Medicaid.

Mrs. Williams received her master's degree in public health management and administration from Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. She also holds a Bachelor of Science in Social Work. Her research interests include maternal health, access and sustainability of quality early childhood education for ages zero to five, and preventative health promotion for children.



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# Katherine Kellom

## Administrative Manager

Katherine Kellom (she/they) is an administrative manager at PolicyLab and the director of the Qualitative Research Core at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. She has worked at nationally top-ranked institutions with teams comprised of experts in their fields conducting qualitative, mixed and multi-method research for more than ten years. Beginning as a research assistant at the University of Pennsylvania's Mixed Methods Research Lab, Katherine currently serves across a variety of project teams to provide conceptual and technical support for clinical and community-based research projects. She has extensive knowledge and valuable practical experience applying qualitative research methodologies with a focus on integrating key stakeholder perspectives and goals into research designs.

Katherine leads and advises project teams using qualitative methods to achieve research aims on projects ranging from small pilots to state-wide, mixed-methods evaluations. Katherine is an expert in facilitation techniques and in the use of the qualitative data analysis tool, NVivo; she provides training in both areas. As director of the Qualitative Research Core, Katherine manages and supports staff members and qualitative team members in the Core and at PolicyLab, ensuring skillset development and access to the resources needed to contribute high-quality work to various project teams.

Katherine received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Bryn Mawr College in 2009, majoring in psychology.



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# Jennifer Whittaker

## PhD, MUP

## Research Scientist

Jennifer Whittaker (she/her) is a research scientist at PolicyLab and the senior manager of qualitative methods training and program development with the Qualitative Research Core at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP).

Dr. Whittaker has over a decade of experience conducting qualitative and mixed-method research, with a particular focus on community-engaged research. As a member of the Qualitative Research Core, she develops and leads training in qualitative research methods and provides research design and conceptual support to research teams across CHOP. At PolicyLab, Dr. Whittaker is a member of the maternal health research team where her work focuses on the role of place and public systems in supporting maternal and child health. She serves as the staff lead for the Family and Community Health Portfolio and is an advisory board member for the Community Partnerships in Research program. She is also a member of CHOP's Qualitative Methods

Research Affinity Group, a fellow at University at Pennsylvania's Center for Public Health Initiatives and a board member for the Pennsylvania Rural Health Association.

An alumnus of Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Health Policy Research Scholars Leadership Development Program, Dr. Whittaker is trained in interdisciplinary, applied and policy-oriented scholarship. She completed her PhD in city planning at the University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design, where her research led to [Our Rural Pennsylvania](#), an atlas created by mothers and caregivers to record the everyday places that influence their health. She completed her master's degree in urban and regional planning at the University at Buffalo and her bachelor's degree in geography at the State University of New York at Geneseo. Prior to coming to Philadelphia, Dr. Whittaker was a research associate at the Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab where she conducted research on the role of local government policy and planning in facilitating healthy communities.



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## **Brian Vazquez**

### **MA**

#### **Clinical Research Coordinator**

Brian Vazquez (he/him) is a clinical research coordinator at PolicyLab and Clinical Futures at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. In this role, he coordinates all clinical research activities within the scope of the Family Bridge Program protocols, a hospital-based, patient navigator intervention to improve access and quality of care for uninsured or Medicaid-enrolled children, including children in families who speak Spanish, Vietnamese and Somali. His primary responsibilities include facilitating institutional review boards (IRB) processes, recruiting and educating participants, conducting interviews, analyzing data, and delivering program interventions.

Throughout his professional career, Mr. Vazquez has worked in education and administration, research and writing, and the translations and interpretation industry. Some of his work experience involve working as a co-instructor for an intensive English and developmental psychology course at Bethlehem University in the West Bank and as an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor to culturally and linguistically diverse adult learners at a non-profit organization in Philadelphia. Additionally, Mr. Vazquez has worked in the translations and interpretation field for eight years. His master's thesis investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrant Latino ESL adult learners in Philadelphia.

Mr. Vazquez holds a Bachelor of Art in Psychology with a minor in religion from La Salle University and a Master of Art in Social Sciences and Education and Society Certificate from The University of Chicago.



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## Funders of Project

Vanguard Strong Start for Kids

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## Related Tools & Publications

- [Launching Today: A Home Visiting Initiative Building Connections for Better Maternal-Child Health Blog Post](#)  
Sep 04, 2019
- [Meeting Families Where They Are: Child Care Navigation Supports Through Primary Care Blog Post](#)  
Mar 08, 2022
- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Public Comment: Improving Child Care Access, Affordability, and Stability in the Child Care and Development Fund Tools and Memos](#)  
Aug 2023

## Related Projects

[Community Clinical Systems Integration Initiative – Home Visiting Family & Community Health](#)