

Evaluating Use of Family Navigation in Child Care Settings

Statement of Problem

Developmental delays and behavioral challenges are often first identified among children between the ages of 1 and 5 years old. It is estimated that about 10-12% of children experience some degree of delays or behavior problems and are often referred to services by their child care providers as a result. Though early identification and intervention is crucial to prevent adverse outcomes, research has shown that only 50% of children access relevant services, and many children are lost in the gap between referral and initiation of behavioral health and early intervention services.

Navigation—providing care guidance and facilitating connections to health services—has proven to be one effective way to increase access to behavioral health for adults and has been piloted for young children in primary care settings. Research exploring the use of navigation for families in child care settings is limited.

Description

Through this project, our team plans to evaluate the feasibility, acceptability and impact of a family navigation intervention in early childhood education settings. Our team will pair a family navigator with caregivers to help facilitate connection to referred services. We will examine the impact of this family navigation intervention on access to and engagement in early intervention and/or behavioral health service use among children who are referred by their child care provider. We will also gather information about developmental and/or behavioral challenges among young children and will explore how early childhood agencies address these needs. We enrolled 20 child care centers in Philadelphia in the project.

Our team will measure:

- number of and reason for referrals
- time between referral, intake and initiation of services
- communication between service entities and child care centers
- parent perceptions about early intervention and behavioral health services
- utility and satisfaction of the family navigator intervention from the perspective of child care administrators

Next Steps

With this project we hope to build evidence that a family navigation intervention increases the percentage of children who gain access to needed early intervention and/or behavioral health services. Findings from our study will be disseminated to partners and collaborators in Pennsylvania to inform strategies used by child care centers, early intervention and behavioral health entities to optimize access to services for all children.

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PolicyLab Leads

Team

Lanelle Quzack MSW, LSW

Clinical Research Coordinator

Lanelle Quzack (she/her) is a clinical research coordinator at PolicyLab and the Qualitative Research Core at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). Prior to coming to CHOP, Lanelle worked as a licensed social worker in child welfare. Lanelle's work is driven by a commitment to understanding the complex dynamics of human experiences and promoting social justice. Lanelle's in-depth understanding of social work principles and practices allows her to navigate complex social issues and integrate an equity lens into research. She also has experience working on qualitative projects and program evaluations. Lanelle finds the most fascinating projects are those that engage and empower community members, allowing their voices to shape the research process.

Lanelle is currently pursuing a PhD in social work at Widener University, where her doctoral research focuses on community-centered research and decolonial approaches, exploring ways to challenge traditional power structures and center marginalized voices. She completed her master's degree in social work at West Chester University and her bachelor's degree in psychology at Millersville University.



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Andrew Orapallo

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School Mental Health Consortium Project Director

Andrew Orapallo is the project director of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's (CHOP) Tri-County School Mental Health Consortium (SMHC), a collaboration between the Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery County Intermediate Units and CHOP, with the goal to strengthen capacity for implementing, evaluating and sustaining evidence-based school mental health promotion programs. In addition to his work on SMHC, Dr. Orapallo works at CHOP's Young Child Clinic, where he provides intervention, consultation and assessment services for children from birth to kindergarten. He also serves on the editorial board for *Prevention Science* as an early-career reviewer and is an active member of several professional organizations, including the Society for Prevention Research (SPR) and the American Psychological Association (APA).

Dr. Orapallo's research interests broadly focus on the integration of evidence-based mental health programming into schools and community settings, with a particular emphasis on prevention and early intervention for high-risk infants, toddlers and young children. His work leverages principles inherent to dissemination and implementation science, trauma-informed approaches to care and community-engaged research. Clinically, Dr. Orapallo has expertise in early childhood development. In particular, he focuses on promoting positive parent-child relationships and teaching caregivers effective behavior management strategies for young children with or at-risk for disruptive behavior concerns. He also conducts comprehensive evaluations for a range of developmental, social-emotional and behavioral concerns at the Young Child Clinic.

Dr. Orapallo received his PhD in School Psychology from Tulane University in 2023. Prior to joining PolicyLab, he completed his predoctoral internship in Integrated Behavioral Health at CHOP, where he was also a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) fellow.



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