A Call to Reimagine Early Childhood Mental Health in 200 Words

Family & Community Health

Date Posted:

Nov 16, 2023



“He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.” – Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart



Emma and Dr. Njoroge attend the Pennsylvania Association for Infant Mental Health conference

I (Wanjik?) recently had the privilege of kicking off the Pennsylvania Association for Infant Mental Health (PA-AIMH) conference with this powerful quote. In the wake of the pandemic and high levels of distress among young children, caregivers, and providers, I called on attendees to reimagine, rethink, and rebuild infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH).

Research shows the early years of a child's life are vitally important. Nurturing relationships and healthy environments set children up to thrive, while adverse experiences can have effects that may be felt across the life course.

With the goal of supporting early childhood development, conference sessions explored rethinking the practice of IECMH through models such as reflective practice, which involves reflecting on attitudes and actions for the purposes of ongoing learning and improvement. Other sessions, including one on health inequities, called for policy changes such as universal child care.

At PolicyLab, we're committed to answering the call to reimagine IECMH. Our researchers are evaluating implementation of models that promote IECMH such as HealthySteps and Reach Out and Read, and several of us are collaborating on a strategy for coordinating and sustaining evidence-based early childhood care models in Pennsylvania.

The conference was an opportunity to connect with colleagues across the state on our shared work to benefit Pennsylvania babies and families—and we're excited for what's ahead.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Communications Manager Laura Cavello.

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