
SERIES: An Integrated Approach to Supporting Child Development

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This Evidence to Action brief highlights PolicyLab's work related to developmental screenings for young children.

Developmental delays affect between 10 and 13 percent of U.S. children under the age of three; however, only two to three percent of children in this age group receive Early Intervention (EI) services. An approach that identifies concerns early and links children to services is vital. Many efforts have focused on implementing developmental screening in primary care, and have contributed valuable information about the feasibility and effectiveness of this strategy. However, few studies have evaluated the success of screening beyond the identification of a developmental concern and the initiation of a referral. Those studies that have looked beyond referral show significant gaps between the identification of a concern and the receipt of developmental services by children and families. This has prompted increasing awareness of the need for better care coordination across systems involved in meeting the developmental needs of children.

To promote a more coordinated approach to meeting children's developmental needs, this brief proposes the adoption of the SERIES paradigm of developmental screening in which each step—Screening, Early Identification, Referral, Intake, Evaluation, and Services—is seen not as an isolated activity, but rather an integral component of a single process. SERIES challenges all systems serving young children to broaden their focus to include practices that promote shared responsibility for ensuring that each child successfully completes the entire pathway from screening to services. This brief does not aim to be a comprehensive review of the evidence around developmental screening, as such reviews already exist. Instead, the brief explores barriers that may prevent children from completing the SERIES, highlights promising approaches for collaboration, and proposes practice and policy actions that may offer useful guidance for planning, financing, and delivering early childhood services.

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