

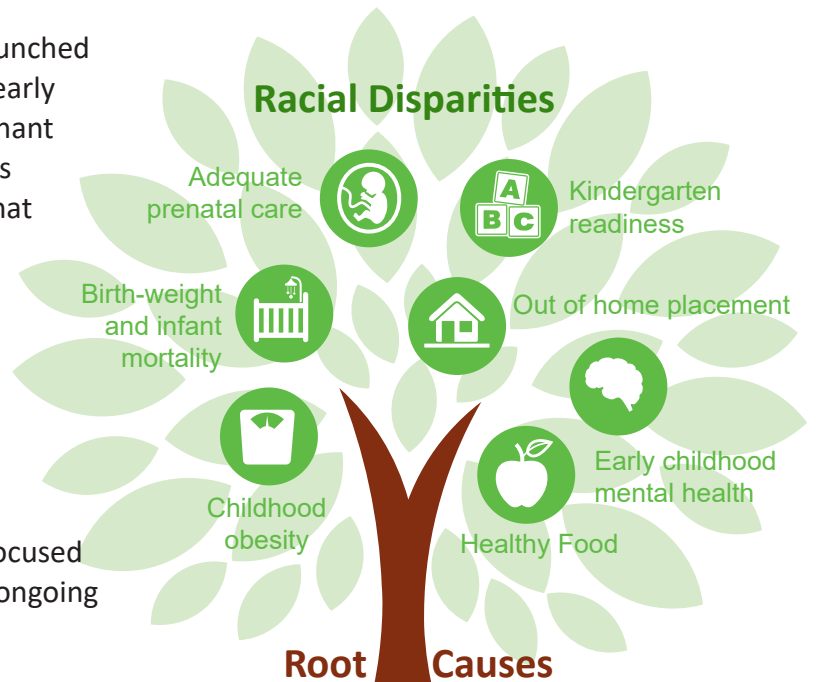
Early Childhood Systems Reform

Early childhood is the optimal opportunity to support lifelong health and well-being, and development during this time is interdependent with family and community prosperity. Significant findings in recent years inform us that what occurs in early childhood – in particular before birth until age three – has great impact on future success.

The Early Childhood Systems Reform project was launched in early 2017 to create an effective state system of early childhood programs and services that ensures pregnant and parenting families of prenatal to three-year-olds are receiving the supports they need in a manner that encourages their optimal growth and development, and eliminates racial disparities in program access and outcomes.

We started by putting the families and communities that are impacted at the center of the process to identify solutions.

In partnership with families and communities, we focused on naming and examining the root causes of these ongoing disparities in early childhood access and outcomes.



Steering Committee Members

- ✓ Represent racially, ethnically and geographically diverse constituents.
- ✓ Have an active method for organizing and communicating with their constituency around early childhood issues.
- ✓ Provide fresh perspectives.

Specific Communities represented include:

Culturally-based Somali Child Care and Isuroon; Coalition of Asian American Leaders; Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES); Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center; Rural and Urban Family Voice; Hmong Early Childhood Coalition; White Earth Nation; Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe; Early Head Start; Minnesota Initiative Foundations; Assistant Commissioners and Division Directors from Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota Department of Human Services



Through a series of conversations that focused on naming and examining the root causes of disparities, we created a theory of change. This theory includes a Vision and Mission statement, Goals and Focus Areas, and top level Recommendations on how to broadly achieve the goals and vision.

Vision

By focusing on children facing racial, geographic, and economic inequities, all children in Minnesota will be born healthy and able to thrive within their families and communities.

Mission

Create an equitable system that supports pregnant and parenting families with young children. To do this families, communities, and government agencies will partner to eliminate structural racism and inequities that exist in access, policies, programs and practices.

Goal Areas

Early Learning, Health & Wellbeing, Economic Security, Safe Stable Nurturing Relationships

Focus Areas

Early Care & Education, Healthy Birth & Development, Housing & Community Design, Government Partnership with Community, Family & Community Supports

Top Level Recommendations

- ✓ Prioritize policies that support family economic stability.
- ✓ Ensure policies and programs incorporate an inclusive and flexible definition of family.
- ✓ Expose and eradicate explicit and implicit racial & geographic bias.
- ✓ Incentivize authentic partnerships between government and communities.
- ✓ Increase access to and knowledge of services in a community driven and culturally responsive way.
- ✓ Increase access to safe and affordable housing for families with low incomes.
- ✓ Build trust of government within communities.
- ✓ Transform government culture and operations to meet the needs of families and communities.



MN Early Childhood Systems Reform Theory of Change

GUIDING LENSES

Cultural Relevance • Equity • Leveraging Family & Community Assets • Support Long-Term, Whole Family Stability • Brain Science • Integration of Strategies to Break Down Silos • Acute & Historical Trauma

VISION

Defines the future reality we are working to create.

By focusing on children facing racial, geographic, and economic inequities, all children in Minnesota will be born healthy and able to thrive within their families and communities.

MISSION

Describes how we will create the future.

Create an equitable system that supports pregnant and parenting families with young children. To do this families, communities, and government agencies will partner to eliminate structural racism and inequities that exist in access, policies, programs and practices.

GOAL AREAS

Focus the Vision into tangible, achievable outcomes.



Early Learning



Health & Wellbeing



Economic Security



Safe Stable Nurturing Relationships

FOCUS AREAS

Provide focus for our Recommendations. Interrelated and drive change in several Goal Areas.



Early Care & Education



Healthy Birth & Development



Housing & Community Design



Government Partnership with Community



Family & Community Supports

RECOMMENDATIONS

Broad recommendations to drive state agency practices and policies and provide focus for community-defined strategies & actions.

- ✓ Prioritize policies that support family economic stability.
- ✓ Ensure policies and programs incorporate an inclusive and flexible definition of family.
- ✓ Expose and eradicate explicit and implicit racial & geographic bias.
- ✓ Incentivize authentic partnerships between government and communities.
- ✓ Increase access to and knowledge of services in a community driven and culturally responsive way.
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- ✓ Transform government culture and operations to meet the needs of families and communities.

About the Goal & Focus Area Definitions

GOAL AREAS

Focus the Vision into tangible, achievable outcomes.



Early Learning

State and local communities provide culturally-affirming and multi generational financial supports that start before birth in order to eliminate the achievement gap, so that young children are healthy, thriving, and ready for education and life success.



Health & Wellbeing

State and local communities work together to eliminate inequities in access to opportunities and resources for pregnant and parenting families so they may achieve and maintain optimal lifelong health and wellbeing.



Economic Security

Recognizing that economic security is a key influencer of health and wellbeing, government partners with communities to build family and community wealth, so that pregnant and parenting families have equitable access to the resources they need for economic prosperity.



Safe Stable Nurturing Relationships

Government provides culturally-affirming services that enable pregnant and parenting families to experience socially connected, safe, supportive, and nurturing relationships within their families and extended families, communities, and schools.

FOCUS AREAS

Provide focus for our Recommendations. Interrelated and drive change in several Goal Areas.



Early Care and Education

The ways in which government and other systems provide support for pregnant and parenting families and their care providers in accessing high quality care and education that meets their individual family needs.



Healthy Births & Development

The ways in which government and health systems support and interact with pregnant and parenting families to meet their needs throughout the prenatal, birth, and early development periods.



Housing & Community Design

The way in which government and nonprofit programs support safe and affordable housing and communities for pregnant and parenting families with young children to address social determinants of health and wellbeing.



Government Partnership with Community

The ways in which government and other systems provide support for pregnant and parenting families and their care providers in accessing high quality care and education that meets their individual family needs.



Family & Community Supports

The way that government, communities, and other systems holistically recognize and affirm diverse cultures in programs, policies, and practices to support pregnant and parenting families with young children as a way to address community development.

How am I doing...



EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS REFORM RECOMMENDATION FRAMEWORK



Prioritizing policies that support family economic stability?

- Direct financial resources to policies and practices that prioritize whole family approaches.
- Increase financial investment in early childhood ecosystem to provide quality care, including nontraditional, non-center-based options that meet the needs of all families.
- Change the government narrative and behavior to promote family economic stability, specifically for those experiencing inequities from institutional racism.
- Continue services and resources when there is a significant change and throughout a transitional period, until the family stabilizes.

Children can't thrive if their family is not economically stable. Current programs, practices and policies either incorrectly assume economic stability in the way they are delivered or are designed in such a way that they are keeping people in poverty through overly stringent eligibility requirements and cut-off criteria.



Ensuring policies and programs incorporate an inclusive and flexible definition of family?

- Ensure laws and policies are built around definitions of family created by the family.
- Use language, engage families and implement programs using the definition of family created by family.
- Resource fully and support family engagement in decision making, policy making, and program implementation.

The definition of “family” that government systems use to inform programs and eligibility standards do not align with what different communities consider to be family. This creates a mismatch between the communities that programs are intended to reach and who is able to access them. One solution that was developed was for families to define for themselves who their family consists of. This would allow diverse communities with different conceptions of what a family is to be able to access the resources they need.



Exposing and eradicating explicit and implicit racial and geographic bias?

- Direct funding to those delivering core services in a culturally-specific way.
- Assess and create plans to expand current level of training on historic and acute institutional racism and trauma.
- Make decisions based on community-involved and data-informed processes.

Government must acknowledge past and current racial inequities and structural racism present in its programs, practices and services, and take significant action to eradicate it. One strategy to accomplish this is for the state government to require in-depth training on historic structural racism and multi-generational trauma.



Incentivize authentic partnerships between government and communities?

- Establish task force around building authentic partnerships in order to solve specific problems.
- Establish feedback loops between government staff and communities that support reciprocal relationships.

In many cases, government programs and services do not match the needs of those that they're intended for. And, families and communities know best what is needed for their children to thrive. Given this, government systems need to engage communities when they are designing programs, practices, and policies. Part of establishing authentic partnerships is creating channels for real communication, enabling communities to more readily express things they feel are going well and are not, and government staff to follow up appropriately.



Increasing access to and knowledge of services in a community driven and culturally responsive way?

- Direct funding to support communities to define their own problems and community-specific solutions. Culturally-specific community-based hubs should be strongly considered as a model for accomplishing this.
- Provide the necessary infrastructure, support, and technical assistance to allow for intake and navigation across a multiplicity of whole family issues within community-based locations.
- Ensure that culturally-specific whole family programs and services are provided within communities.

Communities that traditionally experience barriers to services and programs would benefit from being able to access a location in their community, staffed by people that look like them, in order to hear about and sign up for a range of targeted resources and services. Community hubs are one strategy that would allow services and programs to be tailored to the unique issues facing their community and alleviate distrust of government systems.



Increasing access to safe and affordable housing for families with low incomes?

- Institute education and training about the history of racist housing policy and its effect on the current housing situation.
- Support organizations that are holistically addressing housing instability across multiple sectors.
- Make housing a priority for inter-agency efforts working on early childhood.
- Invest across the continuum of housing stability support and services.
- Work with city and county governments to address key barriers to housing stability.

Unstable and unaffordable housing is at the center of a host of related problems in early childhood, both the effect of a web of complex government policy and systems, and the cause of numerous negative outcomes for kids and families. Efforts have to address affordable and stable housing as the center of child and family wellbeing, and those efforts need to be coordinated across multiple agencies and sectors.



Building trust of government within communities?

- Hire and retain a diverse, culturally-informed workforce and develop an infrastructure that allows diverse communities to apply their cultural values to the development of state and local practice, programs, and policy.
- Establish accessibility to services through navigators or community locations.
- Share power between communities and government to co-create programs and policies.
- Collaborate to allow for ease of data sharing and other county/state administrative needs.
- Co-create a narrative that prioritizes racial equity in practice, programs, and policies.

Government needs to figure out how to incentivize relationships, love and support rather than its current focus on accountability and check-boxes which has resulted from its grounding in scarcity mentality and fear of litigation. It is also important to acknowledge the implicit bias in government practice, programs and policies that has been a source of distrust in communities.



Transforming government culture and operations to meet the needs of families and communities?

- Prioritize collaborative cross-agency government efforts that place families at the center of the efforts.
- Increase investment in early childhood education by fully funding evidence- and practice-informed strategies and services that meet the needs of all families to eliminate the cliff effect.
- Partner with families and communities as experts to identify and solve problems and create culturally-driven programs that support child health and development that can be accessed by all communities that need them.

Government culture that incentivizes siloing of services, lack of coordination, and incremental change, coupled with historic and ongoing structural racism that perpetuates mindsets about who is deserving of support lead to inequities in service provision and outcomes. To make progress, these cultural norms need to be disrupted.