

Universal Screening Initiative Takes Off

The Strong Families Work Group is spearheading a statewide initiative on universal screening of young children and their families. The purpose of the project is to develop screening systems that would identify children and families experiencing problems as early as possible so that needed interventions could be provided that would potentially avoid more costly treatment services. As an initial step, with the support of the BUILD Initiative, the Work Group surveyed other states to determine best practices and models. The Work Group has decided that the initial focus will be on conducting child developmental screening in primary care using standardized tools for all children at ages 9 months, 18 months and 30 months. This effort would be in keeping with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines and would facilitate early referral and services for better outcomes for children.

The intent is that although the initial focus will be on developmental screening, it will create the platform to screen children and families for other key areas such as social emotional development and maternal depression, and to assess family risks and needs for supports and services.

In May, representatives from the Work Group met with the Medicaid Redesign Team to discuss the critical importance and long term cost savings of developmental screening and to discuss how to use Medicaid Redesign to help drive and support system change.

Background - We know that health and developmental problems evolve over the first few years of a child's life so early identification of possible problems is critical to getting children into services at a time when outcomes can be improved. Left undetected and untreated developmental problems can lead to speech and motor delays, learning difficulties, behavioral problems and eventually trouble in school.

- Approximately 12-16% of children have developmental or behavioral disorders.ⁱ
- Only 20%-30% of children with disabilities are identified before entering school.ⁱⁱ

Provider surveys suggest that fewer than half of pediatricians regularly use standardized screening instruments to monitor development of their young patients. Through this initiative, the Strong Families Work Group hopes to make routine developmental screening universal in New York State, starting with primary care (pediatricians, pediatric nurse-practitioners, family practice physicians) which is the universal portal through which young children are served and which offers an un-paralleled, non-stigmatizing venue to reach young children and their families.

ⁱ *Incorporating Comprehensive Developmental Screening into Program and Services for Young Children*, Ounce of Prevention Fund, 2006.

ⁱⁱ *Developmental Screening in Early Childhood Systems: Summary Report*, American Academy of Pediatrics/ Health Child Care America, 2009.