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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