

# Improving Access to Vision Care for Youth in Foster Care

## Statement of Problem

Vision is tied to multiple aspects of well-being including physical, emotional, developmental, and social. Uncorrected vision problems among children can impair learning, participation in extra-curricular activities and social development.

Accessing vision care and glasses can be particularly challenging for youth in foster care. [Undetected and undertreated health problems are common](#) among children entering foster care, and they can experience unique health care access barriers during placement.

While caring for youth in Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's (CHOP) [Fostering Health Program](#), we noticed that many children with abnormal vision screens did not have access to glasses. In research to [further understand](#) this issue, we reviewed the charts of 190 children seen at our clinic over a one-year period. Out of 55 patients with a documented history of needing glasses, only 12 (22%) had access to them. We performed eye chart vision screens for 120 patients and 71 (59%) were abnormal. Almost all youth with abnormal vision screens (66/71, 93%) did not have access to glasses.

We also noted that children in foster care face unique challenges in accessing vision care. Fragmented health care and schooling resulted in missed opportunities for routine vision screens. Some children reported their glasses were lost as they entered foster care or moved placements. And caregivers, especially non-relative foster parents, reported being unaware that children in their care needed glasses.

Further, children in foster care are at [increased risk](#) for health problems that can be compounded by uncorrected vision issues, including academic delays and behavioral manifestations of trauma experiences such as hypervigilance.

## Description

In 2024, our team, composed of Fostering Health Program and PolicyLab professionals, launched a project funded by the Warby Parker Impact Foundation aimed at helping children in foster care access the vision care they need.

As part of this project, patients of CHOP's Fostering Health Program with abnormal vision screens will receive case management to help coordinate optometry visits, support with associated costs such as transportation, optometry exams, and glasses, as well as help using technology to facilitate ordering glasses.

Multiple systems are involved in delivering care to foster youth including health care providers and payors, courts, and child welfare agencies. In tandem with implementation of additional care supports within the Fostering Health Program, we are speaking to various interest-holders to understand system-level barriers and opportunities for improving access to and continuity of vision care for youth in foster care. This will inform the

development of targeted educational materials and policy recommendations.

Additionally, we will measure the impacts of the clinical intervention on access to glasses and multiple domains of well-being. We are putting youth and caregivers at the center of this work, inviting foster youth and resource parents to share their experiences and insights in interviews. This information will be paired with assessment of intervention-related outcomes, such as time to receipt of glasses after abnormal vision screens, to demonstrate the impact of this program and inform next steps.

## Next Steps

With this project, our goal is to ultimately improve systems of care for foster youth so they have consistent access to the glasses they need to learn, participate in the activities they love, interact with others, and recover from trauma experiences. Over the course of this project, we aim to:

- **Develop and disseminate** educational materials from interview findings and desk-based research to help inform practice across child welfare agencies, foster care agencies, child advocates, vision care providers, schools, foster parents, and additional community interest-holders. These materials will center foster youth and help their support network see the role they can play in advocating for youth's vision health.
- **Translate our findings** into a policy brief and disseminate policy recommendations at the local and state levels to the multiple systems involved in caring for foster youth. This brief will demonstrate the vital importance of vision care for foster youth and explore strategies to mitigate the unique access barriers this population faces.
- **Highlight youth voices and foster parent perspectives** on the impact of living with and without vision supports, as well as identifying needs and gaps in the system to identify and sustain the most valuable intervention components and inform future efforts.

As this work has progressed, two new projects have evolved from our work in this space:

- In a project using visual qualitative methods, we aim to demonstrate the longitudinal impact of improved access to vision care among youth in foster care beyond the health care space. This work is funded by The National Foundation to End Child Abuse and Neglect (EndCAN).
- Drawing on the expertise of individuals with lived experience and leaders from child welfare organizations, we will develop a partnership to expand vision screening beyond the medical setting with community-based initiatives to better address the vision care needs of youth in foster care. This work is funded by American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) CATCH Program.

## Suggested Citation

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## **PolicyLab Leads**

### **Kristine Fortin MD, MPH**

#### **Faculty Scholar**

Kristine Fortin (she/her) is a faculty scholar at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, an attending physician, Director of the Child Abuse Pediatrics Fellowship and Medical Director of the Fostering Health Program at Safe Place: Center for Child Protection and Health at CHOP.



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## **Team**

### **Katherine Kellom**

#### **Administrative Manager**

Katherine Kellom (she/they) is an administrative manager at PolicyLab and the director of the Qualitative Research Core at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. She has worked at nationally top-ranked institutions with teams comprised of experts in their fields conducting qualitative, mixed and multi-method research for more than ten years. Beginning as a research assistant at the University of Pennsylvania's Mixed Methods Research Lab, Katherine currently serves across a variety of project teams to provide conceptual and technical support for clinical and community-based research projects. She has extensive knowledge and valuable practical experience applying qualitative research methodologies with a focus on integrating key stakeholder perspectives and goals into research designs.

Katherine leads and advises project teams using qualitative methods to achieve research aims on projects ranging from small pilots to state-wide, mixed-methods evaluations. Katherine is an expert in facilitation techniques and in the use of the qualitative data analysis tool, NVivo; she provides training in both areas. As director of the Qualitative Research Core, Katherine manages and supports staff members and qualitative team members in the Core and at PolicyLab, ensuring skillset development and access to the resources needed to

contribute high-quality work to various project teams.

Katherine received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Bryn Mawr College in 2009, majoring in psychology.



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## **Emma Golub**

### **MPH**

#### **Policy Analyst**

Emma Golub (she/her) is a policy analyst at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). Ms. Golub supports PolicyLab's work on the payment reform necessary to scale and sustain health care interventions that support healthy development in early childhood and advance health equity. She focuses on HealthySteps, a dyadic care model that promotes healthy early childhood development in pediatric primary care. Her role also includes serving as the strategist for PolicyLab's Family & Community Health Portfolio.

Ms. Golub most recently served as a senior health policy analyst at the Center for Health and Research Transformation (CHRT) at the University of Michigan. At CHRT, she supported the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) in its strategic planning to transition Michigan's demonstration project for individuals dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid into a dual eligible special needs plan model. Ms. Golub also supported MDHHS' strategic planning process for long-term care and other health policy research projects.

Prior to her role at CHRT, Ms. Golub worked in global health at Abt Associates. Her focus was a project that engaged private sector actors and fostered public-private engagement to support the achievement of global health goals in sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child health, and HIV. Ms. Golub's public health career began in Amman, Jordan on a project working to improve health outcomes for women and children.

Ms. Golub has a Master of Public Health from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and a Bachelor of Arts from Wesleyan University in American Studies and Middle Eastern Studies.



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# Lanelle Quzack

## MSW, LSW

### Clinical Research Coordinator

Lanelle Quzack (she/her) is a clinical research coordinator at PolicyLab and the Qualitative Research Core at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). Prior to coming to CHOP, Lanelle worked as a licensed social worker in child welfare. Lanelle's work is driven by a commitment to understanding the complex dynamics of human experiences and promoting social justice. Lanelle's in-depth understanding of social work principles and practices allows her to navigate complex social issues and integrate an equity lens into research. She also has experience working on qualitative projects and program evaluations. Lanelle finds the most fascinating projects are those that engage and empower community members, allowing their voices to shape the research process.

Lanelle is currently pursuing a PhD in social work at Widener University, where her doctoral research focuses on community-centered research and decolonial approaches, exploring ways to challenge traditional power structures and center marginalized voices. She completed her master's degree in social work at West Chester University and her bachelor's degree in psychology at Millersville University.



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# Meredith Matone

## DrPH, MHS

### Director

Dr. Matone's research interests include maternal and young child health, as well as family well-being. She focuses on building community and public agency research partnerships to support improvements in policies and programs that serve mothers and infants in under-resourced communities. She is experienced in large-scale program evaluation, mixed-methods research designs, and use of administrative data for observational study designs in areas of child and caregiver health.

Dr. Matone is a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics, a faculty affiliate at The Field Center, and a board member of the Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Youth Children. Dr. Matone received her Doctor of Public Health, specializing in child and adolescent health and development, from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She is an alumnus of the Doris Duke Fellowship for the Promotion of Child Well-being program and a former Stoneleigh Foundation fellow.



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## **Related Tools & Publications**

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[Keeping a Close Eye on the Vision of Youth in Foster Care  
Tools and Memos](#)  
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