

## **Mental Health Prevention & Early Intervention: A Framework for Action**

### **Goal Statement**

Promote policies, programs and funding decisions which work to:

- Prevent mental health or substance use concerns across the life span;
- Prevent the initial onset of mental illness when possible; and
- Intervene early when mental or behavioral health concerns arise to prevent more significant problems.

### **Guiding Principles**

- Effective and appropriate mental and behavioral health prevention, promotion, and early interventions should be implemented throughout Texas.
- Mental, neuro-developmental and substance use conditions should be detected early and treated effectively through routine screening in schools, primary care, and other appropriate settings.
- When concerns arise, a continuum of early interventions should be available and affordable in community-, school- based settings.
- Integration of mental and general health care must be promoted at all system levels.
- All policies, programs, strategies and interventions should be pursued in culturally and linguistically competent ways.
- Public and private systems should work collaboratively to promote effective and efficient service delivery and to avoid fragmentation of services.

### **Elevator Speech**

An elevator speech advocates can insert into any mental health discussion to bring attention to and to affirm the need for Texas to better address prevention and early intervention of mental/behavioral health concerns in its policymaking:

*Preventing mental health concerns and intervening early when they do occur promotes healthier, more prosperous families and communities. Research tells us that lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health can be prevented with early intervention. Effective and innovative strategies to prevent mental and behavioral health concerns exist, however most Texans do not have access to them.*

## Policy Recommendations

Create a full continuum of effective interventions necessary to promote mental wellness, to prevent the initial onset of illness when possible, and to intervene early when mental or behavioral health concerns first emerge. Policy recommendations to move Texas toward this goal include:

- a. Increase the routine use of standardized best practice developmental, mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention screening tools in primary care and other settings, including screenings for all teens, individuals with neuro-developmental disorders, postpartum mothers, military families, and the elderly.
- b. Promote integrated health and mental health care policies and practices.
- c. Expand families' access to home visiting programs.
- d. Strengthen the state's Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) system.
- e. Expand child care professionals' access to Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations.
- f. Expand and strengthen effective school-based strategies and interventions (such as school wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) approach, school counseling curriculum, and Communities in Schools).
- g. Implement social-emotional learning components within a positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS) approach in settings which provide child care, education (including alternative education programs), day programs (work or non-work), residential (congregate or in-home), and justice settings.
- h. Expand and strengthen effective community-based early intervention programs that, in coordination with school, law enforcement, child welfare and mental health systems, provide early intervention services to families in crisis.
- i. Identify, strengthen and expand effective community based juvenile and adult justice diversion efforts.
- j. Increase the capacity of community professionals to appropriately recognize, respond to, and make community based referrals for individuals with suspected mental health or substance use concerns or who are at risk for suicide.
- k. Ensure provision of mental health and substance abuse services related to disasters and emergencies.
- l. Implement effective programs to prevent suicide in schools, colleges, mental health and health care settings across Texas.
- m. Prohibit schools from referring elementary aged students to Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPS) for discretionary purposes, instructing them to instead provide for more appropriate early interventions using a PBIS approach.