

Child Care, Health, and Early Education Research Consortium: An SSRC/AAP Collaboration

Background Information

In 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) established a Center for Child Health Research (CCHR) to (1) identify unanswered but answerable research questions with implications for improving child health; (2) catalyze, coordinate, facilitate, and conduct that research; and (3) help the AAP and others use this research to inform efforts to improve health services and child health outcomes. As this effort evolved, several research consortia were established.

In March 2001, the CCHR and The Social Science Research Center (SSRC), Mississippi State University, established The Collaborating Centers for Child and Family Health Research. This partnership led to numerous child health research studies/projects and creation of a Consortium on Rural Children in Spring 2001 that was chaired by Linda H. Southward, PhD. This effort evolved into the CCHR Health, Early Education and Child Care Consortium in December 2002, and Paula Duncan, MD, FAAP, was appointed as the chairperson for this effort.

The Consortium held its first meeting in September 2003 to develop a plan to establish a research network of child care programs linked to the children's medical and dental homes and families. A key focus of this effort was to partner with and learn from early childhood educators and child care professionals to improve child health outcomes through a coordinated system of care. The Consortium was proposed as a way to link health care disciplines with the multiple factors that influence early child development and the disciplines that both study and advocate for them, using out-of-home child care as a focus. In this way, health care professionals could advocate for the comprehensive needs facing the children in out-of-home child care programs and promote child care and health professional partnerships related to research. Since there was a core group of AAP members who had been involved in child care health and safety efforts for more than a decade, representatives from this group (known as the AAP Early Education and Child Care Special Interest Group) were invited to the September 2003 meeting and included in ongoing Consortium activities.

A Consortium steering committee of 6-8 individuals was formed and met monthly via conference calls. The full Consortium (about 20 to 30 leaders/members) held quarterly calls to discuss progress to date on existing projects and met at AAP and other national conferences whenever possible. In 2004, the SSRC (with the support of the Consortium) conducted a survey of child care center directors in 5 states (FL, MS, NM, OH, and VT) to determine which health issues were most relevant to child care center directors. Two Chartbooks summarizing the 2004 survey and the 2005 follow-up survey results were completed/published by the SSRC as part of the Consortium activities.

In Spring 2005, Dr Southward became the Consortium chairperson, and a nationally representative survey of licensed child care directors was conducted by SSRC. To our knowledge, this is the *first ever* nationally representative survey of child care center directors. (Note: The SSRC has built a database of approximately 97,000 child care directors and is currently seeking funding to maintain and expand this database). Results from these surveys and other research projects conducted by individual members have led to manuscript development, publications, and/or presentations at national conferences. The AAP developed Web pages to highlight the work of the Consortium that provided descriptions and summaries of surveys/research conducted by members.

Early in 2006, the Center for Child Health Research was dissolved, and key activities were integrated into related initiatives at the AAP and other institutions. In May 2006, the AAP Board of Directors approved integrating the Consortium with the AAP Early Education and Child Care Special Interest Group and related initiatives. In July 2006, a Provisional Section on Early Education and Child Care was formed to continue the efforts of the Special Interest Group, Consortium, and other AAP child care health and safety efforts.

The Child Care, Health, and Early Education Research Consortium is a collaborative effort of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Social Sciences Research Center, and leaders/researchers actively involved in research projects on health issues in child care settings. For more information, contact Laura Aird, laird@aap.org or Linda Southward, PhD, linda.southward@ssrc.msstate.edu

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