



DEFENDING CHILDHOOD STATE POLICY INITIATIVE

The *Defending Childhood State Policy Initiative* is designed to help states develop a plan to:

- Ensure that all at-risk children and youth are screened and assessed at multiple points of contact
- Provide evidence-based, trauma-informed treatment services to children and youth exposed to violence
- Identify mechanisms to blend and braid funding sources to support identification, assessment, and treatment services
- Improve outcomes for children and youth exposed to violence

Each year in the United States, millions of children are exposed to violence in their homes, schools, and communities. A recent national survey estimates exposure rates at about two out of every three children (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, & Kracke, 2009). Without intervention, children exposed to violence are more likely to fail in school, suffer from mental health problems, become involved in the justice system, and suffer from repeated violent victimization (*Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force On Children Exposed to Violence*, 2012). Trauma caused by exposure to violence also has long-term medical implications, including increased likelihood for stroke, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and premature death (Edwards et al., 2005; Felitti et al., 1998).

While the human consequences of children's exposure to violence left unaddressed are significant, the economic ramifications are almost equally staggering. The *Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force On Children Exposed to Violence* (2012) states that the "predicted incremental cost of violence and abuse on the healthcare system alone ranges from \$333 billion to \$750 billion annually, or up to 37.5 cents of every dollar spent on healthcare." The financial burden extends to other public systems as well, and are similarly astronomical.

To address these issues, Attorney General Eric Holder's Task Force generated a list of recommendations that tribal, state, and federal entities could implement to begin reducing the impact of violence on children. The *Defending Childhood State Policy Initiative* was born from these recommendations.

Three initial states were competitively selected to participate in this effort:

- California
- Massachusetts
- Michigan

The goal of the *Defending Childhood State Policy Initiative* is to help selected states develop and implement a strategic plan for identifying, assessing, and treating children who suffer from trauma caused by witnessing or experiencing violence in their homes, schools, or communities. Additionally, states are expected to identify federal, state, and local funding streams to heal and support these children and their families. These efforts should result in more effective policies and programs, better outcomes for children and youth, and significant reduction in cost to the child welfare system, the juvenile and criminal justice systems, the healthcare system, and the overall economy.

For more information, please contact the NCMHJJ at 862-962-6455 or ncmhjj@prainc.com