



**OHIO
CHILDREN'S
BUDGET**
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ISSUE BRIEF

ISSUE: Coordinating Care & Preventing Custody Relinquishment for Multi-System Youth

Multi-system youth (MSY) are children and teenagers with significant mental health challenges, addiction, and/or developmental delays who are or are at risk of being involved with child protection and/or the juvenile justice system because they cannot access the services or supports they need to remain stable and in their own homes. MSY have complex needs that cannot be met by a single system.

Ohio's opioid epidemic is creating an increasing number of MSY who have experienced great trauma and have very complicated and costly needs. Services for these children are often uncoordinated across systems, and there are large gaps in access to and funding for necessary care.

When youth have intensive needs that exhaust the resources of both the child's family and community, parents face a decision to relinquish custody of their child to a child protection agency to access necessary services. According to the Public Children Services Association of Ohio, nearly one in three MSY in Ohio enter the child protection system via custody relinquishment.

Ohio must act quickly on Governor DeWine's commitment to coordinate children's programs and services across all state agencies to better serve MSY, and our lawmakers must take steps to address the gaps in care and funding that result in custody relinquishment.

Policy

Ohio has a number of policy vehicles to improve care coordination and service provisions that are inadequate for MSY, including:

- Ohio's Family and Children First Councils (FCFCs) work to streamline and coordinate existing services for families seeking assistance by considering the best and most appropriate care for a child with needs from two or more agencies. Local communities often lack resources to adequately



coordinate care and address the needs identified by FCFCs' service planning processes.

- Medicaid offers care coordination services through managed care entities, and Medicaid is set to begin offering behavioral health care coordination through provider organizations starting in July 2019.
- The SFY 2018-19 Biennial Budget appropriated limited Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars to help youth and families in crisis and prevent custody relinquishment. To date, this funding has been very difficult to access.

Despite these and other parallel and overlapping state and community programs, there are many gaps in coordination, care, and funding, particularly for children and youth with the most complex needs.

Challenges

While existing support and collaboration mechanisms can help many children and their families, some youth served by multiple systems have needs so extreme that they cannot be supported through Ohio's existing services and supports.

- Each child serving system has ongoing difficulty accessing services from the others, and these separate systems often offer duplicative services.
- There are many gaps in care and funding, and there is a clear need to enhance the array of services that enable children to remain at home with their families while supported by community resources.

Uncoordinated efforts and gaps in care and funding result in children entering foster care and the juvenile justice system because they cannot get access to the services they need at home and in their communities. As a last resort, many children and families are forced to access services in emergency rooms for lack of alternatives. Some of these families relinquish custody to get access to necessary services. On any given day, over 100 children in child protection custody are placed in residential treatment facilities in other states because they cannot access the care they need in Ohio.

Opportunities

The Joint Legislative Committee on Multi-System Youth of the 130th General Assembly studied the needs of MSY and the gaps in systems that result in custody relinquishment. Chaired by Senator Gardner and Representative LaTourette, the bi-partisan committee unanimously recommended:

- Establishing dedicated funding to help youth and families in crisis access appropriate levels of care and services;
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- Collecting and sharing data on MSY across child-serving systems;
- Creating a Medicaid-reimbursable service for an evidence-based practice called High Fidelity Wraparound to provide intensive care coordination and supports to youth and families in need;
- Creating a Medicaid-reimbursable service to support peer services for youth and families;
- Modernizing local Family and Children First Councils;
- Conducting an independent evaluation of the timely access to children’s and youth’s residential and inpatient mental health treatment; and
- Creating an Oversight Committee to monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

To date, these recommendations have not been adequately addressed by Ohio’s policymakers.

Governor DeWine has committed to coordinating children’s programs and services across all state agencies. The establishment of a Director of Children’s Initiatives in the Governor’s office provides great opportunity to use the Joint Committee’s recommendations to address lack of coordination and gaps in care and funding for MSY.

Support Child Well-Being: Recommendations

The SFY 2020-2021 Biennial Budget offers Ohio’s lawmakers a chance to build upon the Governor’s commitment to coordinate children’s programs. The Governor’s Office and General Assembly should support:

- Identifying and implementing a strategy to systematically collect and share data about children receiving services from the following Ohio Departments: Job and Family Services, Medicaid, Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Youth Services (and Juvenile Courts), and Education.
- Studying state and local entities' programs and benefit packages to identify opportunities to align and harmonize services across agencies. This assessment should identify both overlaps and gaps in care, and state government should aim to create efficiencies and expand services. Policymakers should commit state resources to intervene in situations of crisis and extraordinary need.
- Committing to prevent custody relinquishment that results from lack of access to services as part of the Governor’s initiative to reform the foster care system.

To fill some of the existing gaps in services that are greatly needed by MSY and their families, the SFY 2020-2021 Budget should be used to establish the following Medicaid-reimbursable services:

- Intensive care coordination and supports (i.e. High Fidelity Wraparound) and
- Mental health peer and family mentoring

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