

Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Introduction to Communications



THE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR
Infant and Early Childhood
Mental Health Consultation

Contents

- Communications 3
 - Introduction..... 3
 - Using Communications to Support IECMHC Goals..... 4
 - A Five-Step Process 6
 - Step 1: Analyze the Current Situation..... 6
 - Step 2: Identify and Understand the Audience 7
 - Step 3: Develop the Message 10
 - Step 4: Create and Implement a Communications Strategy..... 11
 - Step 5: Evaluate the Message..... 11
- Communications Toolkit Support 11
- Considerations for Communicating About IECMHC 12
- Templates for Communicating About IECMHC..... 13
- Cultural Awareness and Tribal Considerations 14

Communications

This section of the toolbox offers guidance on effectively using communications to support Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) initiatives and goals. It contains both messaging ideas and templates (talking points, sample op-eds, letters to the editor, and social media guidelines, and PowerPoint presentation) that a team or program can use to communicate its themes and messaging. Whether you are simply exploring the possibility of IECMHC, are just getting started with designing and implementing your communications plans, or are a well-seasoned practitioner in the IECMHC field, there is something in this section for you.

Introduction

Science supports the importance of nurturing interactions between infants and adults. The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child says that safe, strong, and healthy relationships help to activate connections in the developing brain, thus enabling communication among the neurons that specialize in different kinds of brain functions¹. This developing brain architecture provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health, the Council reports.

In other words: Relational health is a key driver in brain building. The earlier in a child's life that we focus on mental health, the better.

While research clearly shows that IECMHC is an effective intervention, it does not carry universal or even wide name recognition among those who might use and benefit from the service. At the local level, infant and early childhood educators and care providers, along with home visitors, may not be aware of what services to benefit children and families are available to them—or, if they are aware of what is available, they may not realize the benefit of these services. Parents are also not likely to know what IECMHC is or why it matters. At the national, state, or tribal levels, policymakers and administrators may not have heard of IECMHC, yet they are the very stakeholders who could create pathways for the effective implementation and sustainability of IECMHC initiatives. At every level, there is a need to effectively communicate the benefits of IECMHC; to lessen obstacles to adoption, expansion, or sustainability; and to provide the tools needed to “make the case” for each potential audience.

The Center of Excellence aims to raise awareness of and demand for IECMHC at all levels of decision-making. The messaging found within this section is a major step forward to position and frame IECMHC in an accessible manner that will allow for greater dissemination and traction across the country. At the same time, teams can use this message on a local level as they consider adopting, implementing, expanding, and/or sustaining

¹ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004). Children's Emotional Development Is Built into the Architecture of Their Brains: Working Paper No. 2. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.



IECMHC. Throughout this toolbox, you will find assessments, resources, and recommendations for how to plan for implementation or improvement of IECMHC.

Using Communications to Support IECMHC Goals

Creating a communications plan that aligns with IECMHC goals can help gain buy-in and support from multiple stakeholder audiences, whether you are adopting IECMHC for the first time or working to expand or sustain your IECMHC program or system.

For instance, teams who are thinking about **adopting and implementing** IECMHC will first need to understand where they are starting from and where they would like to be within a given timeframe. Some questions to consider:

- ◆ Has any IECMHC work been done in the state, tribe, or community?
- ◆ Do the team and stakeholders have a basic understanding of what IECMHC is?
- ◆ Is there buy-in from those who could support the implementation of IECMHC?

Each of these questions highlights where a team could use communications to help gain support and buy-in. Communications can also support the team's efforts to raise awareness and demand for the services it will offer.

If the focus is on **expanding** the use of IECMHC, teams should consider the following:

- ◆ What is standing in the way of that greater expansion?
- ◆ Are there people who need to be convinced to broaden the availability of IECMHC?
- ◆ Do policymakers need to be convinced to add a line item to their budgets to help with expansion?

If the team is working on **sustaining** existing IECMHC work, consider these questions:

- ◆ Has the team identified what is needed to achieve sustainability?
- ◆ Are there people who need to be convinced of IECMHC's value?
- ◆ Are there evaluation data that can support the need to sustain services?
- ◆ Are there anecdotal data and success stories?



- ◆ Has the buy-in of those directly impacted by IECMHC been secured? If not, why not? If so, has support been offered to these individuals so they are well prepared to speak out and support the team's efforts to achieve long-lasting sustainability?

Once the team has pinpointed the work it wants to tackle and settled on its IECMHC goals for the state, tribe, or community—and before embarking on a communications plan—a strategic plan or logic model needs to be in place. As Lewis Carroll once said, “If you don't know where you're going, any old road will get you there.” Developing a strategic plan and/or a logic model is the best way to ensure that a program actually achieves its goals.

A well-thought-out strategic plan or logic model encompasses the following:

- ◆ The unmet IECMHC needs that currently exist
- ◆ What is already in place within the state, tribe, or community to meet those needs
- ◆ A plan for bridging the gap between where you are and where you want to be

This toolbox offers a number of resources for creating a strategic plan and/or logic model:

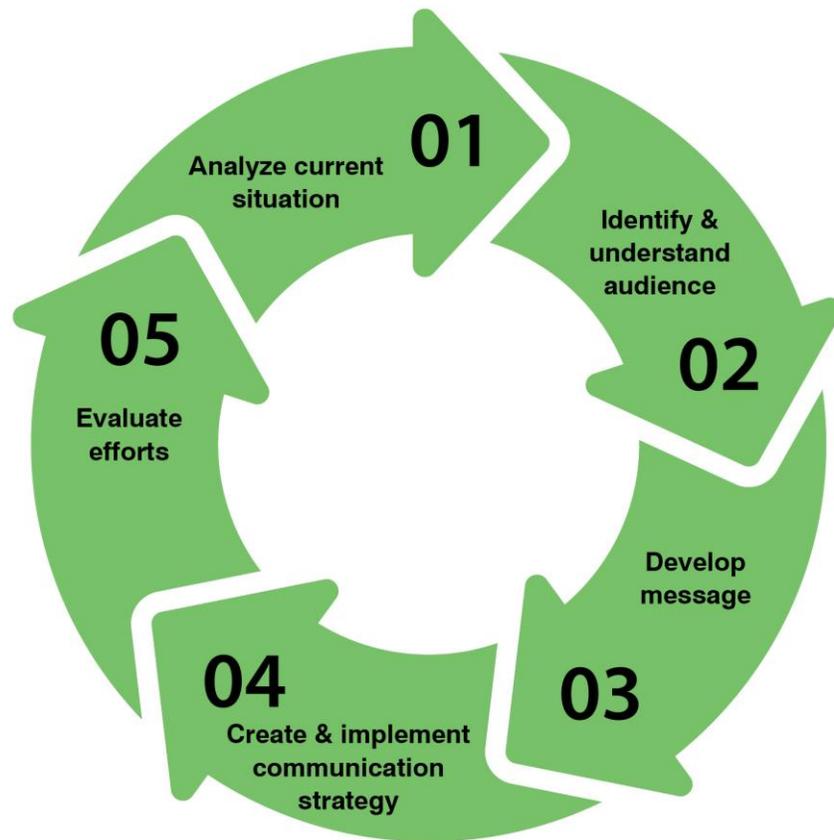
- ◆ The [Systems section](#) of the toolbox provides an excellent overview for systems-level thinking and enhancements that decision makers need to consider as they plan to adopt, expand, or sustain IECMHC in a state, tribe, or community.
- ◆ The [Research and Evaluation section](#) offers guidance on creating a logic model.
- ◆ The Interactive Assessment and Resources Planning Guide for an IECMHC Model located in the [Models section](#) of the toolbox, offers guidance to help teams identify goals and develop a roadmap.

Once your team has a strategic plan or logic model in place, you can begin thinking about what kinds of communications efforts to implement, including your communications goals, strategies, and tactics.



A Five-Step Process

Communications planning is frequently seen as five segments of a circle that flow into one another in a loop.



We recommend using this five-step process to create your communications plan.

Step 1: Analyze the Current Situation

Conduct a needs assessment, or review the results of the most recent needs assessment. As you consider your environment, think through some pertinent questions, for example:

- ◆ What is the overall community need?
 - How many early childhood programs or home visiting programs have no IECMHC support?
 - How many programs are expelling kids?
 - How many children in the community do not have access to IECMHC?
 - What is the rate of teacher turnover in the community?

- What qualitative data are available (e.g., stories from families or teachers)?

- ◆ If IECMHC is being implemented in the community, what difference is it making?

Align your communications efforts and tasks with the needs you have identified and your overall goals or objectives for promoting the adoption, implementation, expansion, and/or sustainability of IECMHC programs or systems.

Step 2: Identify and Understand the Audience

Identifying who can further the goals in the strategic plan is an important component of a communications strategy. Once the appropriate audience is identified, you will need to assess what they know about IECMHC and their philosophy and sentiments toward investing in early childhood development, early education, and mental health promotion. In addition, it is important to identify what you want your audience to do in order to achieve your IECMHC goals. Having a profile of the identified audiences allows teams to tailor messages that will resonate and promote action. A profile will also inform what tactics may be most effective to reach your target audiences.

In general, there are two types of audiences for communicating about IECMHC: direct target audiences and indirect target audiences.

Direct target audiences are those who can directly influence the adoption, financing, or promotion of IECMHC. They are often policymakers or those who oversee segments of the early childhood systems (e.g., child care, early intervention) at the state, tribal, or local levels. The list below includes links to websites where you may be able to find the name and contact information for stakeholders in your state, tribe, or community.

Audience	Group/Organization	Link
Legislators and policymakers (state, tribal, local, and federal)	National Conference of State Legislatures—Children’s Ombudsman Offices	http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/childrens-ombudsman-offices.aspx
	National Caucus of Native American State Legislators	http://www.ncsl.org/research/state-tribal-institute/national-caucus-native-american-state-legislators.aspx
Medicaid Directors	National Association of Medicaid Directors	http://medicaiddirectors.org/about/medicaid-directors/



Audience	Group/Organization	Link
State, tribal and local agency heads/ administrators (child welfare, Indian Child Welfare, health, education, early care, etc.)	State Child Welfare Agency Directors	https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction=rols:main.ds pROL&rolType=Custom&RS ID=45
	National Indian Child Welfare Association—Board of Directors	http://www.nicwa.org/board/
	Child Welfare League of America	http://www.cwla.org/
State Child Care Administrators	National Association of State Child Care Administrators	http://www.aphsa.org/content/NASCCA/en/home.html
Governors and mayors offices and their cabinet appointees/advisors	National Governors Association—Council of Governors	https://www.nga.org/cms/CoG
	The United States Conference of Mayors	http://www.usmayors.org/
Child care	CCDF Grantee State/Territory Contacts	http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-grantee-state-and-territory-contacts
	Office of Child Care Regional Program Managers	http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/regional-child-care-program-managers
Head Start and Early Head Start	Head Start State Collaboration Directors	https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/states/collaboration/map/index.ht
	Head Start Program Directors	https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hslc_grantee_directory
Early Intervention	State Part C Coordinators	http://ectacenter.org/contact/ptccoord.asp
	State Part B (Section 619) Coordinators	http://ectacenter.org/contact/619coord.asp



Audience	Group/Organization	Link
Home Visiting program directors	MIECHV	Formula Funding: http://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/MaternalChildHealthInitiatives/HomeVisiting/MIECHV_Formula_Grant_Program_%28X10%29.pdf Competitive Awards: http://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/MaternalChildHealthInitiatives/HomeVisiting/MIECHV_Competitive_Grant_Program_%28D89%29.pdf
Philanthropic organizations	The Chronicle of Philanthropy	https://www.philanthropy.com/
	Inside Philanthropy—Early Childhood Education	http://www.insidephilanthropy.com/fundraising-early-childhood/
	Children’s Defense Fund	http://www.childrensdefense.org/?referrer=https://www.google.com/
State Infant Mental Health Associations	Infant Mental Health Associations	http://www.wa-aimh.org/infant-mental-health-associations/

Indirect target audiences are those who are important to implementation, such as state agencies and early education program leaders, and those who benefit from the service, such as families and early educators. You can involve these members as advocates to help engage, inform, and inspire your direct target audiences to rally in support of IECMHC. Indirect target audiences include the following:

- ◆ Mental health center directors—state and community-based
- ◆ Child care and community center directors
- ◆ Early childhood, education, civil rights, family, and mental health advocates
- ◆ Teachers
- ◆ Caregivers
- ◆ Home visiting workers and groups

- ◆ Parents
- ◆ Early interventionists
- ◆ Faith-based places of worship and childcare centers
- ◆ Unions

There are also audiences where no organizing body exists, so you may need to do some of your own sleuthing to find out those names in your community.

Please note that direct and indirect targets often overlap; in addition, indirect targets may start out as direct targets and vice versa.

Step 3: Develop the Message

Once you have examined your needs assessment, developed goals for the communications campaign, and created a profile of your target audiences, you will need to craft and tailor messages that promote action. You can adopt the messaging we have created for IECMHC or design messages based on your own situation.

When developing your messages, consider the following:

- ◆ Why is IECMHC needed and important in this community? What problem, concerns, or issues does it solve or improve? What will it prevent and what will it promote, particularly related to children's social and emotional development and school readiness?
- ◆ Who benefits from IECMHC, at what level (individual, agency, school, center, community, state, tribe, national), and how?
- ◆ In what key ways is IECMHC different from other services directed at improving or sustaining children's mental health? For more information, please see the Crosswalk of Early Childhood Mental Health Services in the [Introduction section](#).
- ◆ What actions need to be taken, and by whom, in order for IECMHC to benefit this state, tribe, or community?

Note: The Communications Interactive module in the [Communications section](#) uses the first three steps outlined above—assessing community needs, determining goals, and understanding the nature of your audience—to create powerful messages. The example explored in this module provides a template to help teams think through and plan for a broad range of audiences.



Step 4: Create and Implement a Communications Strategy

There are many ways to reach an intended audience. Choosing the right communications channel is a matter of matching the content of the message with the venue where the target audience is most likely to receive it.

There are a number of different communications channels teams might use to reach their intended audience with their message, for example:

- ◆ Interpersonal communication
- ◆ Outreach and education to local groups
- ◆ Mass media campaigns
- ◆ Media relations
- ◆ Social media

The toolkits and other resources listed under Communications Resources for IECMHC in the [Communications section](#) can guide teams on creating a communications strategy, given their needs, chosen goals, and audience.

Step 5: Evaluate the Message

Evaluation is a critical but often neglected component of communications efforts. It provides valuable information about what is working and what is not, and helps teams decide where efforts and budget dollars may be best spent in the future. Just as you evaluate the other components of your strategic plan or logic model, you need to evaluate your communications efforts on an ongoing basis.

The toolkits and other resources listed under Communications Resources for IECMHC in the [Communications section](#) provide guidance on selecting appropriate process measures (what, how much, when, where, how, and to whom) and outcome measures (what was changed and by how much) for communications plans.

Communications Toolkit Support

A number of communications toolkits can be helpful as you flesh out the five-step process described above—or if you would like to do a deeper dive into communications strategies. Please visit the Communications Resources for IECMHC in the Communications section for links to these toolkits.

Considerations for Communicating About IECMHC

The following messaging was crafted through careful review of the existing framing and positioning of IECMHC, in-depth interviews with key informants from the field, and focus group testing.

Current Framing of IECMHC

30-Second message

Too many children never achieve their potential because they are labelled “problems” when they’re very young.

We can prevent this—if we understand what’s going on with children and respond appropriately.

Mental health consultation equips parents and caregivers with what they need to build stronger relationships with children so that they feel safe, supported, and valued.

Investing early in children this way pays off: they are more likely to lead healthy, productive lives at a lower cost to society.

What is the problem?

Too many children never achieve their potential because they are labelled “problems” when they’re very young. This can happen when caregivers don’t understand what’s going on with kids and don’t know how to respond to challenging behaviors.

What is the solution?

We need to understand what’s going on with kids and build stronger relationships with them. That’s what mental health consultation does. It equips caregivers with the tools and insights they need to make kids feel safe, supported, and valued wherever they are.

Infant and early childhood mental health consultants

- Help caregivers connect with children and families.
- Strengthen home visitor skills to better support parents.
- Equip parents to help children thrive.

What is the urgency?

The best time to invest in putting children on a path for a healthy, productive life is NOW.



What is the ask?

- ◆ Mental health consultation works. Make mental health consultation the norm in all early childhood programs, and support it.
- ◆ Invest in kids now. Support mental health consultation for infants and children. You will strengthen all relationships that touch on young children and create better futures for them.
- ◆ Spread the word: Mental health consultation strengthens young children's environments, creating better futures for them. Help us put mental health consultation in all early childhood education and home visiting programs.
- ◆ We all want the best for kids. Mental health consultation equips caregivers to do their best, so that kids are happy and stay on track. Find out how mental health consultation can help you improve your program.

Templates for Communicating About IECMHC

The following examples and templates were developed based on the over-arching message presented above and can be found in the [Communications section](#).

- ◆ Talking Points
- ◆ Op-Ed
- ◆ Letter to the Editor
- ◆ Social Media
- ◆ PowerPoint Presentation



Cultural Awareness and Tribal Considerations

Words are powerful and carry different meanings in different communities. Phrases viewed as positive in one context may carry a shadow of potential bias in another. To make the IECMHC process resonate within your community, you may need to serve as a translator of sorts, converting the language of the toolbox into the language and phrases your families and programs understand and use. For example, the title “Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant” may confer an unintended but real message that a program or community is somehow lacking in what they are able to provide to their children and families and that, once again, an “outsider” will tell them what needs to be done. Through messaging, communities and individuals may be more able to interpret the title in the way it was originally intended and not as a threat. For example, you may describe the consultant as a helper, someone who walks alongside and brings one piece of knowledge that joins with the knowledge of the family and providers to create a new way of doing things together.

Many tribal programs and organizations increasingly use digital storytelling as a means of sharing a program participant’s experience, information on a program’s services and outcomes, or individual success stories. These short videos are a powerful and engaging approach to sharing a message that combines video, photography, personal narrative, and music. The Center for American Indian and Alaska Native Health, located at the Colorado School of Public Health, has provided several digital storytelling workshops (<http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/research/centers/CAIANH/ds/Pages/digitalstorytelling.aspx>) and created a Project Showcase (<http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/research/centers/CAIANH/NTOTAP/Pages/ProjectShowcase.aspx>) to highlight a variety of digital stories on topics as diverse as cancer prevention and treatment and the ways in which traditional cradleboards can reduce infant mortality. For more information on digital storytelling for Tribal Nations, please visit the Tribal Evaluation Institute’s Dissemination Toolkit on their website and consult their Digital Story Creation document (<http://www.tribaleval.org/dissemination/dissemination-toolkit/>).

Recognition of the underlying values of the IECMHC model—namely, collaboration, respect, and a strengths-based and holistic approach—may provide a starting place, the common ground for discussions around the use of this model within your community. Providers may need to see past the “lingo” that is so often used in the field and look to the heart of the process: a bringing together of the circle that surrounds a child, a classroom, a teacher, a home visitor, and/or a program to ponder, reflect, and look together at solutions.

The way in which you change and modify materials for your community will bring needed information to the field as a whole. We hope that you will share your experience of what works and areas for improvement.

