

Snapshot: Highlights of Workforce Development – Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership: Early Childhood Home Visiting Consultation Project (Statewide IECMHC Home Visiting Program with universal access)

Program Overview

The mission of the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership: Early Childhood Home Visiting Consultation Project (ECHVC) is to provide mental health consultation to every home visiting program across the state of Illinois.

ECHVC has three key goals:

- ◆ Increase the capacity of early childhood home visiting programs to recognize and address the mental health needs of the young children and parents in the home visiting programs
- ◆ Develop a well-trained cadre of experienced Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) consultants across Illinois
- ◆ Sustain the work of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) by enhancing the understanding and competency of home visiting program supervisors to address ongoing family work through an IECMH perspective

Based on available funding, a consultant works with a home visiting program for a period of two years. Consultants meet with the home visiting program director at least once a month. Consultants meet with the home visitors and their supervisors monthly, and they meet with all home visitors as a group twice a month. Funding levels generally permit the consultant to work 20 hours a month, with about a third of that time devoted to consultant training and support.

Staffing and Staff Qualifications

ECHVC has approximately 22 consultants who provide IECMHC across the state to home visitors, supervisors, and home visiting program directors.

ECHVC hires clinicians with master’s degrees in social work, mental health counseling, and/or related fields. The program does not require independent licensure; however, ECHVC strives to hire seasoned professionals with a full range of skill sets that include knowledge and understanding of adult mental illnesses and the mental health service system; infant and early childhood typical and atypical development; the role of a consultant; reflective supervision as a cornerstone to practice; crisis intervention; home visiting; and services available within other state-funded early childhood programs (e.g., preschool, Head Start, Early Intervention).



The availability of skilled and trained consultants varies across the state, depending on proximity to training institutions. The Consultation Coordinator works with home visiting sites to choose the best consultant for that particular site, but hiring authority rests with the home visiting sites; it has been found that having ownership of the consultant decision leads to more rapid induction of the consultant into the site and acceptance by the supervisor and the staff.

Requirements for new hires:

- ◆ A master's-level degree in social work, mental health counseling, and/or a related field
- ◆ Experience working with children at some age level (note, however, that some hires come directly from a master's-level program and may only have internship-related experience)

Ideal attributes and training:

- ◆ Independent license (for example, LICSW)
- ◆ Experience working with young children and families
- ◆ Experience working in early childhood education or school-based settings and/or consulting with early care and education settings or schools
- ◆ Previous experience offering ECMHC
- ◆ Training in IECMH and/or IECMHC
- ◆ IECMH credential

Training and Support for IECMH Consultants

To reach ECHVC's goal of creating a well-trained cadre of IECMH consultants across Illinois, professional development opportunities are integrated throughout the project. Learning is conducted through peer sharing, opportunities for individual and group reflective consultation, and organized training. The amount of time a consultant dedicates to support and training averages about 18 hours per quarter. The professional development offered to consultants generally falls within six areas:

- ◆ **Orientation:** At the onset of each two-year cohort of the project, before consultants begin providing consultation services to the site, they attend a three-day orientation. So that the orientation is tailored to the unique strengths and needs of each cohort, the consultants complete a “Consultant Professional Development Planning Tool,” designed to identify individual consultant’s professional development needs. The three-day training includes an overview of the project, the role and expectations of consultants, an in-depth review and discussion of each component of ECHVC, and topic-based trainings based on the needs and interests identified in the tool.
- ◆ **Monthly calls:** Each month, the Consultation Coordinator has an individual one-hour call with each consultant, to provide reflective supervision to the consultant and to discuss issues specific to that consultant and site.
- ◆ **Group supervision:** Every other month, there is an opportunity for consultants and the Consultation Coordinator to gather by phone and in person. The Consultation Coordinator facilitates a one-hour call with the consultants as a group, which gives them an opportunity to discuss the challenges and strengths of their sites and to provide support, resources, and new perspectives to one another. During the same quarter, the Consultation Coordinator and consultants gather for a three-hour in-person meeting. Both meetings offer opportunities for learning—from other consultants and from the larger project. In addition, through the use of open-ended questions, wondering out loud, and personal reflection, the meetings model the reflective consultation that consultants are expected to provide to their sites.
- ◆ **Infant Mental Health Learning Group:** This five-hour professional development opportunity occurs quarterly. The group is facilitated by the Ounce (Ounce of Prevention Fund), as the statewide home visiting training resource, and attended by both Program Supervisors and consultants. A specific topic is discussed, and then one home visiting program presents a case for group discussion. This is another opportunity for sites to discuss how consultation has benefited their programs and to share new strategies to address common challenges.

Note: This activity is currently on hold, due to budgetary constraints and lack of funding at this time.

- ◆ **Reflective learning groups:** These cross-initiative gatherings give IECMH consultants a chance to reflect on their work with their peers. Reflective learning groups are recognized by national leaders as one of the most significant, as well as cost-effective, learning tools available to support consultants in their work with early childcare providers, teachers, early intervention staff, families, and young children.
- ◆ **Mental health consultation retreat:** Mental health consultants are located in all areas of the state of Illinois and sometimes are very isolated. For this reason, the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership provides a retreat for mental health consultants at least every other year. The retreat allows consultants to network with others in the field, build or refresh their skills, and observe the scope of the work in IECMH across the state.



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