



July 25, 2018

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LEADING CHILD ADVOCACY GROUPS LAUNCH COLLABORATIVE FOCUSED ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH POLICY

New Collaborative will address issues ranging from infant mortality to violent injury and death to healthcare access for Illinois children

Leading children's health advocacy groups in Illinois have joined forces to launch the Collaborative for Children's Health Policy. Through this partnership they will strategically align efforts to advance evidence-based policy solutions to achieve health equity for youth, families and communities across the state.

"Our goal is to advocate with a unified multi-sector voice on behalf of children and adolescents to strengthen child health policies in Illinois," says Jill Fraggos, Executive Director of the Collaborative for Children's Health Policy from Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, one of the founding organizations. "Together we will take on tough issues that can help children live healthier lives but have shown to be resistant to change."

In addition to Lurie Children's, other founding organizations include EverThrive Illinois, Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation, Ounce of Prevention Fund and Voices for Illinois Children.

The Collaborative will develop a policy agenda to tackle some of the most pressing concerns for child health in Illinois, including:

Health Insurance Coverage: One in three children in Illinois are covered by Medicaid, and children represent half of all Medicaid recipients in the state. Uncertainties in Medicaid funding threaten timely access to healthcare for Illinois children.

Infant Mortality: Illinois ranks 31st in infant mortality among all states, with a rate of 6.3 per 1,000 live births. If infant mortality were as low as in the state with the lowest rate (New Hampshire, at 3.7 per 1,000 live births), every year almost 400 more children in Illinois would survive to celebrate their first birthday. Racial disparities in infant mortality persist in Illinois, with infants born to black women two to three times more likely to die than infants born to white women.

Violent Injury and Death: Firearm-related injuries are the leading cause of death for Illinois children, with one-third of these occurring outside of the Chicago metropolitan area. Of all the non-fatal violent injuries in children under 16 in 2014, 50 percent were among black children.

Socio-Emotional Health: One in 10 children in Illinois suffers from a mental health illness severe enough to cause impairment. Yet, in any given year only about 20 percent of these children receive mental health services.

“Through the Collaborative, we will engage lawmakers in discussions about child health policy in its development,” says Tasha Green Cruzat, President of Voices for Illinois Children, one of the founding organizations. “We will inform lawmakers about child health data and the impacts of poverty and other social determinants of child health.”

With support from the Collaborative, in February a bipartisan group of Illinois legislators from the House and Senate launched the Illinois Children’s Health Caucus. The Children’s Health Caucus is Co-Chaired by Sen. Julie Morrison (D-Deerfield), Sen. Chuck Weaver (R-Peoria), Rep. Camille Lilly (D-Chicago) and Rep. Tom Demmer (R-Dixon). The Collaborative has and will continue to share data with the new caucus to help inform future policy decisions.

“We encourage and welcome additional organizations and individuals to join this multi-sector collaborative. We invite parents, grandparents, advocates, service providers, and members of the business, health, behavioral health and educational sectors – anyone who has a stake in child health and wants to advance child health policy,” says Fraggos. “The Collaborative looks forward to working with the Children’s Health Legislative Caucus, the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet, the Illinois General Assembly and the Governor’s Office to advance children’s health policy in the weeks, months and years ahead,” says Fraggos.

For more information on how to get involved e-mail Jill Fraggos, Executive Director, Collaborative for Children’s Health Policy at jfraggos@luriechildrens.org.