

Virtual Webinar Announcement

10:00am-5:00pm EST, June 24th

Federal Research Investments in Whole Child Health and Wellbeing

Alarming statistics reveal persistent challenges to the healthy development and wellbeing of our children and youth. Many face physical, mental, and social health problems, academic underachievement, and rising rates of violence and hopelessness, leading to failure to fulfill their full potential and thus hampering the growth of the nation's prosperity now and in the future. The U.S. continues to rank low among developed nations in measures of child wellbeing, including high rates of infant mortality, chronic illness, and unmet basic needs. These issues threaten not only the health of our children but also the nation's future workforce, resilience, and prosperity.

Fortunately, we now have the knowledge based on years of largely NIH-supported scientific research about what children and youth need for healthy development. We also have a better understanding of conditions that can undermine children's ability to thrive and flourish, and the potential for positive experiences to override the impacts of those adversities. These scientific advancements have led to development of numerous evidence-based strategies that promote children's health and wellbeing by fostering strong families, quality education, accessible health care, and supportive environments.

The challenge now—in addition to ongoing research to elucidate malleable mechanisms and drivers—is to determine best practices for integrating effective practices, programs and policies into our *educational, social, health, economic, and physical exosystems* across our nation's communities. Through further investment in a pragmatic program of research at NIH focused on determining best practices in implementation and dissemination protocols, there is potential to improve children's wellbeing and support family- and child-focused programs and services. Advancing comprehensive, child health research by focusing on the whole child—considering the full range of experiences and conditions that impact health—will lead to significant advances in our ability to offer every child the opportunity to flourish and succeed throughout life.

The DOC Committee is leading a national research and policy agenda to foster whole child health and wellbeing. In addition to members of the Committee, the webinar features *leadership from NIH and other child health experts* who will discuss innovative and evidence-based approaches for nurturing the physical, mental, behavioral, and relational health of our children. They will discuss the latest data, ongoing studies, and real-world stories illustrating why robust support for whole child health research, policies, and child- and family-serving systems are vital to our future.

This full-day webinar was organized by the *Decade of the Child (DOC) Committee* and sponsored by the Nova Institute for Health, the National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives, the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center at Penn State University, and the Department of Maternal and Child Health, Gillings School of Global Public Health at the University of North Carolina.

Sponsors

- National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives (NPSC)
- Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative (CAHMI, Johns Hopkins)
- Nova Institute for Health
- Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Penn State University
- Department of Maternal and Child Health, Gillings School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina

Virtual Briefing Detail

- June 24th
- Time: 10:00am – 5:00pm EST

Moderator

- **Ms. Maddy Jupina, ABD**, Communications Intern and Doctoral Student at Penn State University. Currently, she is studying parent-child communication during the transition to adulthood, particularly in families experiencing stress.

Opening Remarks

10:00-10:15am *Research to Facilitate the Translational Pipeline from Bench to Trench*

Diana Fishbein, PhD, Senior Scientist, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Part-Time Research Faculty, Prevention Research Center at Penn State; and President of the National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives

Abstract: This introductory talk will frame the urgent need to move whole child health research from discovery to real-world impact. Drawing on advances in prevention science and child development research, it will highlight how evidence-based programs, policies, and practices can be more effectively implemented, disseminated, and scaled across education, health, and community systems. The presentation will set the stage for the day by emphasizing the importance of a pragmatic research agenda that supports healthier developmental trajectories for all children and youth, as reflected in the Decade of the Child Research, Practice, and Policy Agenda.

Agenda and Featured Speakers

10:15-10:35am *Overview of Whole Child Health and Wellbeing*

Christina Bethell, PhD, Director, Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative; and Professor, Population, Family, and Reproductive Health, School of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University

Abstract: Dr. Bethell will provide a current population-based national and across state profile of whole child health and wellbeing drawing on recent national and across state data

that demonstrate the critical need for integrated approaches to address the physical, environmental, social and relational roots of healthy development and lifelong flourishing of children, youth and families. She will synthesize the current state of the field reflecting broad consensus and recommendations for systems transformation that require robust efforts to fill critical gaps in research related to the translation of existing knowledge and evidence based approaches into existing national, state and local health, education and social programs.

10:35-10:55am *Decade of the Child Framework*

Zili Sloboda, ScD, Applied Prevention Science International (Former Division Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse, NIH)

Abstract: Dr. Sloboda will introduce the Decade of the Child initiative: a national research and policy action plan to foster whole child health and wellbeing. She will explain how the Decade of the Brain in the 1990s led to an accumulation of knowledge and best practices generated by research at NIH, other federal agencies, and leading organizations that provide a blueprint for the nation to improve children's health, development and wellbeing, and support families to ensure their children thrive and flourish

10:55-11:15am BRAIN BREAK

11:15-11:35am *Evidence and Research Foundations*

Deena J. Chisolm, PhD, Nationwide Foundation Endowed Chair in Health Equity Research, Director, Center for Health Equity and Outcomes Research, The Abigail Wexner Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital, Professor of Pediatrics and Public Health, The Ohio State University

Abstract: Dr. Chisolm will ground the day's discussion in the existing evidence base for whole child health initiatives. She will review the origins of the whole child health movement in research and its linkage to research in population health, health services, and health equity research, featuring some of the seminal, large-scale initiatives that have shaped the field. She will also discuss the growing body of research on multi-sector, community-driven approaches that can inform next steps.

11:35-11:55pm *NICHD/NIH Leadership in Whole Child Health Initiatives*

Rohan Hazra, PhD, Acting Director, National Institute on Child Health and Human Development

Abstract: Dr. Hazra will provide an overview of NIH and NICHD support for pediatric research. He will also highlight NICHD's current pediatric research portfolio, including focus on child development.

11:55-12:30pm FUEL BREAK

12:30-1:50pm *Additional NIH Institute Investments in Whole Child Health and Wellbeing*

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), National Cancer Institute (NCI), National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), and National Institute on Mental Health

(NIMH) are also actively involved in funding studies and initiatives that address various aspects of children's physical, mental, and social wellbeing. These institutes contribute to advancing knowledge and developing interventions that promote holistic child development, reflecting a broad commitment across NIH to improving outcomes for children.

David Shurtleff, PhD, Director of the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Research (NCCIH)

Abstract: Dr. Shurtleff will discuss how the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) advances a whole person health research framework across the lifespan, including a focus on whole child health. Moving beyond fragmented, disease-focused models of pediatric care, NCCIH supports research on complementary and integrative approaches including nutritional, physical, psychological, and mind-body interventions to promote resilience, emotional well-being, healthy development. NCCIH also investigates these approaches for the prevention and management of pediatric health challenges, including obesity, depression, substance use, chronic pain, migraine, and irritable bowel syndrome, among others. By examining the dynamic interactions among biological, behavioral, social, environmental, and developmental factors, NCCIH seeks to better understand the multisystem processes that shape health across the lifespan. This whole person framework aims to optimize developmental trajectories, strengthen protective factors, and reduce the risk of chronic disease, empowering children, families, and communities to build a foundation for lifelong health and well-being.

Nora Volkow, MD or Wilson Compton, PhD, Director and Deputy Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Abstract: Under Dr. Volkow's direction, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) supports two major longitudinal research initiatives focused on understanding brain and behavioral development across childhood and adolescence: the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) Study and the HEALthy Brain and Child Development (HBCD) Study. ABCD follows nearly 12,000 youth from late childhood into early adulthood to examine how biological, environmental, social, and behavioral factors—including substance use and mental health—shape adolescent brain development, while HBCD begins during pregnancy and early infancy to investigate how prenatal and early-life exposures affect early brain and child development. Together, these studies provide comprehensive, large-scale data that help researchers identify developmental pathways influencing cognitive, emotional, and physical health across the lifespan.

Andrea Beckel-Mitchener, PhD, Acting Director of the National Institute of Mental Health Research (NIMH)

Abstract: Dr. Beckel-Mitchener will provide remarks on NIMH current priorities relevant to youth mental health. This includes an overview of the burden of mental illnesses (focused on child and adolescent populations), overall NIMH research priorities relevant to youth mental health, and topical discussions on the impacts of social media on youth mental health, youth suicide prevention, and AI/AN youth mental health.

Brigitte Widemann, MD, Chief of the Pediatric Oncology Branch, National Cancer

Institute (NCI)

Abstract: Dr. Brigitte Widemann will discuss the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) investments in childhood cancer research and how these efforts contribute to improving whole child health and wellbeing. Her remarks will highlight the unique challenges of pediatric oncology, including the rarity and complexities of childhood cancers, which require highly collaborative and innovative approaches. She will provide an overview of NCI's intramural and extramural pediatric cancer research portfolio and discuss recent advances that are improving outcomes and quality of life for children with cancer.

1:50-2:15pm Q&A session with NIH ICs

2:15-2:25pm STRETCH BREAK

2:25-3:45pm *The Future of Whole Child Health Research*

Pragmatic program of research, building from the basic science to develop best practice protocols for implementation, dissemination, scaling, sustainability, and community drive, engagement, and acceptability.

Ronald Prinz, PhD, Carolina Distinguished Professor and Co-Director of the Research Center for Child Well-Being, University of South Carolina)

Abstract: Dr. Prinz will focus on the critical domain of parenting and family support as one of the foundational pillars for achieving the goals of a much-needed Decade of the Child. He will challenge our current approach to family well-being by advocating for a shift from reactive crisis intervention to population-wide, proactive parenting support. Normalized, evidence-based digital and community interventions can prevent behavioral and health issues before they start. Multi-tiered public health frameworks can normalize parenting support, making it accessible to every family rather than a luxury for a few. Essential principles and practical implementation strategies can make community-wide family programming feasible. Massive economic and social return on investment can be achieved when governments in partnership with communities prioritize upstream, preventive family support.

Anthony Biglan, PhD, Senior Scientist Oregon Research Institute and Director of Values to Action.

Abstract: Dr. Biglan will focus on the two most important social determinants of health, family poverty and discrimination. He will review the evidence regarding their contribution to a wide variety of psychological, behavioral, and health problems and will describe how existing public policies contribute to poverty and discrimination. He will then outline research that has proven benefit in reducing these risk factors. The majority of prevention research is focused on more proximal risk factors such as abuse and neglect and academic failure. However, prevention of these problems will remain limited if we do not prevent poverty and discrimination.

William Wieczorek, PhD, CEO of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation

Abstract: Dr. Wieczorek will present a prevention-centered policy framework to improve whole child wellbeing by aligning public systems with established life-course science. Current U.S. policy structures are fragmented and overly focused on treatment, despite compelling evidence that early investment in prevention, environment, and behavior yields the greatest long-term health and economic benefits. Fundamental aspects of the framework are to elevate children in policymaking, realign incentives toward prevention, and build integrated delivery and accountability systems. Research on real-world, large-scale policy implementation and its population-level impacts provide opportunities aligned with NIH priorities and MAHA goals for preventing chronic disease and reducing disparities.

3:25-3:45pm *Opportunities for Transformation Through Scalable Solutions*

Margaret Kuklinski, PhD, Endowed Professor of Prevention in Social Work; Director, Social Development Research Group, School of Social Work, University of Washington

Abstract: Reaching more children, families and communities at local, state, and national levels requires shifting the lens from “What works for whole child health?” to “What is needed to scale strategies for whole child health?” Using examples from the field, Dr. Kuklinski will highlight the infrastructure essential to undergirding whole child health and the impact of strong local and state infrastructure on whole child health.

3:45-4:25pm *Identifying policy levers to sustain impactful change*

The medical community has long recognized that: (1) health is more than the absence of disease or disability; (2) social factors and conditions – not medical care – play the major role in improving health; and (3) the greatest opportunities for improving health are with children and through primary, preventive, developmental, and ecological actions. This is not reflected in public policy investments in health care, public health, or health research and we need to redirect our investments accordingly.

Charles Bruner, PhD, Senior Fellow at the Center for the Study of Social Policy and at the RISE Institute

Abstract: Dr. Bruner will conclude with the message that medicine has long recognized that health is more than the absence of disease and disability. Clinical and medical research is a subset of the research needed to improve health and has been the primary focus of most health research. Broader health care research now is needed to advance knowledge on effective health care actions which respond to social as well as biomedical determinants of health. Public and population health research is needed to advance knowledge of public and population health strategies to improve healthy development and maintain current health, again through responding to social and community conditions as well as individual health-related ones. Many of these involve scaling effective strategies and exploring how they collectively can make major gains in population health. The greatest potential and imperative in advancing overall population health is to focus upon child health care research and child-focused public and population health research as the primary focus for health improvement.

Jesse Kohler (Doctoral Student @ University of Pennsylvania), CEO of The Change Campaign

Abstract: Mr. Kohler will discuss the nearly \$40 trillion in debt and the need for the United States to make strategic investments that provide the greatest returns. Safe communities and healthy families reduce systems involvement and promote a fuller tax base in the future. When we factor in the reduction of intergenerational transmission of trauma across generations, the return on investment grows exponentially.

4:25-5:00pm Closing Remarks and *Q&A session*

Diana Fishbein, PhD, Nova Scholar at Nova Institute for Health; President of NSPC; Senior Scientist at UNC-Chapel Hill; and Part-time Research Faculty at Penn State