



Identifying Community Supports for Families Awaiting Services: *Strategies, Ideas, and Resources for Community Health Centers*

Overview

During a learning network session, community health centers shared best practices on building partnerships, establishing common goals, and prioritizing communication strategies and family/caregiver outreach and follow-up. Identifying family needs and strengthening collaboration with family-serving organizations in the community can help health centers improve patient and referral outcomes and support the delivery of high-quality health care.

Practical Strategies

- **Work with community partners to strengthen and expand community resource networks and establish feedback loops.** Regular meet-and-greets with community partners are important, and case conferences are an opportunity to solve problems and improve together. Health centers can also engage partner organizations and families to solicit input and ideas about their own referral sources and trusted places in the community, such as libraries, medical-legal programs, faith-based communities, and nutrition assistance programs (e.g., SNAP, WIC). The health center should establish a feedback loop (e.g., send a monthly report, share updates at a joint meeting) that enables referral sources to regularly get updates on the status of the referrals they send.
 - **Ask families about their main challenges in accessing services.** Families have expressed that they find it hard to access developmental support services because of transportation issues, language needs, limited appointment availability, high costs, lack of communication from trusted partners or preferred platforms, and not understanding the value of support. Asking families directly about their challenges reduces assumptions and enables the health center team to effectively prioritize which challenges families think are the most important to address.
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- **Establish a process to ensure the community resource directory stays current and provide regular training for all staff to help them stay up-to-date on what resources are available.** Standardize documentation and reporting in the electronic health record by using shortcuts such as SmartPhrases and flowsheets. Train nursing and front desk staff about the importance of giving forms to families. Create an internal place to store referral websites, forms to print, and other items that staff can easily access and update. Designate a team lead to “own” maintenance of the resource directory.

Actionable Ideas

- **Build a close relationship with one community therapy group or other key partner.** Identify shared goals and challenges, have quarterly meetings, share cell phone numbers, ask for their advice, and visit them to build connection.
 - **Develop a monthly report to monitor and track the status of community referrals.** Share the report with community partners so they can see how many referrals have been made and their status. Identify referrals with unique challenges to host a case conference and problem-solve with community partners.
 - **Meet regularly with local special education staff for preK and kindergarten programs.** Aim to understand program, logistics, and other details that change from year to year. Solicit ideas for where and how best to engage families.
 - **Raise awareness about the importance of child health within your own health center or health system.** Provide information to help practice leaders understand the differences in young children’s and families’ needs that are significant for decision-making. Host a town hall, discuss challenges during team meetings, and share reports.
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Resources

- [Cross Sector Engagement Tool](#)
- [Developing a Compendium of Local Resources and Referral Connections](#)
- [Structure Ways to Help Families Complete Referrals](#)

If you have questions, please email us at ECDHSCenter@zerotothree.org.



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