

**Children's Cabinet Meeting
May 16, 2023**

Minutes

Presentation and Discussion about the Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan

The team at DHHS worked closely with the Maine Child Welfare Action Network to develop the [Child Safety and Family Well-being Plan 1.0](#).

The purpose of the plan is to identify a model, vision, framework, and strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The overall goal is to keep children safe by keeping families strong.

The scope of this plan is to create a framework for future action.

1. Promote supportive communities where children, youth, and families feel comfortable seeking help.
2. Improve the economic security of parents and caregivers to provide safety and stability for their children.
3. Provide services and resources to help parents and caregivers ensure the safety, health, and nurturing care of their children.
4. Improve coordination of supports and services for children, youth, and families.

In the immediate, the team worked to identify short-term actions, next steps, legislation, and budget initiatives that can be implemented in this legislative and budgeting cycle.

There was significant community engagement in the development of the plan. This was led by the Office of Child and Family Services in partnership with MCWAN. Together, they convened 13 community engagement sessions, reaching 250 individuals. A follow up survey allowed for greater input from about 50 community stakeholders. We sought input from people with lived experience and the stakeholders encouraged us to continue to engage people with lived experience in the process.

This process directly informed the plan that was developed.

- The group focused on the service gaps and the struggles for families to meet their basic needs.
- We heard a lot about the need for care coordination so that families do access, it is hard to understand them all, eligibility, etc. Parents and caregivers struggle to navigate the system. They often don't know who to call.
- People talked about the need to non-stigmatize asking for help. People talked about perception and stigma and how they may be a deterrent. We need to remove the stigma to asking for help and help all parents understand that parenting can be hard for everyone. It is okay to ask for help.
- Many focused on the need to build and sustain the child abuse prevention workforce and the need to expand peer support and peer mentoring.
- People emphasized the need for community centers/hubs for families to access supports.
- There was a strong interest in establishing community collaboratives to support family well-being.

Some key next steps:

The budget includes two initiatives for the plan:

- Provide technical assistance to communities interested in establishing community-based collaboratives.
- Develop a public messaging campaign and increase awareness of existing resources to promote shared responsibility for child safety and family well-being and normalize the universal experience that “parenting is hard and asking for help is a strength.

DHHS will implement benefit cliffs calculator and accompanying tools that help parents and caregivers identify and avoid benefit “edges” and “cliffs” that discourage families from advancing economically.

MCWAN and DHHS will provide learning opportunities for communities interested in establishing community-based flexible funds for families that can be used for basic needs.

The team will continue to engage community partners and state agency staff in this process and next steps. This is just the first version of the plan. It will be built out further and future initiatives will be identified. The team will also continue to build out the understanding of existing prevention programming and efforts across the state to ensure that they are accessible and coordinated. The team will work to coordinate annual community needs assessment to streamline the work and ensure that they are not duplicative.

Note: More details about the plan and next steps can be found in the attached slide deck.

Christine Thibeault from DOC– It would be great for the legislature to understand all of the work happening around prevention and the intersection with Juvenile Justice. OCFS and DOC are serving the same children and youth. And the prevention efforts are keeping children out of our system.

Commissioner Lambrew – The DHHS Committee will receive a presentation and the plan tomorrow. This is part of a larger effort. For example OCFS is working on the Family First Prevention Act, there is overlap with the opioid response work and more.

Commissioner Makin – Several team members at DOE reviewed the plan. It would be helpful to define what is meant by family. Needs to be diverse. Scope is great. It is comprehensive. Impressed by strategic focus. DOE is right now through ESSER funding, kicking off a program around BARR, Building Assets Reducing Risks. The program utilizes existing supports and resources within the school. The focus is on supporting adults in the school to pay attention to well-being of students, not just academics. It will infuse thriving indicators and assets. This model will be an integral prevention piece.

Commissioner Fortman - I would recommend outreach and education to groups that deal with family members. Employers or even our own career center staff. Help them to understand what should they look for, etc. Also we need to continue to focus on economic prosperity for parents and connection to workforce development.

Presentation on the Research on Positive Childhood Experiences and the HOPE Model by the Maine Resilience Building Network

We are all familiar with the research on ACES. There is new research on Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) and how we can utilize PCEs to promote child development well into adulthood. The assets are something we need to be considering and building into the work that we are doing. Working to prevent risk. The research really supports positive experiences as a way of doing that primary prevention. PCEs can

have a big impact, the relationships and the protective factors. They lead to better mental and physical health.

Wisconsin study 2015 and publication came out in 2019, showing the benefit of PCEs. More and more research supporting to be too. Children feeling safe in their families, feeling supported during difficult times. These are all important. Children can find safety with other adults in their lives. Positive child experiences. Feeling safe in families. Feeling supported during difficult times.

We have identified how ACES impacts the brain. The same is true for positive childhood experiences. PCEs impact children's biology, breaking that stress cycle and provides moments of healing. Allows for these pockets of brain development. They help to regulate the nervous system. Because of PCEs, children have a system that is more regulated place.

Impact of PCE on future adult mental health is significant. Protective for future adult mental health is provided in a dose dependent way, meaning the more PCEs the better their mental health is going to be. PCEs are allowing for healthy brain development even with ACES existing

Tufts Medical Center has more information on [their website](#) about PCEs, including this [helpful fact sheet](#). Here is a fact sheet that provides more information about Positive Childhood Experiences.

It is important that we as professionals working with families approach them with Type 2 thinking. Noticing and looking at the strengths of the families. Through that lens we can look at what is being done in the community. Focusing on the relationships, emotional growth, engagement and environment.

[HOPE \(Healthy Outcomes for Positive Experiences\)](#) identifies ways that our communities and systems of care can better ensure that all children have more positive experiences and that all families have support to nurture and celebrate their strengths. HOPE is a model that professionals can use in their work with families. It is about us connecting and providing every day daily moments and engagement with youth and we see that it has a huge impact on child's well-being.

There are four key building blocks to HOPE:

1. Relationships within the family and with other children and adults through interpersonal activities
2. Social and civic engagement to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness
3. Safe, equitable, stable environments for living, playing, learning at home and in school
4. Emotional growth through playing and interacting with peers for self-awareness and self-regulation

We know that PCEs can foster a child's sense of mattering. Connection to community and mattering. Buffer or reduce in suicidal ideation and engage in risky behaviors. Primary prevention allows for positive experiences for our children. The work you all are doing is important to building positives childhood experiences for our children in Maine.

Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan Version 1.0 - Overview

[Maine Child Safety and Family Wellbeing Plan.pdf](#)

Released on May 9, 2023

Presentation to Children's Cabinet on May 16, 2023



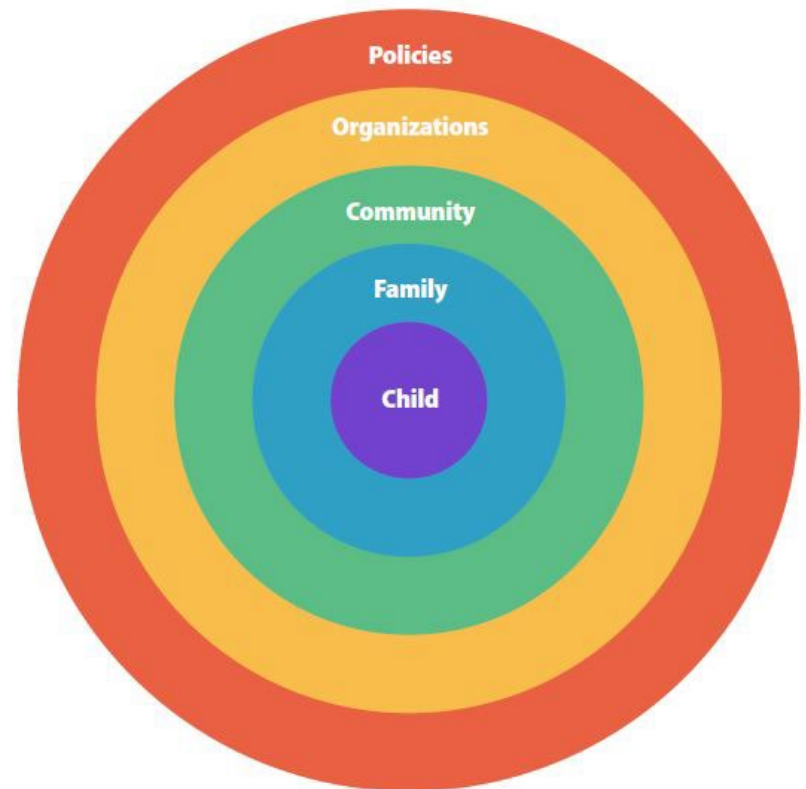
Table of Contents

- Purpose of the Plan
- Scope of Plan Version 1.0
- Community Engagement
- Elements of the Plan Version 1.0
- Version 2.0 of the Plan
- Appendix

Purpose of the Plan

- **Move upstream from the child welfare system:** Growing evidence shows the importance of proactively preventing child maltreatment and investing in the capacity of parents to keep their children safe, rather than disproportionately investing in supports and services after children have already suffered maltreatment.
- **Purpose of the Plan:** Identify a model, vision, framework, and strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Keep Children Safe by Keeping Families Strong



Scope of Plan Version 1.0

- **Create a framework for future action**, detailing four substantive categories for strategic action:
 - Promote supportive communities where children, youth, and families feel comfortable seeking help.
 - Improve the economic security of parents and caregivers to provide safety and stability for their children.
 - Provide services and resources to help parents and caregivers ensure the safety, health, and nurturing care of their children.
 - Improve coordination of supports and services for children, youth, and families.
- **Identify short-term actions**, next steps, legislation, and budget initiatives that can be implemented in this legislative and budgeting cycle.

Community Engagement – Process Overview

- DHHS and MCWAN convened 13 Community Engagement Sessions with community members, state agency staff, and people with lived experience in the child welfare system.
 - Over 250 individuals attended across the 13 sessions, and over 50 survey responses were submitted after the sessions
- In the Community Engagement Sessions, participants were asked the following questions:
 1. Are there service or resource gaps that impair family well-being and put children at risk? Are there policies or other barriers that prevent access to services or resources?
 2. What is one thing you would change to make services work better for families to prevent child maltreatment? At the state level? At the community level?
 3. How do social norms, cultural attitudes (i.e. bias, stigma), engagement and leadership in your community impact efforts to strengthen families and improve child safety?
 4. When have you experienced effective coordination and collaboration across agencies, organizations, and community resources, and what were the conditions that made it work?
 5. In your experience in collaborative work, what is the significance of having a vision, education, and communications plan? What other elements are important to include in the plan?

Community Engagement

Community Partners shared the following feedback in the Community Engagement Sessions:

- Challenges for families in meeting their basic needs.
- Waitlists were frequently identified as a challenge for families.
- Families have challenges navigating benefits "edges" and "cliffs".
- Need for care coordination for families to navigate services.
- Service structure and delivery of services needs to be accessible to families.
- Services need to be offered in a way that is non-stigmatizing.
- Service network should incorporate people with lived experience.
- Understand who to call or reach out to when a child or family needs help.
- Build and sustain the child abuse and neglect prevention workforce.
- Expand peer supports and peer mentoring programs for families.
- Build out community centers and hubs for families to access supports.
- Understand how community collaboratives can support family well-being.

Elements of the Plan

1) Promote supportive communities where children, youth, and families feel comfortable seeking help

Next Steps:

- Support networking and convening communities to build connections about supportive services.
- Support and coordinate with Ethnic Community Based Organizations to increase awareness of and access to supports and resources for immigrant families
- Continue work to implement Community Schools in Maine as a strategy for increasing community-based resources for families

Elements of the Plan

1) **Promote supportive communities where children, youth, and families feel comfortable seeking help**

Legislative Bills and Budget Initiatives in Alignment:

- Provide technical assistance to communities interested in establishing community-based collaboratives.
- Develop a public messaging campaign and increase awareness of existing resources to promote shared responsibility for child safety and family well-being and normalize the universal experience that “parenting is hard and asking for help is a strength.”
- Promote the Community Schools Program - LD 1527.

Elements of the Plan

2) Improve the economic security of parents and caregivers to provide safety and stability for their children

Next Steps:

- Implement benefit cliffs calculator and accompanying tools that help parents and caregivers identify and avoid benefit “edges” and “cliffs” that discourage families from advancing economically.
- Provide learning opportunities for communities interested in establishing community-based flexible funds for families that can be used for basic needs.

Elements of the Plan

2) Improve the economic security of parents and caregivers to provide safety and stability for their children

Legislative Bills and Budget Initiatives in Alignment:

- Implement recent increase in eligibility for Higher Opportunities for Pathways to Employment (HOPE) program to 225% of the income poverty line - P.L. 2023, ch. 21.
- Implement improvements to the Secure Transitions to Economic Prosperity (STEP) program - LD 80.
- Engage with municipalities, community partners, and others to develop a plan to reform the General Assistance program to improve support for families with basic needs.

Elements of the Plan

3) Provide services and resources to help parents and caregivers ensure the safety, health, and nurturing care of their children

Next Steps:

- Continue to increase the number and geographic distribution of high-quality early childhood education slots through the Child Care Infrastructure Grant.
- Complete expansion of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to children in families with income below 300 percent of the federal poverty limit.
- Continue improvements in Primary Care Plus payments in MaineCare that promote positive health outcomes for children and families.
- Apply for summer electronic benefit transfer (EBT) food support program for children.
- Increase the number of professional development trainings provided by individuals with lived experience in mental health, SUD recovery, and DV/IPV.
- Expand activities for primary prevention of substance use disorders in schools and communities.
- Provide trainings for the early care and education workforce on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), trauma-informed practices, and resilience.

Elements of the Plan

3) Provide services and resources to help parents and caregivers ensure the safety, health, and nurturing care of their children

Legislative Bills and Budget Initiatives in Alignment:

- Aggressively implement Maine's Children's Behavioral Health Plan.
- Expand Maine Harvest Bucks to give people with SNAP more healthy options.
- Expand affordable housing.
- Reduce lead hazards that affect early childhood development (e.g. LDs 11 & 490).
- Support gender affirming care (LD 1040).
- Increase access to children's behavioral health services (LD 82).

Elements of the Plan

4) Improve coordination of supports and services for children, youth, and families

Next Steps:

- Coordinate annual community needs assessments.
- Modify mandated reporter training to ensure that community members understand resources and supports for families experiencing challenges.
- Assess opportunities to expand wraparound services care coordination.

Elements of the Plan

4) Improve coordination of supports and services for children, youth, and families

Legislative Bills and Budget Initiatives in Alignment:

- Expand Wraparound Services care coordination.
- Establish a system for coordinating Children's Behavioral Health Services across the continuum of needs.

Version 2.0 of the Plan

- A comprehensive and statewide long-term implementation plan will require a **detailed inventory of current prevention efforts** at both the state and community level to identify gaps and areas for further action.
- This will also require continued **continuous engagement** with community partners, including community-based organizations, schools, clinicians, and families with lived experience.
- DHHS and MCWAN will expand these efforts and begin development of a broader implementation plan in the coming months.

Appendix

Family Strengthening – Current Initiatives

In addition to the strategies and initiatives listed above, Maine currently has many prevention efforts that can increase protective factors and reduce risk factors for families, including but not limited to, the following policies and programs:

- [Access Maine](#)
- [Child and Family Services State Plan](#)
- [Child Care Plan for Maine](#)
- [Children’s Cabinet](#)
- [Children’s Behavioral Health Services](#)
- [Children’s Health Insurance Program \(CHIP\) Expansion](#)
- [Community Schools](#)
- [Comprehensive Behavioral Health Plan](#)
- [Free Community College](#)
- [Help ME Grow Maine](#)
- [Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment \(HOPE\)](#)
- [Maine Children’s Trust](#)
- [Maine Early Childhood Consultation Program \(ECCP\)](#)
- [Maine MOM](#)
- [Maine Opioid Response](#)
- [MaineCare Expansion and Special Population Coverage](#)
- [Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030](#)
- [Minimum Wage Increase](#)
- [Prevention Councils](#)
- [Prevention for ME](#)
- [Universal Free School Meals](#)