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\*\*\*PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\*\*

## Experts Call for Urgent Action to Support Kids' Mental Health in PA

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Pennsylvania, PA – October 25, 2024, at 12pm – In an effort to advance mental health strategies for young children and families, Children First hosted the *Caring Together: Models for Improving the Mental Wellbeing of Young Children and Families* webinar. Drawing over 150 attendees, the event brought together thought leaders to discuss how family-focused interventions can transform mental health outcomes for children across Pennsylvania.

Opening the session, **Sally Kozak, Deputy Secretary of the Pennsylvania Office of Medical Assistance Programs**, emphasized the critical opportunity presented by existing Medicaid structures. “We see nearly 90% of children attending well-child visits. This high participation rate is an opening to embed mental health support into primary care,” Kozak said, calling for a stronger focus on preventive, rather than reactive, mental health care.

**Dr. Natalie Minto from CHOP Primary Care at Cobbs Creek** elaborated on dyadic care, which integrates caregiver-child mental health services. “Empowering parents alongside their children strengthens the family dynamic and establishes a supportive environment that promotes mental wellness for all involved,” Dr. Minto explained.

**Alex Briscoe of California Children’s Trust** stressed the importance of aligning policy and funding with practical care delivery. “A strong caregiver-child bond is the most potent preventative measure for mental health challenges. Now, it’s on us to reshape policy and reimbursement structures to support these life-changing connections,” Briscoe stated.

Panelists discussed the tangible impact of dyadic models like *HealthySteps* and *Child-Parent Psychotherapy*, which have shown substantial results—such as a **43% reduction in behavioral issues among children and a 40% decrease in caregiver stress**. These results demonstrate the power of family-centered interventions in fostering sustainable mental health outcomes.

1. **Expand Medicaid Coverage:** Include dyadic care without requiring a mental health diagnosis, allowing early signs of distress to be addressed preventively.
2. **Broaden Certification Pathways:** Increase the number of culturally competent providers through expanded training and certification processes.
3. **Enhance Program Collaboration:** Foster partnerships between early childhood programs such as Early Head Start and evidence-based home-visiting services.

Additional resources, including reports on optimizing Medicaid for child and youth mental health, are also accessible online.

### Key Resources for Continuing the Conversation

- [Optimizing Medicaid to Improve Child and Youth Mental Health in Pennsylvania](#)
- [State Examples of Optimizing Medicaid](#)
- [Babies Don't Go to the Doctor by Themselves](#)
- [Sustaining HealthySteps: States' Approaches to Financing an Evidence-based Model for Healthy Early Childhood Development](#)
- [Strategies for Advancing Dyadic Care Models](#)

Children First is committed to fostering dialogue and solutions that support the mental health of children and families. For future events and updates, follow at [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), & [LinkedIn](#).

**WHAT:** Children First Webinar: "Caring Together: Models for Improving the Mental Wellbeing of Young Children and Families"

**WHO:** Sally Kozak, Dep. Secretary, Pennsylvania Office of Medical Assistance Programs  
Alex Briscoe, Principal, California Children's Trust  
Dr. Natalie Minto, Pediatrician, CHOP Primary Care at Cobbs Creek  
Emma Golub, Policy Analyst, CHOP Policy Lab  
Dr. Abby Schlesinger, Pediatric Psychiatrist, UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh

**WHEN:** Wednesday, October 25, 2024, 12:00 PM

**WHERE:** Virtual Webinar (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhbSaTqojDc&t=1s>)

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*Children First is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that improves the lives of children in Pennsylvania by developing initiatives and advocating for quality health care, childcare, public education, and family stability. Learn more at [www.childrenfirstpa.org](http://www.childrenfirstpa.org), and on Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube at @childrenfirstpa.*

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