Creating a Culture of Health in Head Start Communities

Head Start National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness
in partnership with UCLA Health Care Institute
Health literacy has taken center stage as an imperative for improving health care and health outcomes. There are numerous definitions of health literacy in published literature. The standard definition is “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.” Former Assistant Secretary for Health, Howard K. Koh, M.D., M.P.H., stated in his National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy, “Improving health literacy is the key to the success of our national health agenda. It is the currency for everything we do.”

Low-income families are at especially high risk for low health literacy. In the last five years, Head Start has taken the lead nationally to incorporate health literacy into school settings where preschool children from vulnerable families are served. In 2016, the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) were revised to include the importance of providing support services that are understandable to individuals with low health literacy. Taking an organization-wide approach to improve health literacy has had significant and positive impacts on Early Head Start and Head Start children and families, not only helping parents help their children meet objectives supporting school readiness, but also improving the whole family’s health trajectory. Health literacy has become a door to engaging Head Start parents, so they can gain confidence knowing that they are their children’s first teacher.

2 National Center for Education Statistics. The Health Literacy of America’s Adults: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.
The UCLA Health Care Institute (HCI) has taught a management systems approach for successful implementation of health promotion interventions in Head Start for nearly 20 years. Fundamental to the innovative approach taken by HCI is the recognition that low health literacy is a key obstacle and that to effectively disseminate knowledge and empower families, materials had to be tailored to the audience’s literacy level, language and culture. Also key to the success of HCI’s methodology is the recognition that relationship building and engagement are fundamental, leading to empowerment of parents and families.

HCI follows a research-based approach that:

» Enables early childhood organizations to empower families with knowledge, tools and resources.

» Engages families to actively participate in health decisions.

» Provides families the opportunity to adopt a sustainable healthy lifestyle.

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Creating a culture of health in Head Start through a management systems approach that builds health literacy and family engagement

We strive to improve the health literacy of families in underserved communities, changing the trajectory of health for generations to come.

Our diverse health-promotion portfolio targets prevention with culturally appropriate health literacy materials.

Train the Trainers
- Unique structured framework that builds leadership capacity
- Skill building: project management, marketing, parent/staff/community engagement
- Mock training

Parents/Staff Training
- Culturally adapted, low-literacy materials
- Adult learning principles
- Experiential group learning activities
- Creation of social networks

Follow Up and Reinforcement
- Reinforces learning and promotes behavior change
- Continuous quality improvement through data collection
- Maintains momentum
- Sustainability

Model replicable across all health education topics
- Oral health prevention
- Mental health and wellness
- Diabetes obesity prevention

Capacity building
- Leadership training
- Community outreach
- Marketing
- Engagement principles

Strategic implementation
- Sustainable and replicable model
- Evidence based

Health promotion & prevention
- Health literacy
- Culturally sensitive

Comprehensive approach to prevention & health promotion
In order to improve children’s health outcomes, increase school readiness, and increase staff and parent engagement in Early Head Start and Head Start, the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness (NCECHW), through the UCLA Health Care Institute, implemented Train-the-Trainer (TTT) events annually since 2016. Participating agencies attended the initial TTT focused on the treatment of common childhood illnesses module, and in subsequent years, attended supplemental trainings in oral health, mental health and wellness and obesity/diabetes prevention. This unique approach enabled Head Start/Early Head Start programs to build depth of knowledge for staff and families and improve health promotion for the entire community.

**INDICATORS**

- **94** Early Head Start/Head Start grantees
- **1,034** staff trained in TTT
- **36,000** families trained
- **29,900** surveys received 83% response rate
- **85%** average family attendance at trainings

**TTT evaluations received 97.7% response rate**

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**YEAR 1**
- Cohort 1 common childhood illnesses

**YEAR 2**
- Cohort 1 oral health & staff wellness

**YEAR 3**
- Cohort 1 mental health

**YEAR 4**
- Cohort 1 eat healthy, stay active!

**YEAR 5**
- Cohort 2 common childhood illnesses
- Cohort 2 oral health & staff wellness
- Cohort 2 mental health
- Cohort 3 common childhood illnesses
- Cohort 3 oral health & staff wellness
- Cohort 3 mental health
- Cohort 2 eat healthy, stay active!
Five Levels of Evaluation*

AWARENESS-KNOWLEDGE-BEHAVIOR CHANGE – LEVELS 1, 2, 3
- Train-the-Trainer Satisfaction Surveys
- Parent Pre/Post Knowledge Surveys
- Pre/Post Tracking of Health Services Usage
- Pre/Post Tracking of School Attendance
- Success Stories and Best Practices

PRACTICE AND POLICY CHANGE – LEVELS 4, 5
- Implementation of Health Improvement Plans (H.I.P) by grantees
- Sustainability Impact Survey
- Surveys of Leadership on Practice Change
- Long Term Impact Surveys (4 years) Staff & Parents
- Cross Sector Collaborations in the Community
- Adaptability to Other Health Topics
- Changes at a system level for Head Start grantees (over several years)
- Changes in National Head Start Program Performance Standards
- Inclusion of health literacy in Healthy People 2030 Framework

Meaningful change takes time, building partnerships and intentional strategic implementation!

HCI Impact: Awareness, Knowledge and Behavior Change
Levels 1, 2 & 3

**COMMON CHILDHOOD ILLNESSES**

- **Treatment of 99.5°F temperature?**
  - 22% decrease in school days missed
  - 50.2% decrease in doctor/clinic visits
  - 19% decrease in E.R. visits
  - 47.2% increase in use of a health book

- **Parents recognize symptoms of STRESS**
  - 68% increase

- **Parents better able to MANAGE STRESS**
  - 71% increase

- **Parents recognize symptoms of DEPRESSION**
  - 68% increase

- **Parents better able to support their children EXPERIENCING TRAUMA**
  - 41% increase

**ORAL HEALTH**

- **FIRST trip to DENTIST at first tooth or age 1**
  - 72% knowledge increase
  - 87% increase

- **child brushes teeth 2-3x / day**
  - 96% decrease

- **SLEEPS with bottle of milk or juice**
  - 9.9% decrease

**MENTAL HEALTH**

- **Parents recognize symptoms of DEPRESSION**
  - 68% increase

- **Parents better able to MANAGE STRESS**
  - 71% increase

- **Parents better able to support their children EXPERIENCING TRAUMA**
  - 41% increase

**EAT HEALTHY, STAY ACTIVE**

- **positive weight loss association between parent and child**
  - 23.5% increased adult exercise
  - 9.9% decreased child obesity
  - 53% decreased adult obesity
The NCECHW, using the HCI-research framework and methodology, has applied a systems management approach to improving community health literacy and to achieving successful, well-attended, engaging health promotion programs. HCI’s model has not only improved the health literacy of staff and families, but has strengthened management capacity to build an internal culture of health and wellness, assisted Head Start programs to meet multiple Head Start Program Performance Standards, and has increased staff, parent and community engagement. Key predictors of annual implementation of HCI, as recorded from HCI’s Sustainability Impact Survey, include engagement of stakeholders at all levels, providing incentives to families to remove certain barriers and including HCI in their annual training/technical assistance budget. We believe once parents have the knowledge, tools and motivation to protect the health of their children, and barriers are removed, meaningful change can occur. We believe health literacy is a door to family engagement and can help set entire families and communities on a better health trajectory.

**Conclusion**

The NCECHW, using the HCI-research framework and methodology, has applied a systems management approach to improving community health literacy and to achieving successful, well-attended, engaging health promotion programs. HCI’s model has not only improved the health literacy of staff and families, but has strengthened management capacity to build an internal culture of health and wellness, assisted Head Start programs to meet multiple Head Start Program Performance Standards, and has increased staff, parent and community engagement. Key predictors of annual implementation of HCI, as recorded from HCI’s Sustainability Impact Survey, include engagement of stakeholders at all levels, providing incentives to families to remove certain barriers and including HCI in their annual training/technical assistance budget. We believe once parents have the knowledge, tools and motivation to protect the health of their children, and barriers are removed, meaningful change can occur. We believe health literacy is a door to family engagement and can help set entire families and communities on a better health trajectory.

**WHAT DID HEAD START GAIN - SURVEY**

- **Confirmation** - we do make differences in the lives of our families.
- **Strategies** to speak to families about difficult health issues.
- **Coordinated** team approach in promoting Health, Wellness and Resiliency.
- **Resources** for a sustainable health education program.
- **New approaches** to parent engagement
- Larger network and improved relationships with community partners.
- **Health literacy** training for our families and staff
- Increased family participation in other Head Start events.
- **Enhanced staff engagement**
- The opportunity to observe parents’ concerns, challenges, strengths, and creativity first hand.
- Families are more empowered to make good decisions when it comes to health.
- **Opportunity** to meet HSPPS for parent trainings, in a structured easy way, with measurable outcomes.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT**

84% sustained HCI beyond initial year of TTT
79% continue annual trainings

**Promoting Children’s Health, Wellbeing and School Readiness**
OUR REACH 2016 - 2020

**PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES**


**HOW TO FIND OUT MORE**

**VISIT US ONLINE**

[anderson.ucla.edu/price/jnj/hci](http://anderson.ucla.edu/price/jnj/hci)

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