

For Immediate Release
March 2, 2015



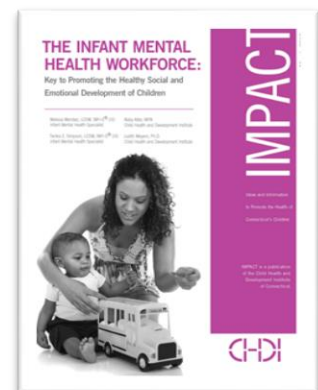
Professionals Working with Infants and Toddlers Are Key to Promoting Children's Mental Health According to a New Report

Farmington, CT – The Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI) today released a new report calling for a statewide system to ensure professionals working with infants, toddlers and their families are skilled in the field of infant mental health. Advancements in early childhood research have focused attention on the mental health of Connecticut's youngest children. Neuroscience provides significant insight on how a baby's brain develops and the importance of social-emotional development (also referred to as infant mental health) in this process. Infant and early childhood mental health hinges on a child's relationship with a caring and nurturing adult beginning at birth and sets the stage for a child's lifelong cognitive, social, emotional and health outcomes.

"There is a tremendous opportunity to improve children's lives by promoting a child's secure attachment with a caregiver from the beginning," said Judith Meyers, psychologist and President and CEO of the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut. "Professionals who care for young children are in the unique position to help families develop nurturing relationships. Successfully cultivating this attachment would prevent so many other ills that follow in its absence."

CHDI's IMPACT report entitled: ***The Infant Mental Health Workforce: Key to Promoting the Healthy Social and Emotional Development of Children***, was authored by Melissa Mendez, Tanika Simpson, Abby Alter and Judith Meyers. It includes:

- Research on infant mental health and early brain development
- Current gaps in the education and training of Connecticut's infant mental health workforce
- Local and national examples of workforce development approaches
- Strategies and recommendations to ensure a competent infant mental health workforce



Connecticut is making progress on building an infant mental health workforce skilled in promoting social-emotional development and buffering the negative effects of toxic stress. The Connecticut Association for Infant Mental Health (CT-AIMH) adapted a system of infant mental health training and credentialing from Michigan AIMH. Fifty-three Connecticut professionals have earned or are in the process of earning the CT-AIHM Endorsement®. In addition, CT-AIMH has provided training in infant mental health to approximately **500 professionals in Connecticut** through partnerships with CHDI, Early Head Start, the Office of Early Childhood, the Department of Children and Families, Birth to Three and Elm City LAUNCH.

"This report underscores the importance of having an early childhood workforce that is trained and skilled in infant mental health," said Office of Early Childhood Commissioner Dr. Myra Jones-Taylor. "With a knowledgeable workforce, we can better address the mental health needs of our youngest

children, identifying and addressing issues early on and providing babies and their families with the support they need.”

"Connecticut's efforts to advance a cross-discipline approach to infant mental health workforce development have had a far reaching impact," according to Melissa Mendez, co-lead author of the IMPACT and Associate Director of Early Childhood at Wheeler Clinic. "This training supports teachers, home visitors, clinicians, child welfare workers, nurses and others in their work with very young children and their families by bringing an infant mental health framework that identifies safe and healthy relationships as the key component to healthy infant and toddlers."

Recommendations in the IMPACT include:

- Requiring infant mental health training for professionals working with young children
- Integrating infant mental health training into higher education and professional development courses
- Ensuring public sector programs serving the most vulnerable young children and their families have access to highly trained specialists in infant and early childhood mental health
- Increasing support for reflective supervision – a key ingredient for effective work in the infant-family field.

The Office of Early Childhood provided funding for this publication as part of its effort to promote an early childhood workforce skilled in infant mental health.

Visit www.chdi.org to download the IMPACT report or to read more about CHDI's work related to infant mental health. Parents and caregivers can learn more about infant mental health at www.kidsmentalhealthinfo.com. For additional information, please contact Cindy Langer at langer@uchc.edu or 860-679-1538.

###