

Overview of *Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Promotion, Intervention, and Treatment*

A Provision of the 21st Century Cures Act of 2016



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Section 10006 of the 21st Century Cures Act of 2016, initially included in the *Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2016*, is *Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Promotion, Intervention, and Treatment*. This is the first federal legislation to explicitly recognize the mental health of infants and toddlers, and represents an incredible opportunity to promote lifelong health and wellbeing starting with our youngest children.

Social-emotional development, synonymous with infant mental health, is the bedrock of health child development. Early relationships not only set the stage for later relationships, they also give babies the confidence to explore their world, as well as such skills as persistence and cooperation to be successful learners. Yet, we know that babies can and do experience mental health problems, especially when exposed to chronic stress and trauma from situations such as witnessing domestic or community violence or living in poverty. The first years are a unique opportunity to vigorously promote positive mental health; prevent or identify early problems when early intervention can be effective; and identify and treat disorders.

This provision, if funded, will create grants to support development, maintenance, and enhancement of infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) promotion, intervention, and treatment programs. These programs will serve infants and children at significant risk of developing, showing early signs of, or having been diagnosed with mental illness, and will include evidence-based multigenerational therapy and other services that support the caregiving relationship we know to be so critical to healthy development.

Grant funds may be awarded to appropriate service providers who employ IECMH specialists, and can be used to provide:

- age-appropriate services, including multigenerational therapy and other supports for the caregiving relationship, for eligible children and families;
- training for IECMH specialists to support integration of IECMH services into other child-serving settings, including primary care, child welfare, and home visitation;
- mental health consultation to early care and education programs, including home visiting and early intervention programs;
- training for mental health clinicians in promising and evidence-based IECMH practices and models, to expand and improve quality of the IECMH workforce;
- age-appropriate assessment, diagnostic, and intervention services for eligible children.

IECMH professionals nationwide were thrilled with the passing of this legislation, but in order to support their important work this provision must be funded. This section was authorized to be appropriated \$20 million for the period of fiscal years 2018 through 2022. These grants will meet an immense need and, by directing resources where the foundations of strong mental health are laid – with young children, starting from birth- are ultimately an investment in the future stability and capacity of our nation.