Building a Sustainable Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Network Hub: Highlights from Colorado

Heather Matthews, Taran Schneider, Dr. Stacy Howard

Introduction

The road to building Colorado's Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) Network Hub consisted of several years and stages of prior efforts of invested, dedicated stakeholders to define and develop Colorado's early childhood mental health systems. Building on these efforts, there were two essential elements to the success of Network Hub development: partnerships and process.

In 2021, Colorado's ECMHC Network Hub was funded and began the journey to co-create an inclusive, collaborative structure that strengthens connections, resources, policies, and practices for mental health consultation to ensure children, families, and programs can thrive.

Our ECMHC Network Hub lives at Healthy Child Care Colorado (HCCC), a statewide non-profit organization with the mission to build safe, supportive, and healthy early childhood settings and systems where children and professionals learn and grow. HCCC also serves as the state network hub for Pyramid Model and Child Care Health Consultation in Colorado.

HCCC's values, core functions, and organizational capabilities are being leveraged to build out the concept of efficient and effective Network Hub.
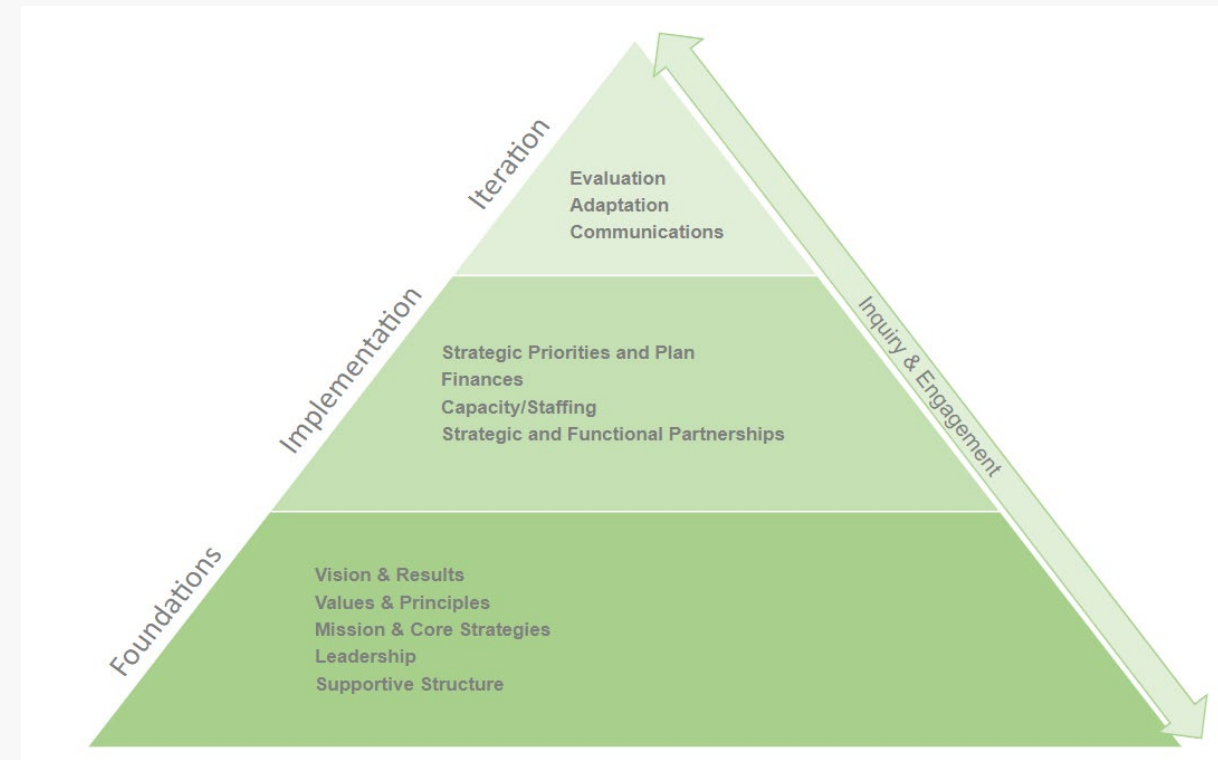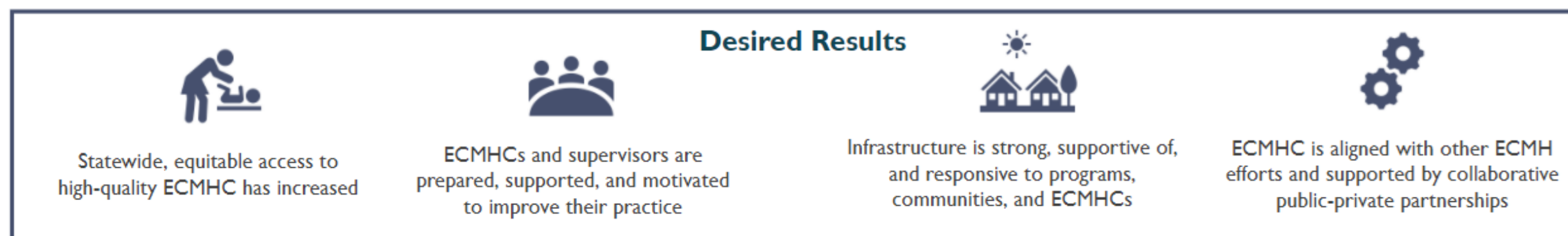
An Advisory Team was established to ensure the ECMHC Network Hub is built with intentional and diverse representation of communities and perspectives.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the cross-sector collaboration and partnerships that led Colorado to have a statewide ECMHC Network Hub.
- Awareness of the process utilized to co-create the ECMHC Network Hub Foundations, Action Plan, and Leadership Structure.
- Share the intentional and deliberate ways that equity, diversity, inclusion, and ability (EDIA) are centered throughout the process.

Public-Private-Philanthropic Partnerships

An incredibly important element of building a strong system of ECMHC and a Network Hub has been the cross-sector collaboration between government, nonprofit, higher education, and philanthropic organizations. The ECMHC Network Hub is being developed in partnership with the Colorado Dept of Human Services Office of Early Childhood as well as an Advisory Team. We are co-creating the Network Hub by utilizing existing resources, collecting input from the field, and by collaborating with the Advisory Team to develop key elements. The Foundations will serve as our guide for the next 5+ years and they include our purpose, EDIA commitment, guiding principles, desired outcomes, and core functions.

Equitable Foundations

The process to develop the Network Hub was guided by a sustainability framework. This framework was initially developed by the consultant through a review of literature on program and organizational development and sustainability. It was then fine-tuned over time through use with many organizations, programs, networks, and other collaborative groups to ensure comprehensive and grounded planning processes. Dedicating sufficient time and resources to strong foundations that guide strategic planning and implementation is essential. The Network Hub Advisory dedicated additional time to commit to principles and practices of equity, diversity, inclusion, and ability.

ECMHC Network Hub Foundations

Lessons Learned

- ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT. Honoring and leveraging HCCC's history, values, structure, and functions set us up for success integrating the ECMHC Network Hub into the organization. Consider functions in addition to content expertise.
- CLARITY & COLLABORATION. We built upon the trust and collaborative approach HCCC embodies to ensure clarity of our process, and infused authentic engagement opportunities throughout. This ensured relevance and meaning for those who will engage in Network Hub activities, particularly from those closest to the work and communities. A cross-sector advisory team was critical.
- EDIA COMPASS. Deep and intentional dialogue around EDIA is required to ensure clarity and commitment among the full Advisory Team and to ensure it is centered throughout the foundations and action plan–even when it extends the process. Invest the time.
- TRUST THE PROCESS. Invest time and resources in a high-quality process with expert facilitation and a framework to guide you.
- SUSTAINABILITY. Establish a leadership structure with representation from implementation and practice as well as systems and policy perspectives to focus on keeping the Network Hub's work relevant, meaningful, responsive, and sustainable over time.

Resources

Brief History & Timeline

Feasibility Study

Essential System Elements Rainbow

Infrastructure Elements Brief

Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Acknowledgements & Contact Information

Special thanks to the many stakeholders who helped ensure a stronger ECMHC system and an establishment of a Network Hub in Colorado. The ECMHC Advisory Team Members have ensured we are building upon the intentional systems building work done over the past two decades.

Taran Schneider, MA
taran@healthychildcareco.org