



Wisconsin State Legislature

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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Children's Mental Health – A Coordinated Response

Last session, the Senate Education Committee held an informational hearing on the impact a child's mental health has on their education, their classroom, and their teacher. School districts told us that mental health was a growing concern; nationwide an estimated one in five children have a diagnosable mental health issue. On a state level, as many as 80,275 children ages nine to seventeen have a mental health issue that needs treatment. During the hearing, we heard from school districts that have effective programs in place to support teachers and find help for children. We also heard stories from teachers about children as young as five years old struggling with mental health issues that brought tears to our eyes.

Children with mental health issues might interact with, and receive services from, a number of different state and local government agencies. Children can receive these services from their school and the local police as well as from programs within the Department of Children and Families or the Department of Health Services. While all these groups are trying to help a child and their family, they might not know what another agency has to offer, or what another program is trying to achieve. This can lead to duplication of services, or might result in a child not receiving the help they need.

Knowing that there are a variety of programs in existence to help children and families with mental health issues, the state created the Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH) as part of the 2013 biennial budget. OCMH's purpose is to coordinate services and activities for children across state agencies and monitor the performance of state programs. By doing so, they can identify duplication of services, improve quality of services, and collect and analyze important

data. OCMH's mission is to "innovate, integrate and improve Wisconsin's child and family serving systems." To fulfill this mission, the office created the Children's Mental Health Collective Impact which works with partners and has three workgroups that look at specific issues in mental health; Access to Services, Trauma-Informed Care, and Resilience.

In Governor Scott Walker's State of the State Address on Tuesday, January 10th, he invited his wife, First Lady Tonette Walker, to join him on the dais and talk about trauma-informed care. As she explained, trauma-informed care is learning to ask "what happened to this child" rather than "what's wrong with this child." It does not mean that we excuse bad behavior or crimes committed, but by shifting perspective, there may be better outcomes for these children.

The job of the OCMH is not to create a program that will solve all of the mental health issues, but rather to find ways for different groups to understand the issue and to know what programs exist and work together. They have established bi-monthly meetings among state agencies to highlight partnerships and explore additional areas of collaboration. They have also created a dashboard that reviews indicators of child well-being ranging from early prenatal care and neighborhood safety to parental substance abuse and child abuse or neglect, it also compares Wisconsin to national averages. In general, it shows that Wisconsin's children have more access to services that build resilience than the national average and less exposure to risk factors.

I would encourage you to visit the Office of Children's Mental Health's website to view the dashboard, learn more about trauma-informed care, and review the leading indicators of a child's well-being. Their website is: <http://children.wi.gov/Pages/Home.aspx>.

If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at: Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us. You can also sign up for our newsletter at our website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen14/news/index.htm>.