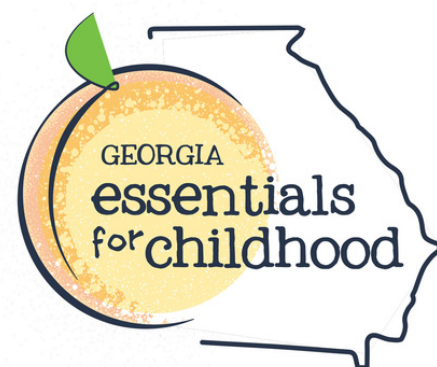




Family Physical Health

Georgia Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan

2020-2029



Highlights

Issues

- Lack of access to affordable healthcare and insurance
- Lack of health infrastructure and healthcare professionals, especially in rural areas
- Need equitable distribution and access to community green spaces for residents
- Food insecurity related to inequity, in Georgia 1 in 7 children face being hungry every day

Solutions

- Expand and improve healthcare access by providing affordable health insurance, expand telemedicine services, and decrease barriers to healthcare access
- Equitably improving reproductive health by increasing awareness of prenatal support resources, improve access to maternal and infant health services, and promote evidence-based models of sexual-health education and adolescent pregnancy prevention for school-aged children and youth
- Increase the focus on school-safety planning and practices and center that around a positive school climate
- Improve community health and safety by addressing food insecurity, promote gun-safety practices and policies, and increase transportation safety



Background

When families are healthy and their children have consistent access to healthcare, the physical health of those families improves. In Georgia, nearly 24% of people are uninsured: that means that 1.4 million people, more than 200,000 of which are children, do not have health insurance. Access to affordable insurance coverage is one of the most important factors in access to healthcare (1).

Georgia ranks 46th out of 50 states and Washington, D.C. in terms of health statistics. We ranked 49th in terms of access and affordability, and 47th in terms of income disparity. A significant barrier to children's medical care is accessibility, and this becomes most prevalent in rural Georgia where the need for mobile health centers, community health screenings, and expanded access to telemedicine is high. 63 counties in Georgia had no pediatricians, 31 counties had no internal medicine physician, and 6 counties had no family medicine physician. Georgia requires expansion of medical services and insurance coverage to mitigate the affects of poor health and help prevent child abuse and neglect (2).



Geographic and neighborhood-level access to green spaces, healthy foods, and safe spaces is extremely important for family physical and mental health. One study found that in Atlanta, there is a large disparity in access to green spaces for racially mixed and minority-dominant communities. Additionally, lower-income neighborhoods have constrained access to parks and sports fields, and those with a higher percentage of minority residents also have lowered access to golf fields. Community green spaces are useful and multifunctional land resources that help promote healthy physical activity (3).

Additionally, several studies have proven that interaction with nature and green space has a naturally positive affect on mental health for people (4). In order to positively impact family physical health, an equity lens must be used to improve access to green spaces for all Georgia residents.

In addition to access to green spaces, food insecurity must be addressed to improve family physical health. In one study, having more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) was associated with severity of food insecurity (5). In Georgia, 1.2 million people face hunger, of which more than 370,000 are children. This means that more than 1 in 7 children in Georgia face being hungry every day. More than 73% of households that are part of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Georgia have children, yet benefits are often insufficient to feed larger families or provide consistent access to healthy foods (6).

However, these benefits are disproportionately utilized by Black and Hispanic communities who still face rampant discrimination and barriers to accessing these programs. Additionally, Access to healthy foods is important for good nutrition and even for birth outcomes. Currently, low birthweight in Georgia has increased 6% in the past two years, affecting 1 out of every 10 births (7). In fact, Non-Hispanic Black Mothers have a prevalence two times higher for low birthweight babies than non-Hispanic white mothers (8). Understanding how access to nutritional foods and healthcare services impacts disenfranchised, low socioeconomic status, and minority families is imperative to improving the health outcomes of all Georgia families and their children.

Although poverty, low health insurance coverage and access to healthcare services, impediments to green spaces, and insufficient access to nutritious foods do not cause child abuse or neglect, these conditions put families and children at greater risk due to lack of resources and the stressors of poverty. It is clear why investing in the physical health of families is important to improving health outcomes in Georgia and lowering the prevalence of child abuse and neglect!

Relation to Child Well-Being

Physical health for families is an important part of preventing child abuse and neglect. Consistent access to healthcare services and providers is one of the best ways to not only ensure your child's healthy development, but to become more familiar with your child's healthcare needs as they grow. Without access to physicians, it can be difficult to gauge the health of your child. Yet, nearly 8% of children do not have health insurance in Georgia: that is more than 2% higher than the rest of the nation. The majority of these children fall below 250% the federal poverty line. If Georgia were to expand Medicaid coverage and subsidies to those up to 400% the federal poverty line, nearly every child in Georgia would gain access to healthcare and physicians (9).



Georgia's current decision to not expand Medicaid leaves many low-income adults in the coverage gap as well, and bars many from Marketplace subsidies that may improve health insurance coverage throughout the state (10). However, recent studies have shown that increasing Medicaid coverage for adults also increases children's coverage. In 2014 after the ACA was passed, gains in Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program were larger in expansion states (3.0%) than in nonexpansion states (1.8%). For children remaining uninsured, nearly 2 out of 3 are eligible for Medicaid or CHIP but not enrolled.

Children with healthcare coverage can be more easily treated for injury and illness and is associated with an increase in child maltreatment reporting. One study found that for every 1 percentage point increase in a county's percent of children insured, there was an associated 2% increase in child maltreatment reporting by healthcare professionals (11).

Improving family physical health takes more than insurance coverage. Preserving the physical and mental health of families also means sustaining safe and walkable neighborhoods with access to green spaces, healthy foods, and transportation. Increased access to safer neighborhoods improves family physical safety, can help improve educational outcomes, and can improve physical and mental health outcomes as well.

Recommendations

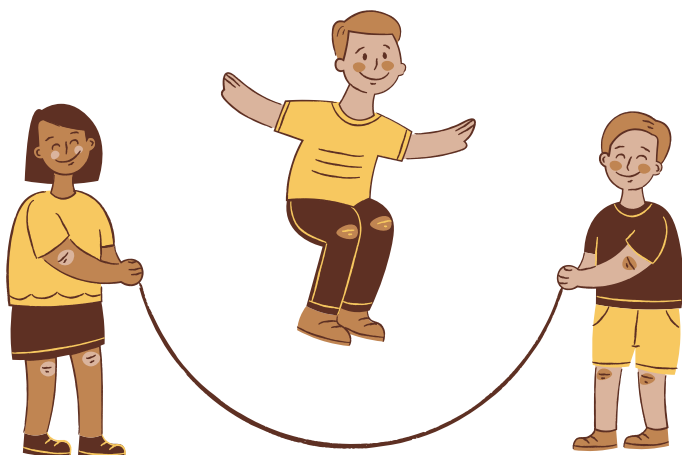
Below are listed different categories of family physical health to focus on. Under each section, we have provided potential resources and links to help your process along.

Expanding and improving healthcare access

- Expand access to affordable health insurance coverage for all Georgians
- Expand telemedicine services
- Promote policies/approaches to ensure medical co-payments and authorization of physical health services by insurance companies (decrease barriers to healthcare access)
- Expanding Funding and Access to Georgia's Charity Clinics: Georgia charity clinics are essential providers of health services to the state's low-income and uninsured population. The clinics have shown to improve health outcomes for patients with verified reduced hypertension and increased medication compliance among those that utilize the clinics. Additionally, the clinics help reduce non-urgent emergency room visits.

<http://charitablecarenetwork.com/>

- Still, 40 of Georgia's counties do not have a charity clinic. Advocating for state support and financing to expand charity clinics all over the state is important for fortifying the use of these clinics to not only increase healthcare access, but decrease emergency room use and improve child and family health outcomes, especially in rural areas.
- This site provides several different program, fund, and grant opportunities for "Telehealth Use in Rural Healthcare." <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/telehealth/funding>



Equitably improving reproductive health

- Increase awareness of prenatal support resources
- Improve access to maternal and infant health services (especially among minority populations) in order to reduce infant and maternal mortality
- Promote and expand the participation of families in the Planning for Healthy Babies (P4HB) waiver program
- Promote evidence-based models of sexual-health education and adolescent pregnancy prevention for school-aged children and youth
- This resource is from The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. While the whole paper is available, the recommendations and conclusions are of particular note. The College finds that comprehensive sexuality education should begin in early childhood and continue through a person's life span. The education should focus on reproductive development, including abnormalities in development, prevention of STIs, and unintended pregnancy. Additionally, it should teach about forms of sexual expression, health sexual and nonsexual relationships, gender identity and sexual orientation, and how to recognize and prevent sexual violence (12).



- This resource outlines the foundational knowledge and skills students need to navigate sexual development and grow into “sexually health adults.” It provides national sex education standards, tools to assess the current curriculum and how it aligns with the National Sex Education Standards, and a glossary (13).
- Improve awareness of prenatal resources by directing families and mothers to Planning For Health Babies. They provide important lab tests, pelvic exams and pap smears, follow-up planning visits, medicine, case management, and referral services, as well as educational classes for mothers of very low birth weight babies (14).
- “From Baseline to Best-In-Class” is a health screening and healthy development project by the Georgia Department of Public Health that highlights the important improvements we can make to improve child and maternal health outcomes. It includes recommendations like expanding Medicaid Provider Resources, enhancing family outreach, creating a universal and coordinated method of data collection and access (Cross Agency Child Data System), and creating care coordinators or health advocates for families (15).
- Rights, Respect, Responsibility, or the 3Rs program, is a toolkit available for grades K-12 and includes a Sexual Education Curriculum. It's available by grade, topic, and language, and comes with a Teacher's guide (16).

School health and safety

- Increase efforts to ensure school buses are safe (e.g., bus monitors)
- Increase focus on school-safety planning and practices (e.g., increased security technology) to focus on positive school climate and the development of Safe School Plan
- The Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency has an entire page on school safety including school safety “hot topics,” school safety training, and safe school plan templates (17).
- The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) Page, as well as Georgia’s Strategic Plan for it, are both resources that are ongoing but continuously improving. PBIS is an evidence-based, data-driven framework that aims to reduce disciplinary incidents, increase a school’s sense of safety, and improve academic outcomes. This is done via a multi-tiered approach to prevention, and targets all students by striving to improve school climate (18).

Community health and safety

- Promote gun-safety practices and policies
- Promote strategies and programs aimed at increasing food sufficiency
- Promote strategies to enhance transportation safety
- This “Guide to the Issues” reviews the principles of transportation to Georgia and pairs them with recommendations to improve and alleviate Georgia’s transportation issues. This includes securing alternative funding sources, using Georgia universities to help research for solutions, and expanding the Atlanta metro express toll lanes into one network (19)
- The Formula Grants for Rural Areas program aims to provide capital and assistance to states in order to improve public transportation in rural areas with populations of less than 50,000 people. The federal share would be 80% for capital projects, 50% for operating assistance, and 80% for Americans with Disabilities Act route paratransit services. It states that states must spend no less than 15% of its annual apportionment for development of intercity bus transport (20).
- The Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Transportation Grants Program aims to incentivize investment in transportation infrastructure (21).



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