

What is Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation?



How Does Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Support Home Visiting Programs?

In Illinois, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)-Division of Early Childhood, Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), Illinois Head Start Association (IHSA), and City of Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) are the major funders of home visiting. Illinois' home visiting system has long valued the integration of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (I/ECMHC) into home visiting programs, as a resource to strengthen provider capacity to identify and address the mental health needs of young children and their families.

The Illinois Model:

The goal of the Illinois model of I/ECMHC is to strengthen the home visiting workforce in Illinois by building programs' capacity to promote healthy social-emotional development within the families and communities in which children live and thrive. The model is based on Infant Mental Health principles, focusing on relationship based, reflective practice, and is culturally responsive. Successful consultation relies on the collaboration between the consultant, program supervisor, and staff to shape a professional development plan with shared goals. Within the context of that relationship, the consultant provides a space for reflection on the system, program, and practice challenges. Through this model, consultants provide the following supports to home visiting, doula, and coordinated intake programs.



Reflective Consultation with program supervisors, individual staff, and staff groups. Consultation provides an opportunity for reflection, cross-cultural exploration, practicing staff interactions, and embedding the skills and knowledge that the consultant cultivates in the program. Staff members are encouraged to observe dynamics and interactions with families, as opposed to problem solving and finding a solution for families.

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“Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants are among those most closely linked to and aware of the challenges facing the home visiting workforce. As the last two years have brought immense challenges and stress to the home visiting field, I/ECMHC has a consistent resource for home visitors and helped foster resilience.”



Professional Development Opportunities: The reflective approach is balanced with content-specific training. The consultants develop ‘mini-trainings’ on topics staff members identify that encompass mental health and social-emotional themes such as: intimate partner violence; substance use; attachment; postpartum depression; trauma; safe sleep; child development; and assessments/screenings.



Family Engagement: Consultants may also discuss circumstances when support through co-facilitation of family groups is appropriate.



I/ECMHC Funding: I/ECMHC is an allowable expense for home visiting, doula, and coordinated intake programs funded by the above listed funding sources. Programs funded by ISBE Prevention Initiative, Head Start, and DFSS may include I/ECMHC in their budgets. To request budget amendments, programs should follow the amendment process defined by their funder(s). Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) and IDHS-DEC-funded home visiting and coordinated intake programs receive funding for I/ECMHC in their program budgets.

Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation is not therapy, and while consultants are often licensed social workers or otherwise highly trained professionals, they do not act as individual counselors to staff or families. Instead, I/ECMH consultants work with home visiting staff to best equip parents and caregivers to support their children’s healthy social and emotional development. Consultants are able to support home visitors as they “hold on” to families working through trauma. Consultants support resiliency of the home visiting workforce experiencing burnout and turnover challenges. Lastly, I/ECMHC reflect with the home visiting team to navigate bias and foster a commitment to equity.

Where do I find an Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant?

Please visit the [Gateways to Opportunity Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant Search](#) to locate a consultant working in your community. The database is a central location to locate an Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant, across the state of Illinois. Consultants offer support in multiple languages, and the number of consultants continue to grow.

