

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM ENHANCEMENT INITIATIVE



MISSOURI KIDSFIRST IS EMBARKING ON A MULTI-YEAR MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM (MDT) ENHANCEMENT INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE EFFECTIVE TEAM FUNCTIONING STATEWIDE AND INCREASE ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IMPACTED BY ABUSE BY INCREASING THE CAPACITY AND COORDINATION OF MDTs. THIS INITIATIVE IS FUNDED BY THE MISSOURI CHILDREN'S JUSTICE ACT.

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BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Over the past decade, Missouri has built the foundation for Multi-Disciplinary Teams to ensure a coordinated approach to child abuse investigations. The MDT Enhancement Initiative will build upon that foundation to ensure MDTs statewide are meeting the highest standards and increase access to services for children impacted by abuse.

FIRST STEPS

The planning stage of the MDT Enhancement Initiative includes:

Stakeholder Outreach

(Summer 2022)

Listening Sessions

(Summer/Fall 2022)

Multi-Year Strategic Planning

(October/November 2022)

Recruit Pilot Sites to

Implement Strategic Plan

(January 2023)

BACKGROUND

In 2020, the fifteen regional child advocacy centers in Missouri with twenty-two locations, served all 114 counties and the City of St. Louis, and provided services to over 8,800 children. All cases referred to the child advocacy centers (CAC) are investigated with a multidisciplinary team (MDT) approach that may include forensic interviewers, law enforcement, Children's Division workers, prosecutors, juvenile officers, mental health providers, medical providers and others.

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THE MDT APPROACH

According to *The National Standards of Accreditation for Child Advocacy Centers - 2023 Edition*, "A committed and effective multidisciplinary team (MDT) with a shared common goal is the foundation of a Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). An MDT is a group of professionals from specific and distinct disciplines that collaborates from the point of report and throughout a child and family's involvement with the CAC. MDTs coordinate investigations and service delivery to mitigate potential trauma to children and families, to keep open the lines of communication and maintain transparency and foster trust, and to help optimize a quality response overall, while preserving and respecting the rights of the clients, and the mandates and obligations of each agency.

A CAC is an agency or organization that facilitates the interagency coordinated response. All MDT representatives contribute their knowledge, experience and expertise for a coordinated, comprehensive, compassionate response that is relevant and accessible to its clients. Quality assurance and a review of the effectiveness of the MDT's collaborative efforts are also critical aspects of the MDT response."

IMPROVING ACCESS TO SAFETY, HEALING & JUSTICE

In 2011, the Missouri General Assembly passed legislation that created the Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children to make recommendations for reducing child sexual abuse in Missouri. Soon after, the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Best Practice Workgroup was established and the Workgroup's first publication was the 2014 Recommendations for Continuous Improvement, which detailed ways to improve team functioning. Despite this coordination and support for the MDT model, the quality and effectiveness of multi-disciplinary teams varies across Missouri. Staff turnover and secondary trauma impede long-term success of many teams. There is a need for continuous improvement efforts to implement best practices, avoid staff burnout and increase the effectiveness of MDTs.

Since 2014, three other states have embarked on MDT Enhancement Initiatives. These initiatives have increased the number of children referred to an MDT for consideration. In addition, MDTs in these states report that cases are completed in a more timely manner, and fewer cases are falling through the cracks with teams working together more cohesively throughout the life of a case. This, in turn, ensures services are provided to the child and family member(s) as recommended by the MDT. Missouri is poised to benefit from a similar MDT Enhancement Initiative. Every county in Missouri has access to a CAC and a MDT because of the hard work of the Task Force and advocates for the MDT model across the state. A focused initiative to enhance the functioning of these teams has the potential to increase their effectiveness and ensure every child in Missouri gets equal access to safety, healing, and justice.