**Advancing Systems of Services Network Café Notes**

**COVID-19 and Early Intervention Services**

*March 12, 2021*

**Key Discussion Questions**

- What has been the experience in your state in ensuring equitable access to EI supports during COVID-19?
- What changes has your state made during COVID-19 to ensure timely diagnosis and referrals into your EI program and/or the transition from EI programs to special education?
- What are the things your state has learned during the pandemic that you want to share with your peer states about identification and referrals into EI and/or transition from EI services to special education? (Lessons learned, resources, etc.)

**New Jersey Efforts**

- Sandra Howell and Susan Evans from New Jersey discussed the state’s Early Intervention Part C services.
- New Jersey’s Lead Agency for Early Intervention Part C services is the Department of Health, but every state is different. Many states’ lead agencies are the Departments of Education.
- In New Jersey, Part C is in the same office space with the CYSHCN program, which makes collaboration and communication easier.
- Changes New Jersey has made due to COVID-19:
  - Adaptation of evaluation processes to be completed via telehealth
  - Consistent “check-in” with families who decided to wait to access services until COVID-19 was over.
  - Joint messaging from NJ Department of Education and Department of Health on processes for transition to special education.
  - Critical policy rule is that Part C cannot provide services to any child over age 3. To address this given some delayed services during the pandemic, NJ Part C offered ongoing “make-up” services to children who missed services, especially in April/May 2020.
  - Additional “exit” evaluations to children who were being considered for special education, for families to have developmental information to provide to their Local Educational Agency (LEA)
- Lessons learned:
  - Support families in accessing services by providing them with the resources they need to participate in the program (e.g., access to electronic information)
  - Recognize and address barriers to care, including language barriers, WiFi issues, how to provide informed consent.
  - Use social media to reach families.
  - Identify top concerns of families (e.g., food and security, employment) and assign staff (e.g., family support specialists) to maintain family engagement and address top concerns.
Build upon existing partnerships to support families.

**Other Title V Strategies to Ensure Access to Early Intervention Services**

- Title V sent letters to families informing them that all services would be provided via telehealth, starting in March. From July onwards, it was up to the families and providers to decide whether services would be face-to-face or telehealth. The state has seen a significant drop in referrals.
- Title V worked with Medicaid to get a written policy around telehealth and how to provide Early Intervention services via telehealth. Title V also gave out mini-grants to providers to purchase telehealth equipment for families who did not have the needed technology.

**Resources Shared**

  - States participating are: Alaska, Hawaii, Utah, Louisiana, Kansas, Oklahoma, Florida, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Massachusetts