



New York Selected for New Initiative to Improve Use of Psychotropic Medications among Children in Foster Care

*Multi-year quality improvement collaborative will assist states in addressing
the misuse of psychotropic medications in this population of children in child welfare*

New York has been chosen as one of five states that will participate in *Improving the Use of Psychotropic Medications among Children and Youth in Foster Care: A Quality Improvement Collaborative*. This three-year initiative, developed by the Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) and made possible through the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), will focus on improving the quality of psychotropic medication use among children in foster care.

New York will join **Illinois, New Jersey, Oregon, and Vermont** in identifying new strategies to address the problem of inappropriate use of psychotropic medications in this child population. A cross-agency team from each state, including Medicaid, child welfare, and behavioral health agencies, will seek to improve the prescribing, monitoring, and oversight of psychotropic medications for this high-risk, high-cost group of children. Providers, caseworkers, and youth and families will be engaged as key partners under this initiative.

New York State's Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), Office of Mental Health (OMH), and Department of Health (DOH) will collaborate to adopt strategies to improve the tracking and monitoring of psychotropic medication, helping to implement standards, training and tools to reduce inappropriate prescriptions, while supporting the health and well-being of youth and their families.

"We are honored that New York State has been chosen to establish an interagency process to adopt strategies to improve the tracking and monitoring of psychotropic medication to ensure that young people in our foster care and juvenile justice systems benefit from the most effective treatment possible," said OCFS Commissioner Gladys Carrión.

In recent years, the use of psychotropic medications among children and adolescents in the child welfare system has become a high-priority, public sector child health and safety concern. Rates of psychotropic drug use are especially high among children and youth in child welfare, who typically rely on Medicaid for physical and mental health care coverage. An upcoming CHCS study finds that children in foster care use psychotropic medications at a disproportionate rate -- more than three times what would be expected given their numbers within the child Medicaid population.

"Despite recent research demonstrating that psychiatric medications are as effective as others, there is good reason to be concerned about their overuse among children. The Office of Mental Health developed the PSYCKES program to help improve prescribing, and we are excited to be partnering with OCFS and DOH on this new project to help make sure children will only receive medicines that can help them," said Mental Health Commissioner Michael Hogan, Ph.D.

Recent legislation requires child welfare agencies to partner with state Medicaid agencies to develop coordinated plans for the monitoring and oversight of psychotropic medication use among children in foster care. The five state teams in the collaborative will work to strengthen inter-agency partnerships, oversight and quality assurance processes, and coordination of care for this population of children. The collaborative will explore existing best practices, inviting state pioneers in child welfare, Medicaid, and children's behavioral health to participate.

"We are delighted to welcome these five states to advance opportunities for more effective psychotropic medication use for children in foster care," says Kamala D. Allen, director of Child Health Quality at CHCS. "These teams are clearly committed to finding innovative ways to ensure that the children entrusted to their care receive the most appropriate services to meet their needs, and achieve the best outcomes possible."

For more information on CHCS's work in children's behavioral health and child welfare, visit www.chcs.org.

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