



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
**Health**

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# Health Services Newsletter

## Head Start Health Manager Networks: People Helping People Helping People

Have you ever left a conference or a meeting having loved the opportunities for networking and learning what your peers were doing? A health manager network or cluster might be something to consider. Formal and informal groups of Head Start health managers come together on a local level, or in states and regions, to support one another in their jobs. Around the country, health managers organize themselves into clusters, user groups, and/or networks. These networks include, but are not limited to, a group of three or more managers and staff who may work in health, nutrition, mental health, and oral health services (and possibly a number of other service areas in their programs). Because these networks are most often built and maintained by members according to member-specific needs and interests, each network is unique and well positioned to advance local agendas.

Across the organizational spectrum peer support and networking have proven to be effective professional development strategies. Teachers, mental health providers, even nursing students benefit when people provide knowledge, experience, emotional, social or practical help to each other. *Peer support* can include peer mentoring, listening, or counseling as well as a time or place for colleagues, members of self-help organizations and others to meet as equals to give each other support. The members of these groups share a common interest in the work they do and a desire to do it better.

Health manager networks promote improvement by building relationships among those in similar positions across Head Start and Early Head Start programs. A network affirms the expertise and recognizes the talents of its members. Ideally, these groups become communities of practice and an opportunity for knowledge and information sharing. The sharing of resources is the number one reason members give for organizing themselves into groups.



*"We can't do it by ourselves.  
There is strength in numbers."  
- CA Head Start Health  
Manager*

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## ECLKC Workspace for Network Leaders

The National Center on Health and the Head Start Information and Communication Center established a Health Manager Networks Leaders workspace on ECLKC for the exchange of ideas and support. If you are a leader of a network, send your name and email address to [nchinfo@aap.org](mailto:nchinfo@aap.org) with Network Leaders Workspace in the subject line. You will receive instructions on how to access the workspace.

### Coming soon to ECLKC!

A directory of Virtual Meeting Tools

Getting Started: Health Manager Networks

Revised Health Manager Orientation Guide

## BENEFITS OF HEALTH MANAGER NETWORKS

Members of the Connecticut Health Managers Network have said that they feel as if they are **“in the know”** when they meet and learn about what everyone else is doing. Health managers report many benefits from networking, such as shar-

ing forms and policy manuals, delivering joint trainings, orienting new managers, and identifying local partners that provide free or low-cost sensory screenings. Networks also serve a variety of other purposes such as: policy development, professional development, peer mentoring, promotion of local health activities, support

on specific health topics, and access to local and state experts on health and development

Networks also have the potential to reduce staff turnover, ensure greater consistency in implementing Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and completing the Program Information Report (PIR). Using clusters or networks gets the health messages out to more people.

The National Center on Health (NCH) has learned that successful and sustainable networks have buy-in from program directors. Directors who recognize the benefits of a network to their whole Head Start program—not just health staff—are a crucial support to network membership. Networks also require strong health manager leaders to thrive. One leader compared starting a cluster to when her daughter wanted to join Girl Scouts. At the informational meeting everyone wanted a troop for his or her daughter, but the first challenge was finding parents willing to be the leaders before there could be a troop. While some health manager networks have had a single leader for many years, most benefit from shared or collaborative leadership that does not rely only on a single individual. Networks also benefit from support provided by Head Start Associations, Head Start Collaboration Offices, and Head Start T/TA.

*“It is a time to catch up on the ‘latest and greatest’.”*  
—CT Health Manager

*“Our network meetings have had an impact on health services in our programs.”*—SC Health Manager Network Leader





## GETTING STARTED CONT.

While Head Start staff may have unique concerns and issues, there are other early childhood professionals who likely serve similar populations. These include Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) managers, State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) projects, child care health consultants, early childhood mental health consultants, school nurses, and oral health advocates. Head Start health manager organizers may consider collaborating or aligning with one or more of these groups

### References

<sup>i</sup>Aston, L., & Molassiotis, A. (2003). Supervising and supporting student nurses in clinical placements: The Peer Support Initiative. *Nurse Education Today*, 23(3), 202–210.

<sup>ii</sup>Mead, S., & MacNeil, C. (2006). Peer support: What makes it unique? *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*,(2), 29-37.

# *Fostering a culture of health and wellness for Head Start children, families, and staff.*

### **NATIONAL CENTER ON HEALTH**

#### Our Goal:

To help Head Start and Early Head Start programs implement best practices and effective approaches within medical and dental care access, health awareness, healthy active living, emergency preparedness, and environmental safety to support healthy outcomes and school readiness for young children and their families.

### CONTACT US!

The National Center on Health welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to [nchinfo@aap.org](mailto:nchinfo@aap.org) or call (888) 227-5125.

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***School readiness begins with health!***

