



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health

June 2014
Volume 2, Issue 5

Health Services Newsletter

A 21st Century Vision for Your Health Services Advisory Committee

The focus of Head Start health services is to prevent health problems whenever possible by carefully addressing the needs of enrolled children. Effective partnerships are the key to the success of this approach.

These partnerships enable Head Start to respond to the unique needs of children and families. A partnership with a community-based health care organization has advantages for both agencies as well as local communities. The community-based health care organization can refer new families when appropriate and join Head Start programs in speaking out for the needs of young children and families.

1304.41(b) Each grantee directly operating an Early Head Start or Head Start program, and each delegate agency, must establish and maintain a Health Services Advisory Committee, which includes Head Start parents, professionals, and other volunteers from the community. Grantee and delegate agencies also must establish and maintain such other service advisory committees as they deem appropriate to address program service issues such as community partnerships and to help agencies respond to community needs.

The Health Services Advisory Committee (HSAC) has broad advisory functions, determined by the local program. Each program's HSAC may offer guidance and support to build and maintain high-quality health services and health-related policies. The HSAC should inform and collaborate with the Policy Council and Governing Body whenever appropriate.

Families play a central role in the HSAC, as they bring their perspective about the availability and quality of local services as well as the gaps and barriers to care for low-income families. This perspective creates the context for a family-centered focus for conversations with other HSAC members. The HSAC plays an important role in ensuring that Head Start programs provide comprehensive, integrated, and effective health services to children and their families.



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HSACs can assist local programs in a variety of activities, including:

- Developing and reviewing health-related plans, policies, and procedures;
- Training staff and families on health topics;
- Advocating for interpreters and health information sensitive to the languages and cultures of families;
- Identifying current and emerging health issues affecting Head Start families; and
- Accessing community health resources.

DIVERSE MEMBERSHIP SUPPORTS A WIDE VARIETY OF HEALTH ISSUES

The HSAC brings together staff, families, and community members to address local health issues; establish and review health policies, procedures, and plans; and mobilize community resources. Possible community partners may include:

- Pediatricians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses (including school nurses)
- Dentists and hygienists
- Staff from local Boards of Health
- Nutritionists and staff from the WIC program
- Mental health providers and other local social service agencies
- Special education and related service providers
- OB-GYN providers, midwives, doulas, and lactation consultants
- Audiologists, ophthalmologists, and other specialists
- Emergency responders, such as paramedics and firefighters

“AS A HEAD START PARENT, JOINING YOUR LOCAL HSAC ALLOWS YOUR VOICE TO BE HEARD ON THE ISSUES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU IN THE AREA OF HEALTH, INCLUDING NUTRITION, MEDICAL, MENTAL AND DENTAL CARE.” – OMAIR SHAMIM, M.D., MHS, MK, HEALTH & NUTRITION SERVICES MANAGER

Head Start managers and staff bring to the HSAC their in-depth knowledge of program practices as well as the day-to-day needs of children and families and the challenges they face.

The activities and members of the HSAC best determine meeting schedules. Working professionals often face many challenges in working together— time, **distance, and funds**. Today’s technology offers a wide variety of virtual meeting tools to help meet these challenges and facilitate productive working relationships by connecting members between regular meetings.

HSAC members can tailor virtual meeting tools to meet their needs. Members can use something as simple as a telephone to attend a meeting. The HSAC can also create an online community to share documents and post information.

Meeting virtually allows an HSAC to draw upon a wider group of members, including working parents and professionals with relevant knowledge or skills who may work some distance from the program or whose schedules do not permit them to attend meetings in-person. Instead of spending several hours traveling, attendees can take an hour or so to attend the meeting from the convenience of their home or office. In addition, those unable to attend the meeting can review an archived recording and members can discuss issues and trends before and after the live meetings.



What about families?

Programs may consider re-cruiting any interested family member to their HSAC; joining an HSAC may be of particular interest to family members who:

- Work as health care or allied health workers such as dental assistants, medical technicians, or community connectors
- Care for children with special health care needs
- Are experiencing challenges with health care delivery
- Are exploring training in the field of health care

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

To improve the health and mental health of Head Start children and families, in its [2012 Final Report](#), the Advisory Committee on Head Start Research and Evaluation recommended:

“Increased collaboration among all Head Start stakeholders, including professional organizations, to better leverage local resources, and to improve the consistency of messages and services for the local Head Start programs.”¹

There really is no limit to what an HSAC might choose to focus on or do. There are always opportunities for innovation.

For example, an HSAC could address:

- Making more fresh produce available to children and families **by collaborating with local growers to establish a farmers’ market;**
- Making dangerous intersections safer for pedestrians and vehicular traffic by helping to secure new traffic signs, signals or crosswalks;
- Advocating for clean environments by engaging in local efforts to mitigate hazards in the soil, air or water; and
- Addressing health challenges and improving access to care by applying for funding from external sources (such as health foundations or local service organizations).

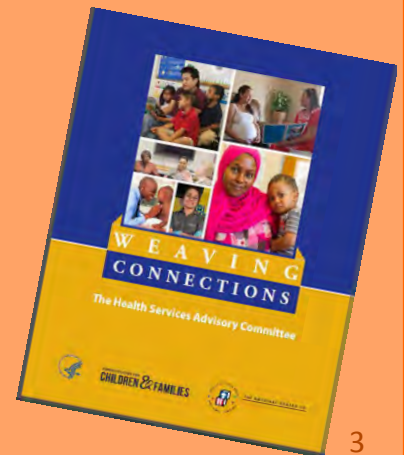
“Our health services advisory committee allows us to continue with the important work of health services within the Head Start world. Our committee is made up of community partners and community-based services from the arenas of health, dental, nutrition, and mental health. The HSAC provides us with the needed resources, workshops, brainstorming, goal setting and advice that allows us to better serve the children and families in our care.”—Judith Kunitz, Health Services Coordinator

Harnessing the Power of the HSAC during the Five Year Project Period

The new five year project period offers HSACs an opportunity to help programs plan, implement and report on the impacts for children and families, the organization and the community that align with their long range goals and objectives in each year of the project period.²

By analyzing data from their community wide strategic planning and needs assessment, HSACs can help programs to identify gaps in their health delivery system and locate additional resources to improve the health of children and families. HSACs can also help programs design ongoing monitoring systems that collect the data needed to determine the success of their efforts and make recommendations for continuous program improvement. Working together, Head Start staff, families, health professionals and other members of the HSAC can help programs engage their communities in meaningful ways to strengthen health services and achieve program goals and objectives.

Revised Edition Coming Soon!



¹ Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation. (2012, November). *Advisory Committee on Head Start Research and Evaluation: Final Report*, 82. Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/mr/opre>

² Application for Federal financial assistance to operate a Head Start and/or Early Head Start program

RESOURCES

Care for Their Air: For Health Service Advisory Committees is a joint resource from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It is part of a campaign to promote smoke-free homes and cars. The tip sheet is available in English and Spanish to help Health Services Advisory Committees focus on awareness and prevention efforts.

Directory of Virtual Meeting Tools describes several forms of electronic media that groups can use to meet and collaborate outside of face-to-face meetings. *Coming soon to ECLKC.*

Embracing Our Future is a streaming video available in English and Spanish about Head Start health services featuring four children in Head Start and Early Head Start programs. It provides a picture of Head Start health services including examples of hearing screening, mental health, oral health, and prenatal services that programs can use to train families and members of the HSAC, Policy Council or Governing Body.

Health Manager Orientation Guide is a new resource from the National Center on Health that is in development. Health managers can use the Guide to learn about their role and responsibilities and learn more about Head Start. The current ***Head Start Orientation Guide for Health Coordinators*** is available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center/health-services-management/program-planning/TheHeadStartOr.htm>.

How To Make The Most of Your Health Services Advisory Committees identifies steps that you can take to get your community or state more involved in oral health.

Weaving Connections is an online resource that the NCH is currently updating that provides helpful hints on how to establish an HSAC and run a successful meeting. There is also a 17-minute video recounting HSAC success stories.

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 or call (888) 227-5125.

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School readiness begins with health!

