

Beyond Prevention: Building Wellness Systems

Knowledge to Action Brief

July 2023

A **Child, Youth, and Family Wellness System** is possible when public systems and community-based partners align services and supports and make them available through relational engagement at the time and place of a family's choosing. Wellness Systems bolster the strength of families and foster community resilience by including investments in: (1) housing, (2) child care, (3) health and behavioral health services, and (4) educational opportunity ¹. Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to well-being, this requires community organizations to relationally engage all families by providing culturally competent services in an equitable manner.

Wellness Systems also acknowledge the impact of **Positive Childhood Experiences** (PCEs) in communities for creating healthy mechanisms for dealing with **Adverse Childhood Experiences** (ACEs). The conceptual foundation for going *beyond primary prevention*, to do more than simply "preventing bad things from happening", is known as "primordial prevention". In essence, this means proactively creating conditions for well-being before the general population is even exposed to risk factors, which in turn, helps position families to thrive. Primordial prevention can mitigate unequal socio-environmental exposures that impact broader community health determinants (Strasser, 1978; Pandve, 2014).

Wellness Systems are adding a new chapter to the prevention story in several fundamental ways ². Traditionally, public systems have attempted to target prevention at several different points, including primary, secondary, and tertiary, seen below ³. However, this model does not acknowledge the broader role of community in family resilience to the extent that a Wellness System does.

Investment in...



Housing



Child Care



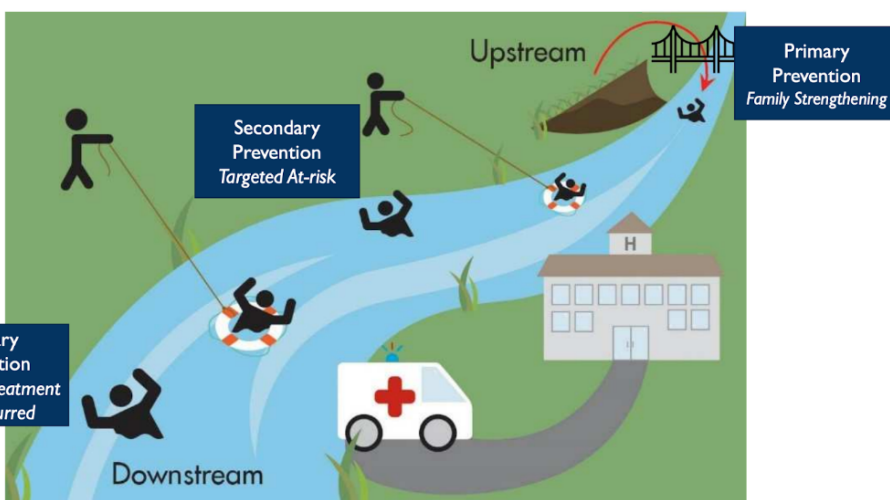
Health Services



Educational Opportunity

PCEs

In California, the **Integrated Core Practice Model** (ICPM) functions as a blueprint for the system and practice changes that allow a community to become a Wellness System. It calls for principled leadership behaviors, authentic engagement, and service integration that is responsive to the needs of all community members, particularly persons with lived experience. The wellness approach should be driven through united leadership efforts, but guided by the community's vision that invites family and youth culture, interest, and preference to be valued ⁴. Wellness Systems are focused on equitable access to services and supports, acknowledging the harm done to families in the past through traditional approaches. Rather, they engage in an adaptive approach and work to engender opportunities to thrive along with social supports when needed throughout the community that are not just preventative, but proactive.



Source: Public Health Sudbury & Districts www.phsd.ca


Ventura County has begun implementing a Wellness System by first establishing a clear vision; “to create a Child, Youth, and Family Wellness System by aligning government, community, and family stakeholders to maximize wellness and quality of life.” This vision will be achieved by breaking down siloed efforts which require families to retell their story to multiple parts of the system, risking re-traumatization each time in order to receive support. In alignment with California’s AB 2083, Ventura County public system partners have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), reflecting their commitment to building wellness, which will center equity and social justice.

In **San Diego County**, the child welfare system has been reimagined as the Child and Family Well-Being Department, consisting of ⁵:

- The **Office of Child and Family Strengthening**, which will include First 5 San Diego, coordination of the local childcare system, and other prevention and strengthening services
- The **Office of Child Safety**, which will continue to provide all services currently administered through Child Welfare Services


San Diego’s unified department will create conditions for equity in the community, with a focus on increasing community supporting while reducing the disproportionate number of BIPOC children and families impacted by public systems.

Actions to Take



Grow your knowledge by exploring California resources on Prevention such as the California Training Institute (CalTrin)

Access comprehensive planning resources for your organization today, including training recordings: [CA Resources on Prevention Learning Objectives](#)



Become actively involved with the Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) in your county. CAPCs are the catalyst, convener, and coordinator of each county’s approach to prevention of child maltreatment.

- To learn more about the CAPCs in CA, review these [CAPC Best Practice Guidelines](#)
- Most counties have such a listing: [San Diego CAPC Contact](#)



Be informed by current prevention initiatives to build Wellness Systems

Office of Child Abuse Prevention: Regularly updated information about best practices regarding prevention and early intervention programs

The [Social Policy Institute](#) provides technical assistance in support of Wellness System building to several California counties. If your organization is seeking capacity-building technical assistance or consulting services, please reach out to us by contacting SPI’s Co-Director Lori Clarke at lsclarke@sdsu.edu



Citations

1. Nancy D. Polikoff & Jane M. Spinak, Strengthened Bonds: Abolishing the Child Welfare System and Re-Envisioning Child Well-Being, 11 Colum. J. Race & L. 427 (2021).
2. River Story – Prevent Connect Wiki. (n.d.). <https://wiki.preventconnect.org/river-story/>
3. Office of Child Abuse Prevention. A framework for Preventing Child Abuse by the Promotion of Healthy Families and Communities. https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Child-Welfare-Programs/OCAP/Framework_for_Prevention.pdf?ver=2020-03-18-135454-650
4. Gerlach, A. J., & McFadden, A. (2022). Re-envisioning an Early Years System of Care towards Equity in Canada: A Critical, Rapid Review. International journal of environmental research and public health, 19(15), 9594. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19159594>
5. County News Center. (2023, February 28). County establishes new Child and Family Well-Being Department. San Diego County News Center. <https://www.countynewscenter.com/county-establishes-new-child-and-family-well-being-department/>



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