



BACKGROUND

Implementation Science

The Science of Success

Effective Intervention Practices x Effective Implementation Practices = Good Outcomes

For decades researchers and professionals have tried to understand why the delivery of human services is typically inconsistent, often ineffective and sometimes even harmful to the people they seek to serve even when there is evidence that the practice is sound. The search for the missing link between effective interventions (and/or promising practices) and intended benefits for children and families has revealed a lack of attention to implementation.

What we have learned from both research and practice is that proven interventions must be consistently and systematically implemented as intended for outcomes for children and families to improve.

Implementation science needs to be employed so that systems support quality practice and successful services reach and positively impact children and families. Implementation science must be applied at all levels of a system, from practitioners in a child welfare agency to the county and state agencies providing child welfare leadership, oversight and policy.

Four Frameworks

Stages, Drivers, Cycles and Teams

Four frameworks help define and constitute implementation science. Together, they provide a structure and guide for agencies, stakeholders and community members in their effort to improve outcomes for children and families. The four frameworks include

- Implementation Stages – The various and distinct stages involved in implementing an intervention and how the process evolves and changes throughout implementation.
- Implementation Drivers – The forces that affect implementation, including those that relate to leadership, competency and organizations themselves.
- Improvement Cycles – The processes that can be used to improve and refine an intervention as implementation unfolds.
- Implementation Teams – The “go to” people that make implementation happen at the local, regional or state level.

Stages

Everything Doesn't Happen At Once

Implementation science recognizes that implementation does not and cannot occur all at once. Rather, implementation occurs in stages and can take two to four years to complete:

- Exploration Stage – Information is collected and analyzed to identify the needs, available resources, potential solutions and a decision to proceed occurs.

- Installation Stage – Staff and systems plan, prepare and organize to build the necessary supports to promote utilization of the intervention.
- Initial Implementation Stage – First implementers are carrying out the new innovation, teams are monitoring the intervention and implementation supports and making whatever improvements are necessary.
- Full Implementation Stage – The majority of staff are using the intervention effectively.
- Sustainability – Financial and programmatic sustainability are considered, planned for and executed.

Drivers

Forces that Support Change

The goal of implementation is for all practitioners to use an intervention consistently and as intended. However, focusing on practitioner use of an intervention alone is not complete. The larger environment – organization and systems – must be supportive and able to help “drive” the success of the intervention. These “implementation drivers” are fundamental organizational supports that ensure the intervention is used as intended and reaches those it is designed to serve. Indeed, they are integrated and compensatory – meaning that implementation drivers are often interrelated and can compensate for each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

Research and practice experience have helped to identify three categories of “Implementation Drivers:”

- Leadership Drivers – Guide implementation by committing to the intervention or practice, adapting policies and organizational structures to support the intervention, pacing implementation and roll-out of the intervention, and being inclusive and transparent in involving a broad array of internal and external stakeholders in the development and implementation of the intervention.
- Competency Drivers – Help build the ability of those throughout the organization to use an intervention’s principles and approaches by training managers, supervisors, staff and stakeholders, providing experience and coaching, designating staff and supporting champions, and aligning staff selection and evaluation systems.
- Organization Drivers – Modify and align organizational systems to support the intervention by evaluating progress and outcomes through quality improvement, using feedback loops, revising policy and creating tools.

Simply stated, even the best intervention or practice will not be effective if it is not implemented appropriately and if it is not supported by the organization or system. Neither interventions by themselves nor implementation activities by themselves are sufficient -- each needs the other to produce meaningful results for children and families.

Cycles

Improving an Intervention and Supporting Change

A third critical framework for implementation science focuses on improvement cycles, including tools and processes that can be used to support change and improve an intervention. Generally, these can involve rapid problem solving, as in the case of the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Cycle where problems are identified and solutions are rapidly developed; usability testing, where a succession of small groups test the intervention and learn how it can be changed or improved so it is more effective and ready to use on a broader scale; and communication feedback loops between practitioners and policymakers to help ensure policies are aligned to support practice.

Teams

Making Implementation Happen

The final framework involved in implementation science speaks to the formation of implementation teams that carry responsibility for the day-to-day operationalizing of the all the components that support, assess and improve implementation. Members of these unique teams respond to whatever comes up – they are expected to “do it, find it or create it” as implementation of the intervention moves forward. Depending on the scale and scope of the intervention, implementation teams can be formed at the local, regional or state levels to promote alignment and remove barriers.

IN CALIFORNIA

CAPP and Implementation Science

Intervention = Child and Family Practice Model

Implementation science is being used by California Partners for Permanency (CAPP) in a focused effort to reduce long-term foster care. Through a five-year, federally funded project, CAPP is working with state, county, community and tribal partners to address both the intervention that is needed as well as the implementation drivers that are necessary for its consistent and effective use. As the intervention is developed, CAPP is also focusing on the relevant improvement cycles and formation of the necessary implementation teams.

After a year of research, planning and collaboration, CAPP’s planned intervention is the development of an integrated model that informs and shifts child and family practice in California. This Child and Family Practice Model will require changes at the practice and organization and system levels.

Child and family practice will need to evolve to ensure that services are in line with the practice model, and organizations and systems will need to build the capacity and internal structure to support those practices. With an eye on implementation science, we will need to ensure that our implementation drivers are strong at the state, regional and local levels to support consistent and effective implementation of the model. Our efforts will also need to be informed by local analyses that have identified organizational and system barriers that stand in the way of success.

As CAPP moves forward with the installation and implementation stages of the practice model and addresses organization and system issues, we will share what we are learning and will continue to evolve and improve. To learn more about our work, visit www.reducefostercarenow.org or contact Karen Gunderson, CAPP Project Director, (916) 651-7395 or karen.gunderson@dss.ca.gov.

The information in this document has been adapted from 1) Implementation: The Missing Link Between Research and Practice by Dean I. Fixen, Sandra Naoom, Karen Al Blasé, and Frances Wallace as it appeared in the April 2007 Edition of the American Professional Society on The Abuse of Children Advisor; and 2) Implementing Practice Models as it appeared in the Summer/Fall 2011 Edition of Child Welfare Matters a publication of the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement.



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CAPP is a five-year federally funded project to reduce long-term foster care. To learn more, visit www.reducefostercarenow.org or contact Karen Gunderson, CAPP Project Director, at the California Department of Social Services, (916) 651.7395 or karen.gunderson@dss.ca.gov.

PERMANENCY
INNOVATIONS
INITIATIVE

PII

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