

2019 Social Innovation Summit: Pathways to Opportunity
Panel on Data Partnerships to Strengthen Families: *What We Learned*

EVENT DETAILS

Date: March 29, 2019

Location: University of Southern California

Speakers:

- Linda Aragon, *Director*, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Division of Maternal, Child, Adolescent Health
- Regan Foust, *Director of Strategic Partnerships*, The Children's Data Network
- Armando Jimenez, *Director of Measurement, Learning & Evaluation*, First 5 LA
- Carrie Miller, *Assistant Executive Director*, Office of Child Protection, Los Angeles County
- Moderator: Jacquelyn McCroskey, *John Milner Professor of Child Welfare*, USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across Los Angeles County, a large number of children and families come into contact with Child Protective Services. Engagement with this system can lead to adverse outcomes that impact children and their families for years. On March 29, 2019, panelists at the Social Innovation Summit held at the University of Southern California discussed the challenges facing families and the opportunities to create data partnerships that can help support families. Panelists discussed current efforts to help families avoid ever coming into contact with the child welfare system including the expansion home visitation services, the weaving together of relevant networks across the county, and the creation of the California Strong Start Index.

CHALLENGES FACING FAMILIES AND DATA PARTNERSHIPS

Panel moderator, Jacquelyn McCroskey, framed the panel's discussion by illustrating the vast number of families and children in Los Angeles County that have interaction with the child welfare system, and underscored that preventing families and children from ever coming into contact with the system is extremely important. Data from the Children's Data Network show that 27% of all children in Los Angeles County are reported to Child Protective Services as victims of alleged neglect or abuse before the age of eighteen. Professor McCroskey posited that the primary responsibility of Child Protective Services is to provide safety, however it is often the case that other issues rise to the attention of Child Protective Services and the system quickly becomes overburdened. Additionally, families often do not have the knowledge to seek other alternatives before reaching the crisis point of being referred to the Child Protective Services system.

In addition to discussing the importance of helping families avoid coming into contact with the child welfare system, the panel also highlighted the limited capacity of administrators to provide the amount of services needed by the community to ensure families and children are properly supported. Panelists spoke to the importance of home visits for families, and the benefits this type of support has for families. Home visiting is a prevention tool that has been shown to improve outcomes for at-risk children, parents, and family systems. However, at present, this program is under-resourced in Los Angeles County. Further, panelists discussed the difficulty in effectively targeting the resources that are available to agencies and organizations due to disparate and incomplete data. A complete portrait of data for children and families can help service providers tailor their programs to address some of the most pressing underlying issues that serve as barriers to opportunity for vulnerable populations in Los Angeles County.



OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN DATA EFFORTS

Panelists also shared current efforts in Los Angeles County to strengthen data partnerships to help support families and children. Members of the panel posited that the prevention of child maltreatment prevents other adverse outcomes over the course of a child's life. As such, Los Angeles County released a comprehensive plan in 2017 – *Paving the Road to Safety for Our Children: A Prevention Plan for Los Angeles County* – that utilizes six main strategies to engage the community in prevention efforts to strengthen families and reduce the need for intervention from Child Protective Services. These six strategies include:

- Network the Networks – developing recommendations for weaving together relevant prevention networks across the county
- Expanding prevention and after care networks
- Creating universal home visiting programs
- Improving access to early childhood education
- Monitoring community wellbeing
- Develop prevention measures using data

Panelists expanded on the topic of home visitation by discussing how the county is using data to expand home visitation. To assist with the expansion and implementation of home visitation services in Los Angeles County, the Children's Data Network leveraged data to conduct a landscape analysis of all evidence-based home visiting programs currently operating in the county. Using linked data – such as birth and child protection records – the Children's Data Network examined potential cut-points for tiered services, estimated the number of slots needed per tier, created maps of potential demand for each tier, and generated baseline data that could be used for evaluation purposes.

The panel's discussion also touched on the utilization of birth records to help communities more efficiently and equitably allocate resources. The California Strong Start Index was created to help fill the public data gap present in many communities across the state. The Strong Start Index uses indicators that already exist for children and families to summarize the conditions into which children are born. The index is made up of 12 variables that fall into four domains: family, service, health, and financial. A birth asset score is calculated by simply counting the number of assets present. The panel posited that monitoring the distribution of assets among newborns in different communities can help ensure investments are made in both an intentional and equitable manner.