

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Legal Council Awarded Innovation Grant from Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities

Grant to fund new approaches to break down barriers to Early Intervention among lead-exposed children

Chicago, IL—Legal Council for Health Justice was awarded one of seven Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities (ICDD) innovation grants to fund a pilot program dedicated to breaking systemic barriers to Early Intervention (EI) services among lead-exposed children, ages 0-3. If successful, Illinois will be the first state in the nation to launch a comprehensive system of eligibility and access to these developmental services and supports for young children exposed to toxic levels of lead in places where they live, learn, play, and pray.

Lead-exposed infants and toddlers are at risk of lifelong developmental disability and delay, but may not manifest signs until it is too late. “For children who have been poisoned by lead there can be lifelong developmental consequences including lower IQ, decreased academic achievement, and an increased incident of behavioral disorders. However, while the brain of a young child can be more vulnerable to insult, it is also more capable of overcoming injury. Early Intervention (EI) is designed to take advantage of a time in life when the brain is the most plastic and amenable to change,” said Dr. Nicole Hamp of the University of Chicago Comer Children’s Hospital.

EI helps young children who are experiencing or are at risk of developmental disability and delay at a time when their brains have a greater capacity to grow, change, and heal. Barriers to EI include access to and eligibility for services.

The pilot will work with medical and EI providers and families to develop best practices for training, educating and serving children who have been lead-exposed. Two of the state’s 25 Child and Family Connections (CFC) offices—the agencies who coordinate Early Intervention services—will serve as pilot sites.

“We are thankful to ICDD for this opportunity to expand our work on Early Intervention and lead exposure. With this pilot, we can help providers feel more equipped to serve children exposed to lead, but who might not show a delay early on and set the stage for statewide

adoption of what will be a new EI automatic eligibility medical condition,” said Amy Zimmerman, managing attorney and program director at Legal Council for Health Justice.

Dr. Michele McCay, currently a professor of public health at DePaul University, was hired as the project manager for the pilot program.

“By providing resources to families to enhance early childhood learning, EI gives children who have been lead poisoned a chance to overcome possible future deficits before they are evident,” said McCay.

This effort began through an Illinois Interagency Council on Early Intervention workgroup, co-chaired by Professor Anita Weinberg, Director Loyola ChildLaw Policy Institute and Ms. Zimmerman, and has been adopted by the Illinois Governor’s Cabinet on Children and Youth.

ICDD aims to help lead change in Illinois so all people with intellectual/developmental disabilities exercise their right to equal opportunity and freedom.

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Legal Council for Health Justice uses the power of the law to secure dignity, opportunity, and well-being for people facing illness and disability. Our evidence-based medical-legal partnership programs work uniquely with health, hospital, and social service systems to train and support the care provider network, provide direct representation to referred patients, and conduct systemic advocacy to promote health equity among populations with chronic, disabling, and stigmatizing health and social conditions.

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