

# Co-Creating Equitable Partnerships Between Families and Child Health Care Providers

**P**ediatric practices should seek to engage families as a powerful resource for achieving child health and life-long well-being. Children have a better chance of receiving the care they need when their caregivers feel comfortable asking questions of their child's health care team, providing information to guide the care plan, and sharing areas of struggle or need. [Family-centered care](#) that promotes joint decision-making between the family and health care provider has become widely accepted in the pediatric field, but it is not always embedded into clinical practice. By engaging family members as equal members of the care team, health care providers can build on a family's strengths and co-create care plans that are more likely to achieve better outcomes.



This implementation fact sheet offers [strategies](#) that pediatric practices can use in meaningfully engaging patients and families to inform both care delivery as well as broader health care system improvements.

## Opportunities to Co-Create Equitable Partnerships in Pediatric Care

Below are strategies and resource links, including tools, trainings, and articles, that child health care teams can use to foster the co-creation of equitable partnerships between patients, families, and providers during and outside patient visits.

### Create Partnership Opportunities During Provider Visits

- ✓ **Create a welcoming environment within the office**, beginning at the sign-in process, by encouraging all staff to take time to talk and relate personally to families, including [fathers](#) who are often left out of conversations and decision-making about their child's health.
- ✓ **Foster a collaborative and family-centered environment** that views the family as the expert on their child's personality, behaviors, needs, and interests. The care team can foster [family-centered](#) approaches and partner with the family in [decision-making](#) at the level the family chooses regarding care delivery for their child.

#### Learn More at the Child Health Transformation Resource Center

This fact sheet is a product of *Accelerating Child Health Transformation*, a national initiative that seeks to accelerate the adoption of key elements necessary to advance anti-racist, family-centered, holistic pediatric practice, made possible by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and led by the Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS). For more information, visit CHCS' *Child Health Transformation Resource Center* at [www.chcs.org/child-health-transformation-resource-center](http://www.chcs.org/child-health-transformation-resource-center).

- ✓ **Incorporate screening practices for the whole family as appropriate** using various [screening options](#), including the [Bright Futures Pediatric Intake Form](#), [PRAPARE](#), and the [Resilience Questionnaire](#), to help identify family strengths in addition to health-related social needs. Other tools, like the [Well-Visit Planner](#), can engage families prior to well-child visits and support them in asking questions about family priorities and their child’s development.
- ✓ **Share information that is timely, complete, and unbiased**, and uses [plain language](#) that is [health-literacy friendly](#) and free of medical jargon. Information should be affirming and useful, and provide clear guidance to help families engage with provider teams and participate in care and decision-making.
- ✓ **Capture families’ hopes and expectations for their child**, as provided during or after the visit, in electronic medical records or other online tools, like the [Cycle of Engagement](#), for follow up at subsequent visits.
- ✓ **Provide tailored and timely anticipatory guidance materials to support caregivers’ knowledge** about social and emotional development, important safety topics, the caregiver-child relationship, caregiver mental health and positive coping strategies, and relevant community services.
- ✓ **Build caregivers’ knowledge, confidence, and engagement** through [strengths-based approaches](#) and observations while reading, playing, and interacting with the child during visits; model activities that promote [social and emotional development](#) and [early relational health](#); co-create goals that are reflected on at subsequent visits; and provide positive affirmations in interactions with families, including fathers.

### A Critical Role for Medicaid

Families and individuals served by Medicaid should be recognized as the experts on their lives and serve as equal partners when addressing the issues they face when navigating health care systems. State Medicaid programs can engage Medicaid beneficiaries to get input and feedback on program and policy decisions impacting Medicaid eligibility, coverage, cost, care access, care delivery, and system design. This is especially needed to better serve families facing complex social needs, families with children and youth with special health care needs, and families of color impacted by structural racism.

A recently [proposed Medicaid rule](#) would require state Medicaid agencies to establish and operate Medicaid beneficiary advisory groups — with crossover membership in state Medicaid advisory committees, which include diverse stakeholder representatives — to reflect the diversity and include the input of Medicaid populations. Co-creating program and policy design with those with first-hand knowledge of health care system issues would improve health equity and health outcomes for Medicaid fee-for-service and managed care delivery systems.

## Strengthen and Assess Policies and Programs

- ✓ **Ensure flexibility in organizational policies, procedures, and provider practices to support children and families’ unique needs**, beliefs, and cultural values. This can include increasing hours beyond the traditional weekday 9 am to 5 pm time frame, recognizing that working parents often struggle to balance work and medical visits, particularly for children with special health care needs.

- ✓ **Incorporate peer-to-peer models**, such as [Parent to Parent](#), a national network that seeks to empower families of children with special health care needs by pairing an experienced family with the family of a newly diagnosed child to share resources and provide support as they navigate the medical system.
- ✓ **Assess patient and family engagement efforts** to measure the effectiveness of engagement activities and impacts on [care delivery](#) and [systems change](#). Family engagement assessment tools are available from various organizations including [Family Voices](#), [Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care](#), and [National Institute for Children’s Health Quality](#).
- ✓ **Connect families to community supports**, such as play groups, library time, [fatherhood initiatives](#), and local parks, to foster much-needed support systems. Providers can also connect families to [home visiting models](#) most appropriate for them.

## Create New Ways to Engage Family Members

- ✓ **Design family and youth engagement practices alongside family representatives**, for example, through family advisory councils (using tools from the [Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care](#), [National Institute for Health Quality](#), [American Hospital Association](#), [American Medical Association](#), [National Partnership for Women and Families](#), or [others](#)), [youth advisory boards](#), or participation on other boards. These models encourage effective [integration of family voices](#) into the clinic setting and solicit feedback regarding practice culture change, how patients and families are treated, connections to community resources, and the selection of [patient-centered measures](#), among other things.
- ✓ **Solicit feedback and input from families** through a [variety of mechanisms](#), such as suggestion boxes, town halls, surveys, listening sessions, focus groups, community nights, and family events.
- ✓ **Create a funded position for people with lived expertise**, such as a [patient advocate](#) or a [patient advisor](#), who can provide ongoing input on more effective and sustainable transformation efforts.

## Support Families in Providing Feedback

- ✓ **Compensate patients and families adequately for their lived expertise** and reimburse them for expenses including travel, parking, food, and child care when they provide [guidance, input, or feedback](#).
- ✓ **Encourage families to get involved in quality improvement efforts and influencing broader systems change** through programs like [Family Voices](#), a national organization that supports caregivers of children and youth with special health care needs by empowering them to advocate for [better health care services and policies](#) for those children and their families.



### ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH CARE STRATEGIES

The Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) is a policy design and implementation partner devoted to improving outcomes for people enrolled in Medicaid. We support partners across sectors and disciplines to make more effective, efficient, and equitable care possible for millions of people across the nation. For more information, visit [www.chcs.org](http://www.chcs.org).