OVERVIEW: The Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership is working closely with numerous public and private stakeholders on the Mental Health Consultation Initiative (MHC Initiative), a multi-year expansion initiative that advances the goal of a universal, effective, and sustainable infant/early childhood mental health consultation (I/ECMHC) model in Illinois, with an expanded qualified workforce. The MHC Initiative will strengthen the capacity of early childhood professionals, families, programs and systems to prevent, identify, treat and reduce the impact of mental health problems among infants and young children.

MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION INITIATIVE PHASES:
The work of the MHC Initiative has been done in three distinct phases.

PHASE I: The planning phase of the MHC Initiative began in September 2015.

Activities completed in Phase I included:

- Conducting a scan of the current I/ECMHC workforce and assess the readiness of the workforce across systems to provide increased I/ECMHC services.
- Developing a leadership team of public and private partners to provide strategic oversight and guidance, as well as to explore opportunities to collaborate and align resources that could support I/ECMHC in their systems.
- Developing a shared vision and articulation of an I/ECMHC model that would be flexible enough to work in multiple systems; better support caregivers, providers, pregnant women, young children and families; and, ultimately lead to better outcomes for young children, families and the programs serving them.
- Developing a theory of change for how to develop a sustainable, cross sector, public/private partnership to expand access to MHC in Illinois.

PHASE II: In May of 2016, work began on Phase II of the MHC Initiative, which focused on the planning for a pilot and evaluation process to be implemented during Phase III of the Initiative. Activities for Phase II included:

- Finalizing of an I/ECMHC Model, which includes agreed-upon core competencies for the I/ECMHC workforce.
- Creating of a workforce development plan that will support the current I/ECMHC workforce as well as create pathways for expansion of a diverse, qualified workforce.
- Conducting a process evaluation with Pratt Richards Group.
- Creating and finalizing a pilot evaluation design.
- Developing and finalizing the pilot, to be implemented during Phase III of the MHC Initiative.
PHASE III: will begin October 2017, ending in early 2020. During Phase III, the Illinois I/ECMHC model will be piloted and evaluated in different communities across different child and family-serving systems. Ultimately this initiative seeks to build a coordinated, statewide, cross-systems network of mental health consultants that is well supported by training, reflective practice, and appropriate funding in order to deliver high quality services to programs to better serve pregnant women, young children and families. We will continue the work as a public/private partnership with the private sector agreeing to front-end support that builds the state’s core capacity to identify, train and support a high quality I/ECMHC workforce and the state agreeing to sustain and expand access to higher quality I/ECMHC and support for the workforce over time.

HOW DID WE GET HERE:
In 2014, the Irving Harris Foundation recognized the importance of infant and early childhood mental health (I/ECMH) and coordinated a statewide planning process to build on the current strengths and close gaps in the I/ECMH system. This process worked with state leaders to develop the Illinois Action Plan to Integrate Early Childhood Mental Health into Child and Family Serving Systems, Prenatal to Age 5 (Action Plan). Throughout the development of the Action Plan, there was strong consensus among stakeholders that I/ECMHC is an effective and necessary strategy to improve mental health outcomes for young children and families. The Harris Foundation determined the timing was right to design a best-practice I/ECMHC model and workforce development plan that allows for adaptation and sustainability across all early childhood serving systems and identified ICMHP as a natural leader to spearhead the MHC Initiative.