

Critical Periods in Development – Position Statement

Introduction and Background

Caring for Colorado has supported communities in achieving health for nearly 20 years. Over this time, we have deepened our knowledge of health equity and child development and evolved our focus so that the well-being of children and youth is central to our organizational practice. We understand child and youth development as critical stages of pronounced growth that form the lifelong foundation for learning, behavior and well-being. We are guided by the following:

- Brain development is most rapid in the first three years of life. Young children who experience frequent, prolonged adversity in the absence of protective factors can develop a toxic stress response that can have significant, lasting effects on development.
- Adolescence is a prolonged period of concentrated brain growth in which youth explore relationships with peers and adults, increase in cognitive complexity and develop identity. The absence of supportive relationships and the presence of extreme stress can affect the healthy adolescent transition to adulthood.
- The most important factor in promoting positive well-being in children and youth is having safe, stable and nurturing relationships with caregivers. This includes both primary caregivers and caregivers in systems who frequently interact with children and their families.
- Prevention and early intervention are effective for children living in circumstances that put them at risk, such as living in poverty or unstable environments.
- Access to health care, high quality early care and education, high quality K-12 education, behavioral health treatment, family support services, safe communities and economic stability, among other factors, can buffer against stress and positively impact families.
- Persistent inequities exist in most health outcomes by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geography, and other important demographic characteristics. Factors that drive these inequities are complex, interconnected, and systemic.
- Practice, policy, and systems-level changes informed by advances in knowledge of child development can reduce adverse experiences, narrow health disparities and promote health equity.

Alignment with Caring for Colorado Foundation's Purpose, Values and/or Focus Areas

Caring for Colorado's vision is that Colorado's children and families are happy, healthy and thriving. Our purpose is to create equity in health, well-being and opportunity for Colorado's children and families. We focus our resources on prevention, promotion and intervention for children, adolescents and families during critical periods to support optimal development.

Caring for Colorado Foundation's Position

Caring for Colorado values all efforts that work to address health across the lifespan. We prioritize promotion, prevention and intervention for children, youth and their caregiving communities during critical periods of development because we believe it is fundamental to achieving equity in health. Our funding is explicitly directed towards opportunities that align with our strategies and deeply center children, families and equity.

Potential Use of this Statement

The foundation will recognize this position in public comments and factor this position into decisions to join partnerships and/or collective actions, when weighing in on public policy, when making investment decisions and when developing strategies.

References

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