
4-YEAR PRIORITY GROUPS FOR THE OEC

OEC GUIDING PRINCIPLE: "PRIORITIZE CHILDREN FACING BARRIERS, RISKS, SETBACKS OR CHALLENGES TO THEIR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT."

Over the coming four years, the OEC will focus our attention and resources to better serve families who face circumstances that increase their risk of poor outcomes. Research shows¹ that certain family circumstances contribute to higher risks for poor outcomes regarding:

- child development
- school success
- child abuse and neglect
- long-term health into adulthood

To ensure state funds have the biggest impact on child and family outcomes, the OEC should dedicate its energy, resources and expertise to meet the needs of families in these challenging circumstances. This will require making changes regarding outreach, eligibility, training and other policy changes.

PRIMARY CIRCUMSTANCES

OEC programs should prioritize access, outreach and services for families and children in the circumstances listed below. Families in these circumstances should be deemed eligible for OEC programs and services without having to meet other program eligibility criteria (as allowed within Federal and legislative restrictions). Further, the OEC should work to expand access, awareness and sensitivity to the needs of families in these circumstances and drive additional policy changes (administrative process, data, documentation, etc.) to eliminate barriers for these families.

- **Deep Poverty:** Families with incomes below 100%¹ of Federal Poverty Level or receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- **Unstable Housing:** Homeless families and families with unstable housing
- **Violence, Abuse or Neglect:** Children in families with domestic violence or who are involved in the child welfare system (in foster care, with substantiated abuse or neglect, families at-risk of losing custody of their children or at a high risk for abuse and neglect)
- **Developmental Delays:** Children with significant developmental delays or with diagnosed medical conditions with a high probability of significant delay (children enrolled in Birth to Three program, with an IFSP or an IEP or a diagnosed medical condition that leads to a developmental delay)
- **Parental Circumstances:** Children of parents who are teens, incarcerated, migrant laborers, refugees or in treatment for substance abuse

¹ Draft Federal Poverty Level.

SECONDARY CIRCUMSTANCES

A family facing multiple challenging circumstances is at higher risk for poor outcomes. Children and families in the following circumstances should benefit from increased eligibility, prioritization and outreach. (Note: For eligibility, consider the Illinois sample eligibility form that describes a point-based eligibility score based on multiple weighted circumstances.)

- **Low income:** Families earning different percentages of the Federal Poverty Level prioritized differently (including 100%, 200%, 258% of Federal Poverty Level and 75% State Median Income)
- **Communities of Concentrated Poverty:** Families living in communities of concentrated poverty
- **Child Conditions:** Children with disabling conditions who do not qualify for IDEA services, with special medical needs, with significant mental health or behavioral problems, or a mild developmental delay
- **Parent Circumstances:** Parents with depression or mental illness, with a history of substance abuse, with no high school diploma, with special needs (cognitive limitations), with history of psychiatric care or mental health problems, who didn't receive adequate prenatal care, who were maltreated as children, who have a large number of children, who are isolated, who are single parents, who have transient non-biological caregivers in their home², who were neglected or abused as a child, who are in the active military or who do not speak English

NEXT STEPS

To better serve families, the OEC will need to undertake a series of systems changes over the next four years. We will need to build capacity to serve families and children in the above circumstances well. This will include work to develop and strengthen key partnerships, examine and gather data, finalize definitions, examine and change policies and practices, review funding levels and provide training and support to providers.

Next steps include:

- 1) Finalize definitions and gather data on priority groups through the unmet needs study
- 2) Plan for training, professional development and technical assistance strategies
- 3) Begin to develop partnerships and policy changes through:
 - a. the Early Childhood Cabinet subcommittee, Families with Young Children Without Homes
 - b. CCDF plan rewriting Care 4 Kids rules and investments
 - c. Other related partnerships and policy changes
- 4) Embed categorical groups into upcoming RFPs, contracts, grants, awards, etc.

ⁱ A literature review of leading risk factor policy research was conducted to capture the most common, evidence-based early childhood risk factors for poor outcomes in school success, child abuse and neglect, child development and long-term health. This review combined reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Child Welfare Information Gateway, National Center on Child Poverty, Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, and Adverse Childhood Experiences literature. Additionally, a survey was administered to OEC leadership to capture recommendations for creating priority groups at the OEC for eligibility, outreach and policy changes. For details, please contact Mary Farnsworth at mary.farnsworth@ct.gov.

² Applies to home visiting eligibility only