

Governor Dave Heineman  
Office of the Governor

Dear Governor Dave Heineman:

As a resident of Nebraska, I am writing to express a need for renewed focus on children's behavioral health, as it is the foundation on which children build their future lives. It is up to policy makers, in concert with parents and others who can help influence the outcome, to ensure that children and youth have every opportunity to achieve the mental health status that will enable them to be successful, contributing members of their families, communities, and nation. We, as community members, parents, and stakeholders, are grateful for your leadership and commitment to children and families across the state, and respectfully recommend further consideration of our following recommendations: Support efforts to communicate the importance and positive outcomes with prevention, including the economic and social benefits of investing in prevention.

- 1) Equip parents, caregivers, community leaders and local educators with the latest knowledge and research regarding strength based parenting and child resilience. In doing this we will be able to easily make decisions about the most appropriate interventions.
- 2) Where possible, build on existing programs to maximize available knowledge and resources.
- 3) Encourage the development of the State and local infrastructure necessary to adopt, adapt, implement, evaluate, improve, and sustain evidence-based practices.
- 4) Encourage a coordinated assessment and accountability system for promotion, prevention, and treatment in children's mental health.
- 5) Examine more systematic strategies to increase and coordinate funding for prevention efforts across Federal and/or State agencies.
- 6) Build a workforce capable of implementing age- and culturally appropriate evidence-based practices effectively.
- 7) Include families in a decision-making role from the outset; that is, in the planning, adaptation, implementation, and evaluation, and sustaining of programs for their children and their communities.

Approximately 90,000 children are affected by mental health challenges in Nebraska. Communities across the state have made this issue a priority by recognizing Children's Mental Health Awareness. Local and statewide Family-Run Organizations are joining forces with their community coalitions to increase awareness and provide educational opportunities this month by joining more than 1,000 communities across the country in celebrating the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Children's Mental Health Awareness. The mission is to raise awareness about the importance of positive mental health from birth.

Nebraska's specific awareness campaign (*Expanding Perceptions*) focuses on the unique needs of young adults, ages 16-25, with behavioral health challenges. It highlights the value of peer support in helping young adults build resilience in the four critical life domains: housing; education; employment; and health care access. Only through the expansion of community perceptions, as it pertains to behavioral health, can we begin to affect necessary shifts in this cultural context. It begins with awareness!

Thank you for continued support and attention to the issues surrounding our children and youth with behavioral health challenges. Due to access to Family-Run Organizations across the state, families have a unified voice and receive education, supports and resources that only other family members can provide through their own personal experiences and specialized advocacy training.

Sincerely,

Print your Name and Community or Region here: