

# Supporting Young Children with Special Health Care Needs

*Washington families want inclusive social opportunities and increased access to care for children ages 0-5 with special health care needs (CSHCN)*

## KEY POINTS

- Families need help finding and accessing timely health care.
- Opportunities for children with special health care needs to develop social skills with their peers.
- Discussions about children's care should include their fathers.
- The Washington State Department of Health should focus on improving family mental health.



In November 2021, the WA State Department of Health (DOH) held a listening session for families of young children 0-5 years of age with special health care needs. The families called for a supportive and inclusive health system to meet their children's needs.

## CSHCN HAVE SIGNIFICANT UNMET NEEDS IN THEIR COMMUNITY

Children with special health care needs lack ways to play and practice social skills. Families want more chances for their children to interact with other kids. Finding and coordinating care for their children is also difficult for families. It is particularly challenging for kids who require medications or extra care.

## CHALLENGES USING EXISTING HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Families hope for more access to pediatric health care. They have barriers to accessing timely care services for their children. These barriers include:

- Long waitlists for specialized pediatric care.
- There are few pathways for providers to communicate with each other about health needs of CSHCN.
- Providers don't have enough time to create meaningful connections with families.
- Not enough providers do home visits.

## BARRIERS TO LEARNING ABOUT AND ACCESSING NEW SERVICES

- It's common for children with special health care needs to receive misdiagnoses.
- Health care professionals provide differing or out-of-date information.
- Families don't get enough information and often experience bias.



Learn more at  
[DOH.WA.GOV/CYSHCN](https://DOH.WA.GOV/CYSHCN)

## FOCUS ON FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH

It is critical for DOH and other system partners to provide resources that help improve the mental health of parents. Mental health affects the well-being of parents and their ability to care for the needs of their children.

## INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

Fathers are less likely to receive health-related communication about their children, even if they are the point of contact or present at health appointments. It is vital to make sure that fathers are engaged in health appointments and related decisions.

## POSITIVE EXPERIENCES FOR FAMILIES

- Parent to Parent and other family-led supports
- Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA)
- Head Start
- Seattle Children's Hospital
- Seattle University's Community Engagement Program

## WAYS DOH AND PARTNERS CAN SUPPORT FAMILY NEEDS

- Increase in-person services.
- Mental health support for parents, including family therapy for anxiety and depression.
- Easier and more reliable transportation options.
- Faster gas reimbursement.
- Advocacy for families who don't read or speak English.
- protocols for evaluation and diagnosis practices.
- More guidance for families when navigating their child's health care process.



*Questions, comments, concerns?*  
Contact [CYSHCN@doh.wa.gov](mailto:CYSHCN@doh.wa.gov)



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## **Listening session question:**

What experiences have you had that have **not** felt family centered?

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**Providers not communicating with father (even though he was the stay-at-home parent); providers would always reach out to mom instead, even if she wasn't the person at the child's appointment.**

– Parent quote from listening session

