New Directions In Child Abuse and Neglect Research
2013: Child Abuse and Neglect is a Serious Public Health Problem

- Past 20 years: 3-fold increase in scientific publications -> new science of child abuse & neglect

- Large problem: 6 million children reported to child protective services, 75% neglected, most under age 5

- Effects of child abuse & neglect not limited to childhood, cascading throughout life, significant consequences for victims, families, & society

- Effects of child abuse & neglect: all aspects of human functioning, yearly cost to society: $80.3 billion

- Addressing this public health problem requires an immediate, coordinated response with high-level federal support
Research Landscape

- Significant progress in child abuse and neglect research; gaps remain

- Many challenges identified in the 1993 report *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect* remain today

- For example, research in the area of child abuse and neglect continues to be disjointed and fragmented across multiple fields of inquiry

- Further, the field continues to be set apart from mainstream studies of child and adolescent health and development

- Improved infrastructure, support, and coordination needed for research field to be efficient, productive scientific enterprise
Consensus Study: New Directions in Child Abuse and Neglect Research

The Committee was tasked to:

- **Build** on the review of literature and findings from the evaluation of research on child abuse and neglect;

- **Identify** research that provides knowledge relevant to the programmatic, research, and policy fields; and

- **Recommend** research priorities for the next decade, including new areas of research that should be funded by public and private agencies and suggestions regarding fields that are no longer a priority for funding.
Expert Committee

Anne Petersen, PhD (Chair) – University of Michigan
Lucy Berliner, MSW – University of Washington
Linda Burton, PhD – Duke University
Phaedra Corso, PhD – University of Georgia
Deborah Daro, PhD – Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago
Howard Davidson, JD – American Bar Association
Angela Diaz, MD, MPH – Mount Sinai School of Medicine
Mary Dozier, PhD – University of Delaware
Fernando Guerra, MD, MPH – University of Texas
Carol Hafford, PhD – NORC at the University of Chicago
Charles Nelson, PhD – Harvard University
Ellen Pinderhughes, PhD – Tufts University
Frank Putnam Jr., MD – Cincinatti Children’s Hospital Medical Center
Desmond Runyan, DrPH, MD, MPH – Kempe Center, University of Colorado
Cathy Spatz Widom, PhD – John Jay College
Joan Levy Zlotnik, PhD, ACSW – National Association of Social Workers
Scope and Recognition of Child Abuse and Neglect: Report Findings

NCANDS data reported 3.4 million child abuse and neglect referrals in 2011

Incidence trends since 1993: Sexual and physical abuse appear to have declined, while neglect statistics vary significantly across states
Scope and Recognition of Child Abuse and Neglect: Research Priorities

Develop a better understanding of trends in the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Why are some forms of abuse going down, whereas neglect may not be?
Causality: Report Findings

- Risk and protective factors
- Causal mechanisms not understood well
- Parental substance abuse, depression, a history of child abuse and neglect strongest evidentiary support as risk factors
Causality: Research Priorities

- High-quality qualitative and quantitative studies
- High-quality longitudinal studies
- Innovative experimental studies that will allow tests of causality
- Ecological model:
  - Individual, community, family, cultural factors
Consequences: Report Findings

- Child abuse and neglect affect all aspects of development:
  - Brain development
  - Cognitive development
  - Social development

- Cascading effects over time:
  - Infancy
    - Attachment and self-regulation
  - Middle childhood
    - Internalizing and externalizing problems
  - Adulthood
    - Arrests, substance use, depression, anxiety
Consequences: Report Findings (cont.)

- But, individual differences
  - Some children fare better than others

- Resilience
  - Less chronicity, less severity
  - Support figure
  - Gene x Environment interaction
Consequences: Research Priorities

- Enhance understanding of separate and synergistic consequences of abuse and neglect
- Enhance understanding of mechanisms
- Abuse and neglect have pernicious effects but research demonstrates that change is possible
Interventions and Service Delivery Systems: Report Findings

Significant advances in the development of effective programs to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect

**Prevention:** successful and promising programs
- Early home visiting programs
- Public awareness campaigns
- Parenting education programs
- Professional practice reforms (e.g., screening)

**Treatment:** Successful and promising programs
- Trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy
- Parent management training programs applied to child abuse and neglect
Interventions and Service Delivery Systems: Research Priorities

- Dissemination and Implementation
  - Implementing in communities with fidelity
  - Taking interventions to scale
  - Sustaining over time

- Infrastructure Development
  - Strengthening the workforce
  - Crafting data management systems to support CQI
  - Fostering system integration and collective impact
Child Welfare System: Report Findings

Outcomes of interest:
- Safety
- Permanency
- Well-Being

Major categories of services
- Child protection investigation
- Family-centered services and supports
- Foster care
- Adoption

Examples of recent system-level reforms
- Differential response
- Privatization
- Parent and family engagement
- Practice models
Child Welfare System: Report Findings

- Coordination with other systems is critical to child welfare system performance and outcomes for children

- Improved empirical data provides a greater understanding of the experience of children involved with child welfare

- Child welfare systems must have capacity to implement service improvements

- Multidisciplinary and multi-method experience and expertise is essential
Child Welfare System: Research Priorities

- Support and undertake rigorous evaluations of effective service models
- Research highly effective delivery systems
- Study how to implement evidence-based practices in complex system
Research Challenges and Infrastructure: Report Findings

Research Challenges

- Complexity of child abuse and neglect research.
- Variability in definitions and measurement of child abuse and neglect
- Coexisting and confounding risk and protective factors
- Lack of high-level coordination for research support
Research Challenges and Infrastructure: Research Priorities

- Dedicated, well-trained, multidisciplinary cadre of researchers using multiple methods
- High-quality public health surveillance system
- High-level federal coordination of child abuse and neglect research efforts
- Sustained funding for rigorous research endeavors
- Interdisciplinary research centers
- Research attentive to diverse and underserved populations
Policy: Report Findings

Federal laws exist to set national standards for confronting child abuse and neglect issues, but many further standards are derived from state laws.

Numerous changes have been made to federal and state laws and policies designed to impact the incidence, reporting, and negative health and economic consequences of child abuse and neglect.

Few research efforts have evaluated the impact of changes to laws and policies and this remains a ripe area for future endeavors.
Research Priorities: Policy

- Evaluate legislative changes and policies at all levels
- Increase funding for policy implementation research and analysis
- Examples of research questions to consider:
  - Is there a relationship between differing state abuse & neglect definitions & child safety? Or well-being?
  - Are training programs for mandated reporters effective?
  - What is the effect of different evidence standards on case substantiation & child welfare intervention?
  - What is the incidence of CAN on Indian Lands?
  - What is the impact of safe haven laws on rates of infant abandonment?
  - How effective are CFRTs in changing child welfare policies & preventing deaths?
Cross-cutting Guiding Principles for Recommendation Implementation

- Move beyond “social address” variables to disentangle cultural processes, social stratification influences, ecological variations, immigrant/acculturation status

- Apply multidisciplinary, multimethod, and multisector approaches

- Leverage and build upon existing knowledge base, including large studies, research definitions, designs, and other opportunities
Report Recommendation Outline

• Develop a National Process for Coordinating & Prioritizing Investment in Child Abuse & Neglect Research (1-3)
  - Create a National Agenda for Research
  - Develop & Implement a National Plan for Sustaining Research

• Create Research Infrastructure to Build & Sustain a Field of Child Abuse & Neglect Research (4-7)
  - National CAN Surveillance
  - Cadre of Researchers
  - Multidisciplinary CAN Research Centers
  - NIH Study Section on Child Maltreatment, Trauma, & Violence

• Evaluation of Child Abuse & Neglect Laws & Policies (8-9)
## Research Agenda and Implementation Plan

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<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Supporting Evidence</th>
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| Coordinated research agenda                     | • All entities that support maltreatment research | • Gaps in research remain  
• Findings/Conclusions throughout the report suggest areas of need |
| National Strategic Plan                          | • FEDIAWG  
• Assistant Sec. of ACF | • High-level, national coordination for research in this field is lacking          |
| Accountability for Implementation of Strategic Plan | • FEDIAWG  
• Assistant Sec. of ACF | • Fragmented nature of research funding  
• Maltreatment research encompasses a wide range of disciplines and research problems  
• Need for accountability for progress in the field as a whole |
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<tr>
<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>National Surveillance System</td>
<td>• CDC</td>
<td>• A coordinated national public health approach to child abuse and neglect will require a high-quality, population-based surveillance system</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• FEDIAWG</td>
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<td>• The infrastructure needed to support such a system for maltreatment is currently lacking</td>
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<td>• Current surveillance efforts rely heavily on data reported to child welfare agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Development of Child</td>
<td>• All entities that support</td>
<td>• Development of a robust workforce is an essential infrastructure component</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abuse and Neglect Researchers</td>
<td>maltreatment research</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Overall lack of educational infrastructure to create and capitalize on student interest in the field</td>
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<td>• Need for investment in child welfare research capacity</td>
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<td>• Need for interdisciplinary training</td>
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## Research Infrastructure (cont.)

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| Multidisciplinary Research Centers | • All entities that support maltreatment research | • Maltreatment research encompasses a wide range of disciplines and research problems, necessitating interdisciplinary collaboration  
• Centers provide a platform supportive of interdisciplinary collaborations  
• Existing research collaboratives serve as a model for support of the multidisciplinary research necessary to advance the field  
• Centers can provide the means to support professional development |

| NIH Study Section               | • NIH                      | • A stable mechanism for evaluating and supporting new areas of investigator-initiated research is critically important for the development and progression of the field |
# Evaluation of Child Abuse and Neglect Laws and Policies

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<td>Mandated Support for Evaluation of Federal Laws</td>
<td>• Congress</td>
<td>• Numerous federal policy changes designed to impact maltreatment</td>
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<tr>
<td>relating to Child Abuse and Neglect</td>
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<td>• Little work has been done to evaluate the impact of these federal policy changes</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• An evidence base in this area will provide guidance to future policy and practice initiatives</td>
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<td>Mandated Support for Evaluation of State Laws</td>
<td>• State Legislatures</td>
<td>• Many maltreatment-related laws and policies are developed and carried out at the state level.</td>
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<tr>
<td>relating to Child Abuse and Neglect</td>
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<td>• Little research has been conducted on the impact of law and policy change at the state level.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Research opportunity lies in comparing the impact of differences between state policies</td>
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For more information and to download the report, please visit www.iom.edu/childmaltreatment