Illinois Preschool Vision Pilot
Strategic Plan

The Illinois Preschool Vision pilot was formed in the summer of 2010 with the coalescing of stakeholders meeting in Chicago and Springfield. The stakeholders decided that the first order of business was to develop an accurate picture of the public health infrastructure that currently exists in Illinois for preschool vision screenings, as well as the service gaps in the infrastructure that should be closed in the future. From there an ideal system would be envisioned and an implementation plan developed.

The Infrastructure Team was formed and met monthly from January 2011 to July 2011 to begin the process. To supplement the expertise and experience at the table, three statewide surveys of program administrators, screeners, and parents were conducted to help inform the process. From the gathered information and data the Team then created an “Ideal System” with three focused implementation strands – preschools (including Head Start, child care); parents / guardians; and pediatricians / medical homes.

Three additional strands have been added to this strategic plan to fully encompass the work of the pilot. The fourth strand addresses data tracking and sharing which is a theme that runs through each of the previous strands. The fifth strand concentrates on the challenge of referral and follow-up care. The final strand speaks to the need for moving from a pilot project to a long-range coalition committed to bringing the work to fruition.

The Infrastructure Team reports and ideal system plan were presented at two stakeholder meetings (Chicago and Springfield) for their feedback and guidance in creating this strategic plan. As the stakeholder groups reviewed the work to initiate the next phase of implementation, one key factor surfaced within every strand – communication. To improve vision screening practices and provide better outcomes for children’s vision and eye health, greater communication must weave through the entire system of service.
Implementation Strand 1: Public and Private Preschool Programs/Head Start/Licensed Child Care Centers

The Illinois Child Vision and Hearing Test Act (410 ILCS 205) currently mandates that all children aged 3 years or older enrolled in any public or private preschool school, Head Start program, or licensed day-care center must be provided an annual vision screening. The purpose of the vision screening is to identify those children who are at risk of vision impairment so that they may be referred for proper diagnosis and treatment. As per the Illinois mandate, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is responsible for training and certifying all vision and hearing screeners in the state. IDPH is also responsible for establishing the screening protocols and practices.

When the Infrastructure Team surveyed preschool administrators 313 responded, approximately 11% of the estimated 2950 programs in the state. Nearly 30% of the respondents had no awareness of the law mandating vision screenings. However, 32% did not conduct screenings and another 4.5% were unsure indicating awareness of the law did not assure compliance.

The Team also surveyed IDPH certified screeners. Of the approximately 3000 screeners, 964 responded to the survey. When best practice questions were asked, a consistent 75 to 80% of the screeners answered positively to expectations. That left a significant number of screeners providing inconsistent levels of service. Certainly there are many contributing factors to the variances but consistent support systems are not currently available to screeners to maintain quality vision screenings.

GOAL 1 - Strengthen the preschool vision screening process to:
- Increase accessibility to become screeners
- Increase availability of well-trained screeners
- Provide oversight and quality standards for screening

GOAL 2 - Develop a communications and training plan for licensed preschool providers through early childhood training programs, colleges and universities to:
- Provide information on children’s vision and eye health
- Impress the importance of vision screenings
- Increase awareness of vision screening mandate

GOAL 3 - Develop a peer-to-peer network for certified screeners to:
- Share best practices
- Reinforce training principles
- Encourage a standard of service
- Provide feedback loop for challenges
- Support re-certification process

GOAL 4 - Develop a plan for consistent communications between state agencies to:
- Increase knowledge of departmental requirements between the Illinois Department of Public Health Vision and Hearing Screening Program and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) – Daycare Licensing Program
- Build avenues of cooperation and inclusion of vision in statewide health initiatives
Implementation Strand 2: Parents / Guardians

A consistent message throughout the surveys of preschool administrators and vision screeners was lack of parental follow-up to referrals for care. A wide range of economic and social barriers contributed to this condition but also noted was parent’s mistrust of the screening process and the results. Anecdotally the Infrastructure Team noted that parents too often dismiss the seriousness of vision problems in young children because they are not in school yet and are not reading.

GOAL 5 - Develop a comprehensive communication plan for parents / guardians to:
- Create a social media network to share information regarding children’s vision.
- Establish a parent champion program for vision screenings at licensed preschool programs
- Build list of parental resources for follow-up care
- Increase public awareness of children’s vision issues

Implementation Strand 3: Pediatricians / Medical Home

For children not in licensed preschool programs, their best opportunity for a vision screening is through their pediatrician or medical home. Even if children are in licensed child care, the medical home is a primary avenue for communication about vision and eye health. Additionally, the stakeholder group is eager to support the improvement initiatives for vision screening of the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

GOAL 6 - Develop a communication plan for medical offices to:
- Promote vision screening as part of well child visits
- Engage pediatricians and medical staff in promoting vision health and safety to parents
- Provide regular messages to pediatricians about vision screenings and vision issues

Implementation Strand 4: Data Tracking and Sharing

At the end of each school year screening program must submit data to IDPH on the number of children screened, re-screened and prescribed glasses. If the screeners receive the requested feedback from parents, they also report follow-up and diagnosis. This data is then compiled into a statewide report. Other entities such as Head Start and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) have data collection systems but information is not shared across systems.

GOAL 7 - Develop data system strategy to:
- Assure inclusion of vision data in health tracking systems
- Increase coordination of data between systems
- Increase information exchange between providers, medical homes and parents
**Implementation Strand 5: Referral and Follow-up Care**

Once referred, parents too often do not seek professional diagnosis and treatment. Reasons vary but most predominant are financial and access barriers. Rural areas are further challenged by lack of eye care professionals in their communities. Specialists such as pediatric ophthalmologists are only available in major cities. Eye care professionals must be engaged to help find solutions to the service challenges.

**GOAL 8 - Develop a vision care system to:**
- Assure all children have access to professional vision diagnosis and treatment
- Identify and share resources for financial assistance

**Implementation Strand 6: Illinois Children’s Vision Coalition**

Currently in the third year of a three-year grant from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, the Illinois Preschool Vision Pilot has engaged a significant listing of stakeholders. The goals put forth in this strategic plan, however, cannot be accomplished in the remaining months of the pilot. A committed group is needed to carry the work forward to accomplish the goals presented.

**GOAL 9 - Establish the Illinois Children’s Vision Coalition to:**
- Achieve the goals of the pilot project
- Provide ongoing forum to address children’s vision issues
- Provide a communication link between government and community based agencies; eye care professionals; pediatricians and family practices; preschool programs and parents