

# Assembly Bill 340

## Mental Health Services for Low-Income Children

Assemblymember Dr. Joaquin Arambula

*As introduced February 7, 2017*

### ISSUE

AB 340 will expand California's infant and child early screening program to identify children who are victims of trauma, in order to provide them with the proper mental health care services.

### CURRENT LAW

The current Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) Program provides prevention, diagnostic and treatment services for low-income infants, children and adolescents under age 21, but does not include a screening for trauma. As a result of not including a screening for trauma, children with a critical need for mental health services who have experienced physically or emotionally harmful circumstances such as child abuse and neglect are not provided with the proper treatment in a timely manner.

### BACKGROUND

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has found that children who experience trauma are at higher risk for health and social problems, like mental health, asthma, diabetes and obesity, as well as learning difficulties. This research shows that negative childhood experiences such as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect, substance misuse within the household, incarcerated household member or household mental illness have a tremendous impact on the mental, behavioral and physical health. Research on this is referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which if not prevented or diagnosed and treated early on in a child's life, are linked to chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death. The chronic stress from ACEs childhood trauma can damage brain development for children and can result in future health diseases and violent behaviors in the child and can be passed from parent to child.

Proper detection for ACEs is needed through screening for trauma in children to prevent

future negative health and social consequences and help them reach their full potential.

Current Federal law under the Social Security Act defines Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) services as comprehensive preventative, diagnostic and treatment services for low-income children under 21. States are required to provide coverage of any services listed in federal law to children who require them.

In California, children enrolled in Medi-Cal who are eligible for EPSDT services receive benefits for periodic screenings to determine healthcare needs and then are provide treatment services as needed.

At a minimum, services that children must receive under the federal law include:

- A comprehensive health and developmental history (including assessment of both physical and mental health development)
- A comprehensive unclothed physical exam
- Appropriate immunizations
- Laboratory tests (including lead blood level assessment appropriate for age and risk factors)
- Health education (including anticipatory guidance).

### THIS BILL

AB 340 will require a screening for trauma to be adopted in order to assure that low-income children receive early detection and proper critical mental health care, therefore improving their quality of life. This distinction of including trauma in EPSDT will create a more efficient and effective delivery system of mental health services that is crucial for vulnerable populations to be properly served.

### SUPPORT

Californians for Safety & Justice (Sponsor)

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