Expanding Help Me Grow in Minnesota
An Update – February, 2019

Minnesota families need easier access to health, mental health, early care and education, county and tribal, and other services and resources that support health, development, and safety. Since 2012, the Minnesota Departments of Health, Education, and Human services have been working with early childhood partners around the state to expand Minnesota’s Help Me Grow system to address this need.

The goal is help families and referring providers more easily find and connect to a wide range of prenatal and early childhood (birth through 8 years) services that support healthy child development and family well-being, including basic needs.

Planning for better access to and coordination of services (2012-15)
Exploration of the national Help Me Grow model started with a statewide Summit of early childhood program partners, and meetings with pediatric health care providers. Partners agreed that Minnesota needs a more connected, coordinated, and family-friendly early childhood system.

The Minnesota Departments of Health (MDH), Human Services (DHS), and Education (MDE) worked with community leaders in four work groups to make recommendations for this system: the Health Care Provider Outreach, Community and Family Outreach, Centralized Access, and Data work groups. Meanwhile, two other meetings with tribal members were held to for input on whether this could support the strengths and needs of tribal communities, programs, and families.

A statewide HMG Leadership Team, which included both state agency and community partners, reviewed work group and tribal meeting recommendations and came to a final set of recommendations.

Exploring ways to fund expanded Help Me Grow (2015-17)
The partnering state agencies and staff remained committed to following the recommendations of statewide partners, after several unsuccessful efforts to get state legislative funding. They worked closely with existing resources and staff, and continued to move toward expanding Help Me Grow.

The three state agencies and Children’s Cabinet of the Governor’s Office agreed to focus short-term work to create a searchable, up-to-date, statewide resource database of prenatal and early childhood resources. MinnesotaHelp.info is an existing web-based resource database that is robust, cost-effective, secure, well-staffed, and already includes many of the needed services.

Implementing the online resource database, navigator, and referral form (2018-19)
A smaller workgroup has worked to update this resource database and create an online navigator that will help providers who work families to learn about and refer to existing local community resources. The online navigator will allow referring providers to search for local services by need (such as developmental supports, housing, or tribal services).

This online navigator has been mocked up and was shared in interviews and focus groups in November 2018 – January 2019 to get input from referring providers who work with families in health care, public
health, early care and education, and child welfare. This process focused on four communities around the state to help us learn from various providers who work in urban, rural, tribal, county, immigrant and refugee, and other settings and groups.

Input from focus groups will help refine the design of the online navigator in early 2019. Then it will be available for local communities and referring providers to test and use. An online referral form is also being developed and tested, to help referring providers link families directly to key public programs.

**Next steps: Engaging communities and families in planning**

Partners now must find a state-local infrastructure that works best to give providers and families *person-to-person* assistance (by phone, face-to-face, or online chat) to help navigate which services are most needed and how to best access them. This is especially for more complex child or family needs that cross many areas of service, such as health, education, mental health, and basic needs.

Follow-through on referrals is key, to make sure that families are able to connect and benefit from culturally relevant services. Expanded Help Me Grow will include tracking referral outcomes and family satisfaction, in order to improve child and family well-being. Gaps and barriers to services will also be tracked, to better identify statewide resource needs and provide data that is needed for planning.

Direct family and community input is needed for this work. Turning this input into reality needs to be well-funded and intentional, so that it responds to families’ strengths and needs, and works for families. State agencies continue to work with partners to submit grant applications and secure other ways of funding this ongoing work.

For more information, or to be a part of the ongoing work, please contact Jennifer.Moses@state.mn.us.

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Expanding Help Me Grow in Minnesota is an interagency effort with the Minnesota Departments of Education (MDE), Health (MDH), Human Services (DHS). For more information, contact Jennifer.Moses@state.mn.us or health.childteencheckups@state.mn.us.

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