



**JOINT LETTER FROM THE ILLINOIS CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP AND
THE ILLINOIS CHILDHOOD TRAUMA COALITION REGARDING COVID-19**

March 20, 2020

Dear ICMHP/ICTC Partners,

During this unprecedented health crisis, it is important that we work together to find a balanced approach to addressing the complex challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. As an example of the complex challenges, we know that trauma-informed responses start with providing safety and offering relational support. Yet now we are being told that safety requires social distancing from each other. We all want to do something to help and yet we are told the best thing to do is stay home. These are tough requirements to balance as we consider how best to help our vulnerable children and families.

We have two positive things to note. First, while children can become infected, thus far, according to the Centers for Disease Control, most children who are infected have generally presented with mild symptoms. While a small percentage of children, especially babies and preschoolers, can become seriously ill, researchers ["are actively trying to determine why so many children appear to emerge relatively unscathed by the new coronavirus."](#)

Second, state agencies are working together to make healthcare more accessible during the crisis while keeping our most vulnerable populations safe. On March 19th, the Governor's Office and the Illinois Departments of Human Services, Healthcare and Family Services, and Insurance hosted a webinar regarding changes in telehealth, SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid/CHIP programs. These include allowing for reimbursement (including insurance coverage) of remote services (including the use of telephone, skype, facetime, and Google Hangout, though not through public-facing websites), easier access to food (modifying some SNAP and WIC requirements), expediting access to Medicaid/CHIP, and expediting hardship payments to providers. Many of these changes, particularly those around telehealth, were declared in an [executive order](#) signed by Governor Pritzker that same day. For full details, see information available through the [State of Illinois COVID-19](#) and [news](#) webpages.

Clearly, not all the news is positive. ICMHP and ICTC notes how the virus is having a direct, negative effect on children, including school, institutionalized, and homeless/runaway/trafficked youth. All school children are shut out of their schools, which affects not only their academic learning but also their social and emotional learning. As always, the negative effect is greater on children from communities with fewer resources, who have less access to virtual learning and whose basic health and nutrition is affected by the lack of access to the school lunch programs. Of even greater concern are the needs of children who are institutionalized or homeless.

While most school children can be home, children living in group homes, residential treatment centers, or juvenile justice facilities are at greater risk of exposure to the virus and, in addition, have lost access to family visitors. Consider the plight of a youth in a juvenile detention center. This youth has been accused of a crime but is still awaiting trial. The youth can only be released by a judge, but the courts are currently closed. So, the youth remains in the detention



center, without the possibility of release, with fewer staff working, and no visitors. Similar concerns arise for children with institutionalized parents; for instance, children cannot have visits with those parents during this viral crisis.

Homeless/runaway/trafficked youth cannot go to closed schools, park district facilities, libraries, restaurants, or coffee shops. Many outpatient clinics are suspending in-person services, and homeless shelters are limiting access to maintain social distancing. As one homeless shelter staff explained, these kids are now having trouble even accessing a bathroom. Should they become infected, they may have no place to self-quarantine.

We are in an unprecedented time of heightened worry and fear, but also heightened community resilience. The past week has shown the power of our state and community to rise up in the face of adversity and help one another. Organizations and individuals across the state are working hard to get the needed resources; many have started to collect information and resources on their webpages, shared documents, and resource repositories. As a start, check out the following groups and COVID-19 resource pages:

- [Center for Childhood Resilience](#)
- [Mental Health America](#)
- [National Juvenile Justice Network](#)
- [Chicago Coalition for the Homeless](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control](#)

Please let us know as you become aware of child-specific issues. Let us know if there is some way that we can assist your organization. In the meantime, we will continue to update you as new information becomes available to us.

Let's stay connected,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gene Griffin".

Gene Griffin
Chair, ICMHP

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A Walsh".

Amanda Walsh
Director, ICMHP

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colleen Cicchetti".

Colleen Cicchetti
Clinical Director, ICTC

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gaylord Gieseke".

Gaylord Gieseke
Chair, ICTC