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# REDUCE CHILD ABUSE



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## *Policy Brief*

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In FY 2008, confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect in Oklahoma fell to a 10-year low of 11,714. In 1998, that number was over 16,000, evidence the programs that Oklahoma provides to vulnerable families are working. Yet these programs are woefully under-funded and do not reach every county. Experts worry that the economic downturn, which puts families into stressful hardships, may leave parents angry and fretful – and more susceptible to substance abuse, domestic violence and child abuse. Now is not the time to cut back on services and programs aimed at preventing and reducing child maltreatment!

Oklahoma has adopted a number of effective programs, working with young families and other caregivers, that provide education and support in a variety of settings. This allows services to be tailored to the needs of individual children and their families.

**Children First** is a statewide public health nurse home visitation service offered through local health departments to first-time low-income pregnant women who enroll prior to the 28th week of pregnancy. Services continue until the child is two years old. In FY 2008, *Children First* served 4,836 families.

**The Office of Child Abuse Prevention** uses the *Healthy Families America* approach that combines center-based and home-based services for pregnant women after the 28th week of pregnancy, parents expecting their second (or subsequent) child, and parents of newborns. Current funding allows for only 23 programs, covering less than half the state. In FY 2008, 413 families attended center-based programs; 1,148 families were served through home-visits.

**Child Guidance** provides services to build healthy family relationships and enhance child development of all families of children through age 12, regardless of income. Mental health consultation services are also provided to child care centers to reduce behavior problems in the classrooms. In FY 2007, Child Guidance staff provided 20,243 screenings, 10,415 assessment and intervention services, and served 44,964 individuals in educational groups.

### RECOMMENDATION:

The 2009 Children's Agenda supports efforts to reduce child abuse and neglect by increasing funding for the existing continuum of prevention services offered by the Oklahoma State Department of Health (Children First, Office of Child Abuse Prevention, Child Guidance), Department of Human Services (Safe Care); and Department of Education (Parents as Teachers, SoonerStart).

### Fiscal Note:

The Oklahoma State Department of Health is requesting \$219,000 to expand services through its Office of Child Abuse Prevention, including Children First, \$402,000 for Child Guidance Services, and \$326,000 for services provided through the two large city/county health departments. The State Department of Education is requesting \$2,000,000 for Parents as Teachers and \$5,131,000 for SoonerStart. *Total request: \$8,078,000.*

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**Strengthening Families** teaches early child care providers about child maltreatment and how to support parents in times of stress. In FY 2008, this program reached 1,273 families and 3,044 children through child care and parent education projects.

**Parents as Teachers** is a voluntary program of parent education that provides practical information and guidance to parents regarding the development of language, cognition, social skills and motor development of children. In FY 2008, Parents as Teachers served only 99 out of 539 school districts.

**SoonerStart** is Oklahoma's early intervention program designed to meet the needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays. The program is a joint effort of the Oklahoma departments of Education, Human Services, Health, Mental Health, the Commission on Children and Youth and the Oklahoma Health Care Authority. During FY 2008, SoonerStart served 13,803 children over the course of the year. In a "point-in-time" survey conducted in October, 4,401 children were being served, of which 230 were children with autism spectrum disorder.