Improving Health Systems Response to Youth in Foster Care

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Children and youth in foster care have significantly greater health care needs than those not in foster care (Szilagyi et al. 2015), including 30-50% higher rates of chronic diseases such as asthma, depression, and other behavioral health conditions. Yet, despite this increased need, their health needs often go undetected and untreated (Szilagyi et al. 2015). This project will use medical and behavioral health care data on 2,223 youth in foster care in Oregon and a matched sample of comparison children (N=6,304), and qualitative interview data with key stakeholders. Our goal is to identify modifiable health system, provider and patient level factors that contribute to unmet needs for youth in foster care and to explore ways to use health system data to identify, monitor and address these needs.

Potential Impact

Few studies have examined health service use for children and youth in foster care, and none to date have studied health service use using electronic health records (EHR). Most prior work has been based on survey data, such as the National Study of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), which have included youth in foster care, but samples are often small, and measures of service use are based on caregiver self-report.

This study is also significant in that it will include qualitative data to begin to better understand patterns of care for youth in foster care from key stakeholders. This will help us to better understand underlying issues related to the health care patterns observed and barriers to needed care.