



Mandatory Reporting Task Force | Meeting 14

March 13, 2024, Meeting Recap

Overview

The Mandatory Reporting Task Force is legislatively charged with analyzing the effectiveness of Colorado’s mandatory reporting laws in keeping children safe, connecting families with the resources they need, and providing clarity to mandatory reporters. Integral to this analysis, the task force will continue to examine the relationship of these laws to systemic issues and disproportionate impacts on under-resourced communities, communities of color, and people with disabilities.

Alternative Processes and Services

Trace Faust opened the meeting with a quick roadmap of the task force’s upcoming meetings. The discussion at this meeting would continue to revolve around alternative processes and services. After the meeting, draft recommendations will be sent out for task force members to review and provide feedback. The task force will discuss further and vote on those recommendations at the March 20th meeting.

A [resource summary](#) was shared with the task force prior to the meeting that focused on three main categories: decision tools, consultations and warmlines. These categories were derived from shared resources and presentations, along with prior discussions and experiences shared by the task force. A survey was shared with the task force prior to the meeting to gauge the task force’s readiness to adopt recommendations regarding these categories. The discussion focused on refining what recommendation would include, determining whether Colorado is ready for such a tool, and discussing how to ensure the three categories align with the state's needs and direction.

Decision Support Tools

Decision support tools may aid mandatory reporters in determining appropriate interventions for child or family needs, particularly whether a concern rises to the threshold of requiring a report of suspected child abuse and/or neglect. Eighty-seven percent of respondents were in favor of developing such a tool for Colorado. The Evident Changes Community Resource Guide was a notable example that generated momentum and excitement among members. The task force was previously provided opportunity to look at a demonstration of a Community Resource Guide as used in Humboldt County, California. Themes emerging from this conversation are outlined below:

User friendly – Humboldt County, California’s system was praised for its user-friendly interface, providing autonomy and clarity in decision-making. It was described as self-explanatory and easy to navigate, catering to both mandatory reporters and individuals seeking information. The system effectively guides users through decision-making

processes and directs them toward necessary actions, streamlining the reporting process based on their responses to questions.

Cost – There is uncertainty about the cost of implementing such tools.

Location – The layout of the New York State website was commended for seamlessly connecting users to relevant services based on location and topic.

Interconnectedness of Approaches – Doris Tolliver highlighted the interconnectedness of the different approaches being discussed. For example, a warmline and a decision support tool could complement each other. The capacity of decision tools to collect data from mandatory reporters and support ongoing improvement are seen as complementary not only to other methods like warmlines but also to training efforts. Understanding how these approaches interact and overlap is essential for the task force's discussions and decision-making process.

Confidentiality – Confidentiality is deemed crucial, especially concerning mandatory reporting and the potential utilization of decision support tools. While expressing hope for the removal of designated mandated reporter roles for domestic violence advocates, the importance of confidentiality in discussions was emphasized. Decision support tools could offer confidential support for advocates without recording personal identifying information.

Additional points raised include the desire for the following:

- Collecting data to inform decision-making processes. Any implemented decision tree should incorporate provisions for gathering data.
- A distinction between trusted adults and peers in child sexual abuse reports.
- Addressing ambiguity surrounding teenagers' cooperation with law enforcement investigations.
- Engaging with families and seeking their input.
- Creating a combined hotline not solely for abuse reports but also for general support.
- Including more examples to aid users in understanding responses.
- Providing print versions of these documents for accessibility, considering that not everyone has reliable internet access and physical copies could be valuable for training purposes and documentation.
- Instilling confidence in mandated reporters when making reporting decisions.
- Addressing a current lack of guidance on where to refer families for services or supports when a report is not necessary. Including this information is seen as essential to ensure that mandated reporters have all the necessary tools to navigate various situations effectively.
- Creating awareness campaigns to educate individuals about the negative outcomes of unnecessary calls and to promote critical decision-making.
- Educating mandated reporters about developmental age versus chronological age, which is seen as crucial for accurate reporting.
- Embedding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training into pre-service education rather than solely focusing on mitigating bias during reporting. This approach is seen as ensuring that DEI principles are ingrained in individuals' practices from the outset.

- Adopting a holistic approach when designing reporting tools and protocols given the complexities of reporting incidents which may involve law enforcement and child protective services. There's a need to account for various scenarios and nuances in reporting requirements.
- Considering what questions to ask and how to engage with families.

One task force member called attention to the potential for decision support tools to address issues in the childcare industry, where the member believes institutions often feel compelled to report everything, regardless of whether it constitutes abuse or neglect. These tools would provide a structured process for determining when reporting is necessary, potentially reducing unnecessary calls to child welfare agencies. Additionally, the importance of empowering reporters to make critical decisions about reporting, rather than relying solely on child welfare agencies to sort through all reports, could lead to more informed and appropriate reporting decisions.

The discussion emphasized that decision tools may not fully address the need for training and development on how to effectively engage with families. It underscores how to conduct conversations with families, particularly in situations requiring more information or alternative paths. Some members pointed to a need for additional resources and guidance beyond the decision tool itself to support mandated reporters in navigating complex reporting scenarios.

The discussion highlighted the importance of having trained individuals involved in implementing the decision support tool. Concerns were raised about funding and recruitment, particularly in rural areas. Addressing these challenges was deemed necessary regardless of the chosen program for implementation.

A significant barrier named to implementing the recommendation is ensuring that the decision support tool reaches all mandated reporters. The decentralized nature of mandated reporter training poses a challenge, with different professions receiving training through various channels.

A concern about the time it takes to make a report in Colorado's current system was raised. Implementing a decision tool before making a report might add more time to the process, potentially leading to frustration and disengagement from the reporting parties. The need to streamline the process to enhance efficiency and effectiveness was raised, especially for busy frontline responders.

In smaller communities in Colorado, existing obstacles include biases towards DEI and sex education. Changing mindsets and biases in such communities is challenging, and collaboration might need to be enforced through legislation. A task force member voiced that it is crucial to be proactive in addressing these challenges and recognizing the uphill battle ahead in shifting community attitudes towards these important issues.

Consultation Services for Mandatory Reporters

Survey results were shared from a poll gauging interest in moving forward with recommendations regarding consultation services for mandatory reporters. Approximately 70% of respondents expressed support, with a significant portion unsure and a few opposing. The Arapahoe County example – which was discussed during a previous meeting – was highlighted as a potential model for replication or expansion in Colorado, based on strong consensus among members.

In the discussion about implementing a consultation approach for mandatory reporters, the focus was on addressing the challenges faced by reporters in determining whether a case warrants a report. The conversation centered around the Arapahoe County example, with Michelle Dossey providing insights on what elements are working or replicable.

The discussion highlighted the existing informal consultation practices and the need to formalize and clarify them to make them more accessible and effective for all mandatory reporters. The current, informal nature of seeking guidance can lead to inconsistency and potential risks for both the advisors and those seeking guidance. The recommendation would lean towards clarifying the consultation process, creating a standardized statewide approach, assuring reporters that seeking guidance does not automatically trigger a report.. Additionally, members emphasized the importance of making the resource available to all mandatory reporters in Colorado.

The discussion focused on determining whether the proposed consultation service should be integrated into the mandatory reporting system or within individual organizations. Kevin Bishop expressed concerns about organizational capacity and the need to decide on its housing within the Colorado Department of Human Services or an alternative entity.

Dr. Kathi Wells underscored the dilemma healthcare providers face in offering informal consultation on child abuse reporting, fearing liability if their advice dissuades reporting. She expressed interest in formal consultation services within child protection services, emphasizing the need to raise awareness among providers to bolster their confidence in reporting accurately.

Stephanie Villafuerte envisions the consultation service being staffed by child welfare or public health professionals. She suggested considering the segmentation of mandated reporters to prioritize access to the consultation service, with medical physicians and emergency responders having immediate phone access.

Jade Woodard highlighted the importance of considering how the warmlines, consultation and decision support tools interact with each other. If only one of these elements moves forward, she voiced that it would have a different impact than if all three were implemented together. She suggested clarifying the conditions under which each approach would be effective and emphasized the importance of addressing potential gaps or holes if not all three approaches are implemented.

Roshan Kalantar echoed Michelle Dossey's points made about a more consistent and well-trained consultation system that can provide consistent guidance to reporters across different regions. Bryan Kelley suggested the potential incorporation of a mechanism similar to New Hampshire's decision tool – in which the state's Attorney General issued a memo stating that use of the tool satisfied a legal obligation to report – which could offer legal reassurance to mandated reporters.

Michelle Dossey discussed the key elements of the consultation program in Arapahoe County and its replicability at scale. She emphasized the importance of education, coaching and providing comprehensive guidance to mandated reporters. She acknowledged the challenge of bias and the variability in decision-making among staff members due to the complexities of child welfare law. She also highlighted leveraging existing data within the child welfare database to provide informed consultations.

The task force discussed where to house the consultation service. Sam Carwyn emphasized the importance of considering individuals' past experiences with government systems, suggesting that tying the consultation service to such systems may deter people from seeking help. Ideas for alternative departments to house the service included the following:

- The 211 system.
- Prevention Services within a state office, such as the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.
- Child Abuse Prevention unit or Family Strengthening unit within Early Childhood.
- Bryan highlighted the example of Wisconsin as a model for integrating the consultation service into existing systems.

Warmlines

Survey results of task force member support for moving forward with recommendations regarding warmlines were then shared. Out of 24 responses, nearly 80% of task force members expressed support, with one person opposing and three uncertain. Trace invited further discussion and questions from those interested in the warmline concept but unsure about its implementation.

The task force discussed warmlines as an alternative approach to take when child maltreatment is not alleged, but there is still a desire and/or need to connect families with services and support outside of the child welfare system. In this discussion, task force members raised the following:

- Concerns about families feeling apprehensive or defensive if referred to a warmline after a report was made about them, suggesting the need for a marketing campaign to reassure families that warmlines aim to provide support without involvement in the child welfare system. This highlights the importance of fostering trust and encouraging families to engage without fear of consequences.
- Recognition of the importance of training for both mandated reporters and individuals in the community who may be accessing warmlines to connect families. It's crucial for these individuals to understand how to approach the situation delicately, avoiding leading with the fact that a report was made to the hotline but not accepted. This underscores the need for education to ensure that everyone involved understands how to navigate these situations effectively.
- Concerns about the sustainability of the warmline concept, emphasizing the need for a clear fiscal plan to ensure its longevity.
- A need for clarity on who the warmline is intended for and when it is recommended, as well as how it fits into the existing landscape of support services such as the Colorado Crisis Line and 211.
- The need to understand how families currently seek help and how existing services like 211 operate.
- Consideration of various options for the warmline's accessibility, including models where lived experience families answer calls and connect with families seeking resources.
- Integration of the warmline into consultation services for mandatory reporters, providing resources and guidance when reports are not made.
- Clarity regarding the target audiences for each service.

- Hypothesizing about the possibility of two separate warmlines: one integrated within 211 for everyday individuals seeking assistance and another dedicated specifically for mandatory reporters making reports.
- Conducting an inventory of existing warmlines or support lines in Colorado and making strategic decisions on how to integrate the new warmline with existing structures.
- Recognizing that some programs implement navigators to provide follow-up support beyond initial connections with services, which could be useful in Colorado.

Bryan Kelley emphasized the importance of leveraging existing structures, such as 211 services, for implementing warmlines. He highlighted examples from other regions, like New York and San Diego, where warmlines are integrated into existing systems. He suggested building upon these structures and amplifying their capabilities rather than starting from scratch.

Stephanie highlighted the challenge of making effective recommendations as a task force, noting the need for a balance between specificity and feasibility. She proposed considering the recommendation for a third-party consultant to conduct an inventory and provide recommendations on utilizing existing resources, recognizing the extensive timeframe needed for such initiatives and prompting the task force to discuss their comfort level with this approach. An informal vote was then taken on moving forward with the drafting of a recommendation that incorporates a third-party consultant. Approximately half of the present members expressed support for utilizing a third-party in a recommendation.

Public Comment

Crystal Ward Allen from Casey Family Programs expressed appreciation for the thorough discussion and noted that many key elements for a successful system were addressed during the meeting. She mentioned a current system in Larimer County called "Supported Families, Stronger Communities," which employs individuals with lived experience to provide consultation and support, somewhat resembling a warmline model. Crystal highlighted that this system is undergoing evaluation, with data expected to be available within the year, including formal evaluations and cost-benefit analyses.