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**CONNECTICUT CHILDREN'S MEDICAL CENTER LAUNCHES  
NEW NATIONAL INITIATIVE TO COMBAT IMPACT OF  
CHILDHOOD "TOXIC STRESS"**

**HARTFORD, Conn.** – In an effort to combat the impact of childhood “toxic stress,” Connecticut Children’s Office for Community Child Health has launched a new initiative to help pediatric practices across the United States identify and assist children at risk. Toxic stress is a frequent or prolonged stress response to adversity such as domestic violence, emotional abuse, chronic neglect, parental substance abuse or mental illness, and other family hardships. Left unchecked – and without the protective presence of a supportive adult – toxic stress in children can have damaging effects on learning, behavior and health.

“Research has shown that the number of adverse experiences in childhood matter,” said Paul Dworkin, MD, executive vice president for Community Child Health at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center. “Cumulative stress has a so-called ‘toxic effect’ on children’s well-being and can contribute to long-term health issues, such as adult heart disease and malignancies, as well as mental illness.”

**Alleviating Toxic Stress**

With support from The JPB Foundation, the Office for Community Child Health will use the successful strategies of its *Help Me Grow*® (*HMG*) National Center to help pediatric practices at sites across the country assess and mitigate the impact of toxic stress in children.

“We will support pediatric practices in the early detection of children at risk for developmental and behavioral problems, and ensure that these children and their families are linked to community-based programs and services that strengthen protective factors, such as family resiliency and parents’ understanding of their children’s developmental stages and needs,” Dr. Dworkin explained.

*Help Me Grow*, a statewide program of the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, helps families with children at risk for developmental or behavioral problems find local support and services through a central call center. With support from the *HMG* National Center at Connecticut Children’s, more than 25 states and territories are replicating the program.



“Over the next three years, our responsibility will be to bring *HMG* to scale and impact within pediatric practices selected to serve as testing sites and learning laboratories under coordination by the Center for the Study of Social Policy,” Dr. Dworkin said. “If the communities selected are not already part of the *Help Me Grow* network, we will work with them to implement the program.”

Specifically, the *HMG* National Center at Connecticut Children's will provide technical assistance and training at the community level for the testing sites. The National Center will deliver existing pediatric practice tools, such as EPIC – Educating Practices in the Community – and MOC – Maintenance of Certification – and other physician and parent engagement strategies on topics related to the effective mitigation of toxic stress and the promotion of children's healthy development. It will also develop modules on the use of toxic stress screening tools, parenting support and other topics.

In addition, the *HMG* National Center will engage pediatric practices in Continuous Quality Improvement, with a focus on developmental promotion, early detection and intervention. The National Center will also enhance the collection, tracking and sharing of data among pediatric practices, *HMG* systems and community-based programs and services that serve children and families.

## **Promoting Healthy Development**

According to Dr. Dworkin, a child's optimal healthy development relies not only on the absence of disease or disorder but also on a multitude of social, economic and environmental factors that impact children and their families. Ensuring optimal healthy development for children at risk for toxic stress requires a comprehensive system that engages parents and families and links them to appropriate community-based programs and services.

“Our Office for Community Child Health and our *Help Me Grow* National Center are committed to a comprehensive strategy to mitigate the impact of toxic stress in childhood and promote the healthy development of vulnerable children,” Dr. Dworkin said. “We believe this initiative will be an important step towards achieving those goals.”

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*For more information about Help Me Grow services in Connecticut – or to refer a child – families, health care providers and other community-based providers may call the Child Development Infoline, a specialized unit of United Way of Connecticut, at 1-800-505-7000.*



**Connecticut Children's Medical Center**

Connecticut Children's Medical Center is a nationally recognized, 187-bed not-for-profit children's hospital serving as the primary teaching hospital for the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. Named among the best in the nation for two of its pediatric specialties in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* "Best Children's Hospitals" rankings, Connecticut Children's is the only free-standing children's hospital in Connecticut that offers comprehensive, world-class health care to children.

Our pediatric services are available at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford and at Saint Mary's Hospital in Waterbury, with neonatal intensive care units at Hartford Hospital and the University of Connecticut Health Center, along with a state-of-the-art ambulatory surgery center, five specialty care centers and 11 other locations across the state. Connecticut Children's has a medical staff of nearly 1,100 practicing in more than 30 specialties.

For more information, visit [www.connecticutchildrens.org](http://www.connecticutchildrens.org) or connect with us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/connecticutchildrens](http://www.facebook.com/connecticutchildrens) and Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ctchildrens](http://www.twitter.com/ctchildrens).

**Connecticut Children's Office for Community Child Health**

Connecticut Children's Office for Community Child Health serves as a coordinating entity for the Medical Center's community-oriented programs and as an incubator for innovative models that strengthen the community child health system and enhance children's optimal healthy development. The Office currently oversees thirteen community-oriented programs, including the Help Me Grow® (HMG) National Center and Easy Breathing©. Both HMG, which promotes early detection and connection to services for children at risk for developmental and behavioral problems through a centralized telephone access point, and Easy Breathing©, a community-based asthma management program, were piloted in Hartford before being scaled up and adopted in many states. The Office for Community Child Health extends the impact of such innovative programs regionally and nationally through the creation of replicable, evidence-informed models of care. For more information on all of the Office for Community Child Health's programs and services, visit [www.connecticutchildrens.org/community-child-health](http://www.connecticutchildrens.org/community-child-health).