



Myers JDC
Brookdale

Municipal Health Program for Early Childhood: Interim Report – From the Initial Planning Stage up to the Implementation Stage

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Abstract

Background

The municipal health program for early childhood is aimed at improving the health status of children in the first years of life, specifically those living in poverty, by improving the availability of services for early childhood as well as the quality of the care provided, in particular, health care. The program is a joint venture of the Ministry of Health Financial & Strategic Planning Administration and JDC-Ashalim.

The program was launched as a pilot in two cities: Lod and Ramleh. At the first stage, a program was developed to address specific issues raised by relevant entities in each of the two cities, which could be of interest to a large number of local stakeholders and get them involved in a collaborative endeavor. The Ministry of Health and JDC-Ashalim aim to promote the joint venture and expand the program to other localities throughout Israel, based on lessons learned from the pilot. The Ministry of Health and JDC-Ashalim commissioned the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to conduct an evaluation of the program.

Goal

This report was prepared about two years following the initiation of the program with the goal of reviewing the processes that took place in the two participating cities from the initial planning stage up to the stage of the pilot implementation and providing insights applicable to future planning and implementation of similar programs in other cities in Israel.

Method

As part of the evaluation activities, the study team attended meetings of the program headquarters staff and of various relevant entities in the two participating cities. It also conducted 12 interviews with key role holders as well as two focus groups – one with mothers from the two cities and the other, with Arabic speaking therapists involved in the pilot. The interviews and focus groups were conducted in the course of 2018 with the aim of understanding the needs in each of the participating cities and collecting related health and socioeconomic data.

Findings

The program development process yielded a number of achievements, including:

1. Recruiting of professionals in the two cities;
2. Identifying an issue to be addressed in each of the cities, which could be of interest to the local stakeholders and get them involved in a collaborative endeavor and whose critical significance for health and development in early childhood was commonly acknowledged;
3. Developing a pilot program to address the issue identified in each of the cities;
4. Establishing a channel of communication between the program headquarters staff at the Ministry of Health and the education system;
5. Enhancing the status of the Tipat Halav family health centers¹ as a vital local entity;
6. Identifying the city as an arena for the implementation of policy;
7. Paving the way for resource allocation to low socioeconomic clusters of the population.

Along with those achievements, the interim evaluation indicated that various challenges had yet to be addressed, including the collaboration with the health plans; the characteristically lengthy formulation and development process of the program; the incorporation of the pilot program as an integral part of the municipal services; the promotion of a real change in the collaborative work routines of the relevant local entities and the program headquarters units; and the rather limited participation of the local residents in the program formulation and development.

¹ Centers that provide health and medical services for pregnant women, infants and children, and their families.