



PROGRAM EVALUATION DIVISION

NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

February 2011

Report No. 2011-01

Programs for Children, Youth, and Families Need a Guiding Framework for Accountability and Funding

Summary

As directed by Session Law 2009-126, the Program Evaluation Division developed an inventory of programs for children, youth, and families in North Carolina. This effort identified state-funded programs that provided goods, services, or public assistance with the specific aim of enhancing the health, safety, or well-being of children, youth, or their families. In addition to identifying programs, the inventory identified sources of funding and determined whether programs collected performance measures to indicate success in meeting their goals.

Although inventories of this kind are limited because they are point-in-time snapshots, they are indispensable starting points to understand programming in a particular policy area. Inventories can provide a means to identify disparate programs, review performance data, and can inform funding decisions.

The inventory found 93 programs operated by 18 state agencies and universities in Fiscal Year 2009-10. Total expenditures from all sources for these programs were \$3.3 billion; six different appropriations committees oversaw state funding. Inventoried programs included a wide range of efforts that differed in terms of target population; type of service, goods, or public assistance provided; service delivery model; provider type; program model; and performance measures collected. Whereas a majority of programs reported that they collected outcome measures, a document review confirmed outcome measurement for less than half of the programs that made this claim.

Despite their disparate characteristics, inventoried programs could be grouped under seven domains. These domains consisted of: child care/prekindergarten; child and maternal health; education and life skills; family support; mental health, substance abuse, and early intervention; child safety and welfare; and juvenile justice. Adopting an organizational framework could help conceptualize programs for children, youth, and families across North Carolina that would promote more intentional funding for these now disparate programs.

Based on these findings, the General Assembly should authorize the Legislative Study Commission on Children and Youth to create a strategic plan for North Carolina's children, youth, and families. Commission tasks should include establishing statewide goals and identifying broad parameters for assessing progress towards those goals.