



REACH OUT AND READ CAROLINAS

December 18, 2018

Dear NC DHHS Leadership,

On behalf of Reach Out and Read Carolinas (RORC), I want to first thank you for taking this important step to design an approach to support children and their families in the earliest years, a time critical for healthy growth and development. Though I shared some thoughts in the earlier part of the process, I want to formalize my thoughts around the way that ROR can contribute to the goals of the Early Childhood Action Plan. Reach Out and Read is an evidence-based intervention integrated into medical clinics throughout the Carolinas and the country, designed to foster intentional skill-building in parents, resilience in families, and positive bonding between children and families. Reach Out and Read's two-generation approach helps move primary care to a more comprehensive approach to child and family health. The intervention lives at the intersection of health and literacy, and trained medical providers use a valuable tool, books and anticipatory guidance, to talk to parents and other caregivers about what's happening in their life; challenges and opportunities, and the benefits of reading aloud to their young children. Across North Carolina, Reach Out and Read serves more than 215,000 children – and growing every day.

In the NC Early Childhood Action Plan, there are many points of alignment between the goals of the Department and RORC, and the medical home remains a critical piece of the early system of support for children and families. For a cost structure of only \$15/year/child annually, ROR can catalyze significant change for families through an efficient, effective, evidence-based intervention. As a truly population-based intervention, the ROR intervention is designed to provide scaffolding, a foundational approach in the medical home on which to build additional layered supports as needed.

The growing population of ROR-trained primary care providers:

- Support parents with strength-based approaches, helping them meet their goals for their children
- Support parents in the skills they need to achieve these goals
- Help families make everyday moments matter
- Integrate the ROR intervention as an approach to well-care, focusing on developmental milestones, two-generational needs, and the parent-child dyad

ROR is solidly aligned with the goals of the North Carolina Early Childhood Action Plan, and as an intervention delivered during the pediatric well-visit, we also support the state's efforts to integrate these goals into its Medicaid transformation strategy. Like North Carolina, a growing number of states are exploring ways to use Medicaid to support early childhood development and several are including Reach Out and Read in their plans. For example, under New York State's First 1,000 Days on Medicaid initiative Medicaid will provide three years of funding to interested mainstream managed care organizations to conduct pilots covering up to 1,500 children per year. In Oklahoma, a Health Services Initiative funded with CHIP administrative funds will help recruit and train pediatric care providers on the Reach Out and Read method and will also support. We encourage the NC Department of Health and Human Services to utilize similar opportunities to implement a cross-sector approach to ensuring child development, family stability and school readiness.



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Selected highlights that demonstrate alignment to plan goals are outlined below:

- **Goal 1 (metric 10) and Goal 5 (metric 4)**– Reach Out and Read is doing pilot work with Centering OB practices, looking at the impacts of reaching mothers pre-delivery, and focusing on mom’s health and needs. We are interested in evaluating more comprehensively the impacts of the ROR intervention on maternal depression and compliance with 6-week post-partum checkups as well as increased early adaptation of serve and return language sharing between mom/baby. Early pilot research shows promising results in this area, so we are expanding our work in the OB space.
- **Goal 3 (metric 3,4)** – ROR is developing evaluation methodology to measure the impact of the ROR intervention on well-visit compliance and continuity. We are also looking at impacts on quality clinical environments/perceptions of support from patients as well as impacts on provider burnout/satisfaction.
- **Goal 6** – Reach Out and Read is in the development phase of coursework for our providers to encourage foster families to use daily reading as a tactic for early bonding with foster children in their care.
- **Goal 7** – Reach Out and Read works closely with providers to encourage screening and referrals. In addition, we work with our providers to help educate and skill-build in parents and caregivers about the importance of bonding with their young children. Simply stated, the ROR intervention helps families learn how to be together in healthy ways. These moments, snuggled up with a book, help buffer other stressors in a family’s life, and build resilience. ROR is developing evaluations now to measure impacts on quality parent/child interactions. Finally, ROR is rolling back our intervention to begin at the very first visit after birth (as opposed to the traditional ROR model where we begin at the 6-month visit). As such, we are increasing our dosage by 40%, capitalizing on all opportunities for brain development and bonding in the earliest years of life.
- **Goals 8, 9, and 10** – The core components of the Reach Out and Read intervention are largely present in this goal. As we work to scale across the state, it is important to note that ROR is a truly population-based approach. Our research demonstrates impacts on early language skills and changes in parent behaviors around reading together. When implemented with fidelity, the ROR intervention support providers in the clinic and support the important skill-building in families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback, and I look forward to working in partnership with DHHS to support children and families in North Carolina.

Thank you,

Callee Boulware
Executive Director
Reach Out and Read Carolinas