



How Agencies Can Collectively Improve the Lives of Children and Youth



What's in Your Cabinet?

By Danielle Evennou and Elizabeth Gaines

In the face of budget cuts that threaten to erode crucial supports for children and youth, some state agencies have found a promising mechanism for increasing efficiency while maintaining or even improving supports for young people: Children's Cabinets.

Children's Cabinets are particularly important in lean fiscal years. States with a high-performing Children's Cabinet and strong state agency leaders can eliminate duplication and

ensure that every dollar designated for kids is well spent.

Children's Cabinets, sometimes known as councils or commissions, typically consist of the heads of state government agencies that support child- and youth-serving programs, including human service agencies. Children's Cabinets are often established through executive order or statute. Members meet on a regular basis to coordinate services, develop a common set of outcomes, and collaboratively decide on and implement plans to foster the well-being of young people in their state. P-20 and P-16 Councils, as well as Early Childhood Councils, coordinate policy in a similar fashion.

What Do We Know About Children's Cabinets?

During the spring of 2011, the Forum for Youth Investment (the Forum) surveyed the landscape of Children's Cabinets and similar structures in the United States. The Forum identified 110 state coordinating bodies; 55 completed the survey, representing 29 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Human service agencies were significant participants in these entities: Seventy-one percent of the coordinating bodies in the survey identified their state human service agency as a member, and almost all of these members participated regularly.

What Can a Children's Cabinet, or Equivalent Structure, Help Me Achieve?

Effective Children's Cabinets systematically change the fragmented ways states typically do business for children and youth. Using a data-driven, results-oriented approach, Children's Cabinets streamline and integrate government programs and services. This



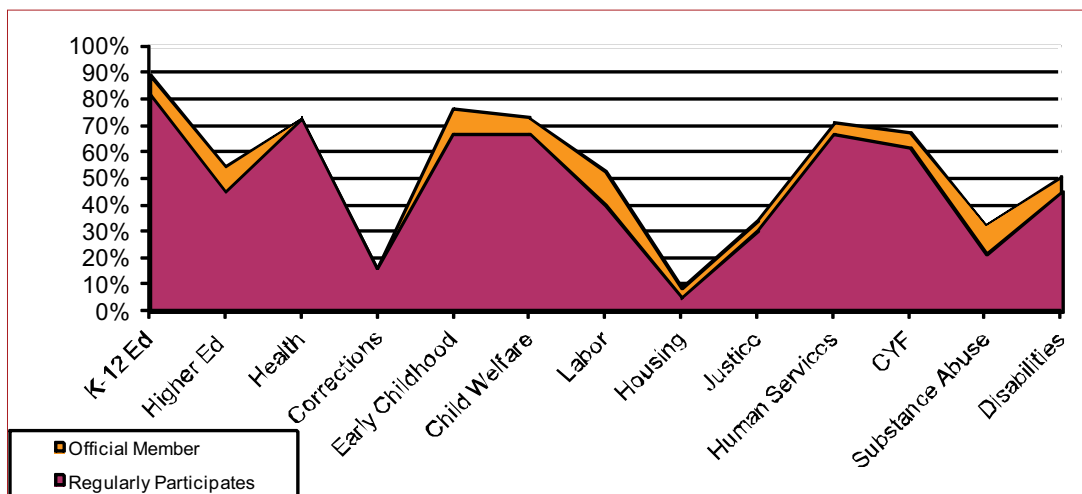
Danielle Evennou is a senior policy associate and



Elizabeth Gaines is the policy director at the Forum for Youth Investment, which manages the Children's Cabinet Network.

What's In It for the Human-Service Sector?

Human service leaders are well aware of the intertwined nature of serving children and youth. As members of Children's Cabinets, human service leaders can connect with new allies and proactively work to change troubled systems.



improves efficiency and creates better outcomes for kids.

There are many ways in which Children’s Cabinets help the human-service sector track and improve the lives of the young people in their state. The forum is particularly interested in how Children’s Cabinets can develop broader partnerships, bigger goals, better data, and bolder actions.

Partnerships

Children’s Cabinets build stronger partnerships. They create bridges between state agencies. Effective Children’s Cabinets also foster connections with nongovernmental stakeholders, like advocates, businesses, researchers, parents, and youth themselves. This helps ensure that the people who are affected by policies have a say in ensuring that those policies are effective. These relationships are also useful to policy leaders as they seek support for their initiatives.

Goals

Once cross-agency partnerships are in place, Children’s Cabinets can steward an agenda for youth policy and practice that is more comprehensive than any individual agency could take on alone. Such agendas are often referred to as a results framework, or a common set of goals that all agencies work toward. States and communities can then use data related to each of the goals for young people to track progress over time.

For example: With the help of its Children’s Cabinet, the state of Maryland has used a common set of

results and indicators to track young people for more than 20 years. In Maryland’s Results for Child-Well-Being 2010 report, Gov. Martin O’Malley states, “I am proud to say that the Maryland Results for Child Well-Being is among the longest, continuously reported results and indicators for children and families in the nation.”

Maryland’s Eight Results for Child Well-Being

1. Babies Born Healthy
2. Healthy Children
3. School Readiness
4. School Success
5. School Completion
6. School Transition
7. Safety
8. Stability

Each of these eight areas has a set of corresponding indicators. For instance, stability is tracked by the following data points: child poverty, childhood hunger and food insecurity, homeless children, and out-of-home placement. Using this information, the state issues a yearly report on where it stands on its results and indicators. The report identifies specific actions, initiatives, and projects undertaken in each result area and examines whether the data have improved.

A common set of results and indicators adds value to state initiatives. Turning again to Maryland, the state launched a campaign to end childhood hunger by 2015 with the help of the Governor’s Office for Children and Share Our Strength, a national nonprofit that seeks to end childhood hunger. The Children’s Cabinet has since been able to track the impact of this

initiative against a broad set of child and youth outcomes.

Data

Sometimes, a little piece of data can make a big difference. The Florida Children and Youth Cabinet has utilized data to re-conceptualize the way the state serves kids. It created the Children and Youth Cabinet Information Sharing System (CYCISS): a secure system that provides real-time data from eight state agencies to caseworkers who are making decisions for kids. CYCISS reduces delays that caseworkers often experience when serving the state’s most vulnerable young people. It gives caseworkers a more complete picture, so that they may make more informed and effective decisions by answering questions like: Is the child receiving Medicaid? Has the family been involved with the justice system?

“The Florida Children and Youth Cabinet is committed to collaborating our efforts and streamlining efficiencies to ensure that all of Florida’s children receive services in a timely manner,” said Florida Department of Children and Families Secretary David Wilkins, chairman of the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet. “What’s innovative is not that the technology is new; it’s the cultural change of sharing the information across agencies.”

Actions

New Mexico has taken its set of results and indicators to the next level. The New Mexico Children’s Cabinet Report Card & Budget Report tallies public funds for each result area —

such as healthy, educated, safe, supported, and involved — and examines the funding levels of key programs that contribute to those results. It shows child indicator trend lines alongside multi-year funding levels to help leaders determine what has made an impact on the lives of young people. Armed with this information, state leaders can make more informed decisions about how best to invest to achieve better results.

Have Children’s Cabinets’ Achieved Tangible Results?

Children’s Cabinets have many success stories. Maine and Maryland moved young people out of expensive care facilities and into community-based settings that are both cheaper for the state and better for the youth. The Maine Children’s Cabinet has leveraged over \$5 million to keep high-risk youth connected and on the path to educational success.

Ohio has also used its Children’s Cabinet to leverage funds. Ohio Family and Children First improved access to services for children with multi-system needs by leveraging over \$6.4 million of federal funds with funding from numerous state agencies to provide respite care, family support programming, early childhood mental health consultation, and parent advocacy services.

In addition, Maryland used its Children’s Cabinet to launch a cross-agency early childhood strategic plan that led to a 20 percent increase in school readiness between 2002 and 2008.

How are Children’s Cabinets Being Received by Incoming Policymakers?

In tough budget years, Children’s Cabinets are a way to fix broken bureaucratic systems. Children’s Cabinets work more efficiently and effectively to improve child and youth outcomes than do individual agencies that work in silos. A number of recently elected governors have caught on to the value of Children’s Cabinets and have taken steps to create one or to revive existing structures.

In 2011, Gov. Mark Dayton created the Minnesota Children’s Cabinet to better align initiatives and develop collective solutions. Since taking office, Gov. Bill Haslam has revamped and reinvigorated Tennessee’s Children’s Cabinet. Gov. Haslam stepped up to co-chair the cabinet with his wife, First Lady Crissy Haslam. In Oregon, Gov. John Kitzhaber and the legislature created the Oregon Education Investment Board. The coordinating body is charged with creating a seamless, unified system for delivering education. It focuses on the full age range from early childhood through post-secondary education, with the aim of equipping all Oregonians for successful careers. California is also thinking about creating a Children’s Cabinet with the introduction of A.B. 823.

What’s the Children’s Cabinet Network?

The forum facilitates a nationwide network for staff and directors of Children’s Cabinets and equivalent bodies, and for those working to establish such an entity in their state. The members, who come from more than 20 states, meet to share best practices and to receive technical support, coaching, and tools. Together they focus on bringing efficiency and effectiveness to state efforts to improve child and youth outcomes. The network tackles a full range of topics, such as how to build political will and technical support for interagency data systems and how to effectively blend and braid funds for kids at the state and local levels.

What Role Can Children’s Cabinets Play in our Nation’s Capital?

Lately, the catchphrase “administrative flexibility” is gaining a lot of attention in Washington. The forum is working with Children’s Cabinets to utilize momentum on this issue to improve outcomes for young people. In short, the forum and the Cabinets are facilitating the dismantling of federal barriers that impede state efforts

to provide support for disadvantaged young people.

Cabinets are also involved with several federal initiatives that seek to increase administrative flexibility and improve efficiency. Children’s Cabinets have been following up on the President’s Memorandum on Administrative Flexibility, which charges federal agencies with aligning administrative and regulatory requirements in a way that allows states, localities, and tribes to target funds toward coordinated efforts to achieve specific outcomes.

At the request of the White House Office of Management and Budget, the forum worked with the Children’s Cabinet Network to identify areas in which a collective effort to remove barriers would have a dramatic effect on child and youth outcomes. After delivering a comprehensive memo on child- and youth-related barriers, the Children’s Cabinet Network was asked to focus its efforts on disconnected youth. Since then, the forum has helped the Children’s Cabinet Network identify three key focus areas: skill development for disadvantaged youth, youth in residential care, and multi-system older youth.

Does My State Have a Children’s Cabinet?

The forum has created an online directory of Children’s Cabinets and similar coordinating bodies, such as Early Childhood Councils and P-20 Councils. To find out more about such entities in your state, access the directory at <http://forumfyi.org/readyby21/childrens-cabinets>.

How Can the Forum Help?

The forum provides technical assistance to Children’s Cabinets. States have relied on the forum to help establish their Children’s Cabinet, create a statewide plan for all children, and to map their state’s fiscal resources for young people.

To learn more about the Children’s Cabinet Network, contact Elizabeth Gaines at elizabeth@forumfyi.org. 