

Reach Out and Read Affiliates Are Working to Advance Policy Priorities

The nationwide Reach Out and Read network is making the case to policymakers and program administrators at every level of government to help expand and sustain the Reach Out and Read model. Reach Out and Read National and Affiliates are positioned as a policy and problem-solving resource, working with others within and beyond the health care system. Below are some of Reach Out and Read's successes.

Indiana: During the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders in Indiana's Department of Mental Health and Addiction were in search of evidence-backed interventions that could reduce the incidence of Adverse Childhood Experiences for young children. Reach Out and Read Indiana provided state leaders with research on the effectiveness of the Reach Out and Read model, and, subsequently, the Affiliate was awarded \$250,000 in federal funding from the state's Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) block grant. The funding enabled Reach Out and Read Indiana to expand operations beyond the city of Indianapolis, training staff and purchasing books for new sites across the state. A new staff member was hired to oversee the statewide implementation.

Minnesota: Minnesota students have historically performed well on measures of literacy, yet reading scores have stagnated, and, in many cases, fallen significantly. Children of color and those in families with low incomes have persistently faced severe gaps in academic achievement. Recognizing that children's capacity for future academic success is largely rooted in positive early experiences — long before they enter



kindergarten —Minnesota lawmakers were persuaded that Reach Out and Read is a prudent, effective, and low-cost investment in early education. In 2019, the legislature allocated \$75,000 annually for two years and continued the two-year funding in 2021. Then, in 2023, the governor issued a bold plan to “make Minnesota the best state in the country for each and every child to grow up” and

directed the legislature to invest much of the state’s \$17.5 billion surplus in improving the lives of children and families. In response, the legislature made a transformative investment in Reach Out and Read, allocating \$500,000 over the next two years. The governor announced that the expansion to Reach Out and Read was included in the plan to boost reading proficiency statewide, “because we must continue to partner with our health providers who parents trust and who know literacy is critical for health outcomes.”¹²

New York: The New York State Department of Health established the First 1,000 Days on Medicaid Initiative, which included a 10-point action plan designed to focus on evidence-backed interventions that align with child development principles and can be supported by Medicaid policy and financing options. A two-year Reach Out and Read pilot, financed with state Medicaid funds, was launched as part of this initiative in June 2021. Reach Out and Read Affiliates demonstrated that the model could operate successfully, maintaining its commitment to universality. This required contracts between Reach Out and Read and up to 10 managed care plans in some clinical sites. Medicaid funding helped drive Reach Out and Read’s implementation of its “Begin at Birth” initiative, increasing the number of clinics participating in the initiative from four, serving 16 percent of families, to all nine, serving 60 percent of families.¹³

North Carolina: A Reach Out and Read innovation in North Carolina now includes community health workers (CHWs) as members of the Reach Out and Read care team. Medicaid funding supported the adaptation of the training module so that CHWs can receive

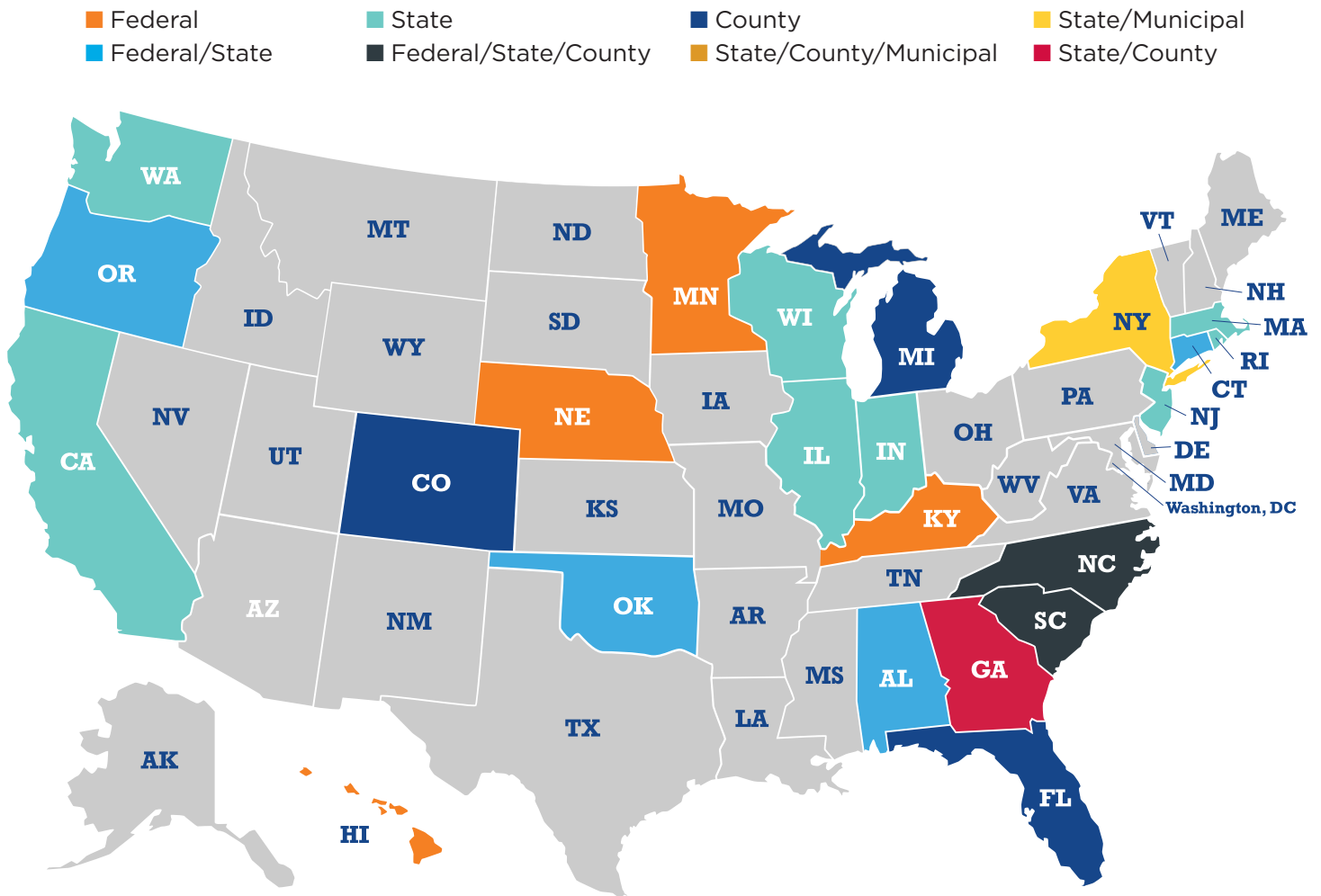


training, credentialing, and continued education credits. During home visits and in the clinical setting, CHWs engage families with information about the importance of early literacy, the value of shared reading, and its connection to emotional development. The extension of Reach Out and Read beyond the clinical setting promotes a comprehensive and coordinated approach to early literacy and child development and builds the capacity of the community. The North Carolina CHW training module is in the public domain and can be shared with and further adapted across CHW networks in any state.

¹² The Walz-Flanagan Budget to Move Minnesota Forward, Supporting Children and Families Fact Sheet.

¹³ First 1000 Days on Medicaid Initiative, New York State Department of Health.

Public Investment in Reach Out and Read



Oklahoma: In 2018, the Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA) and the University of Oklahoma partnered with Reach Out and Read Oklahoma to improve the attendance and quality of well-child visits and increase developmental screenings for children covered under Medicaid. OHCA awarded Reach Out and Read Oklahoma a five-year contract, approximately \$200,000 annually. OHCA leveraged its unspent Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) administrative funds to co-design a Health Services Initiative (HSI) with Reach Out and Read Oklahoma. In addition to the delivering the Reach Out and

Read model, the Oklahoma Affiliate also agreed to distribute developmental screening kits. After three years, a study coauthored by Reach Out and Read Oklahoma and OHCA found that Reach Out and Read sites were more likely to perform developmental screenings at well-child visits than other pediatric health care settings.¹⁴ Reach Out and Read’s effectiveness inspired OHCA leadership to test the model to address other health challenges in the state, including low pediatric fluoride varnish rates in the pediatric health care setting.

¹⁴ Dunlap, M., et al. *Reach Out and Read and developmental screening: using federal dollars through a health services initiative.* J Investig Med 2021; 0:1–4. doi:10.1136/jim-2020-001629