

Monitoring children's development in primary care services: **moving from a focus on child deficits to family-centred participatory support**

Report of a virtual technical meeting
9 – 10 June 2020



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Acronyms

CST	Caregiver Skills Training
GMCD	Guide for Monitoring Child Development
GSED	Global Scale for Early Development
IQ	Intelligence quotient
MCA	Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Ageing
MhGAP	Mental Health Global Action Programme
MSD	Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse
NCD	Department of Noncommunicable Diseases
SDH	Department of Social Determinants of Health
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

Globally, at least one in six children experience a developmental difficulty. However, developmental screening and monitoring are seldom supported by accessible, evidence-based assessments and interventions or effective referral pathways. Primary care services to identify and monitor children at risk of developmental delays and to support them and their families are the first step in building comprehensive services.

Currently there is no generalizable guidance on best practice approaches for monitoring children's development in primary care services, despite recommendations for this by professional associations, and the use of developmental milestones in some child health services and in national norms and standards.

WHO's MCA convened a virtual meeting from 9 – 10 June 2020 to discuss a way forward. The aim was to agree on how best to monitor children 0 - 3 years of age for risk of developmental delay, disorder or disability in primary care services, considering factors at the level of the child, the family and the community.

After discussing the content of literature reviews, presentations and discussions, attention shifted from a narrow focus on developmental monitoring to a broader inclusive approach of psychosocial support, building on a strong provider-caregiver relationship. Conclusions included:

- Given the wide variation in the way children develop and the broad range of influences on individual children's developmental trajectories, focusing on milestones alone is insufficient to detect children who are at risk of sub-optimal development.
- Many factors have a direct impact on early childhood development at the level of the family, community and the child. These factors should be an integral part of developmental counselling and monitoring in primary care services. Attention to caregiver mental health is essential.
- Multidomain developmental assessments are not routinely indicated for all children. However, they should be available for children who have clear signs of developmental delay or whose caregivers have serious concerns about their child's development.
- Cerebral palsy, vision and hearing difficulties are causes of developmental delay whose early manifestations are often detected late. These conditions require careful observations and screening in early childhood as part of universal support for early childhood development.
- Terminology needs to be consistent to advance on implementation. The word "screening" is poorly suited to describe assessment of children's development trajectories. In contrast, "monitoring" implies ongoing observation and adjustment, through information, counselling and support provided to caregivers and families.
- Services to support early childhood development must be organized according to the continuum of care, with developmental counselling and monitoring for all families and children as the basis for identifying those who require more intensive follow-up or indicated services.
- The momentum for integration of developmental monitoring and counselling in primary care services is strong, and therefore a unique opportunity exists for providing countries with the best possible guidance. The meeting laid out parameters for such guidance.

WHO, in collaboration with UNICEF and other partners, will take forward the conclusions in existing and future efforts to strengthen support for children's healthy growth and development.

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