



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Culture of Health

Bringing Brain Science to the Front Lines of Care

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The brain is an exquisitely sensitive organ—so sensitive that, as recent advances in brain science show us, children who are exposed to violence, abuse, or extreme poverty can suffer the aftereffects well into adulthood. They are more likely to develop cancer or heart disease as they age, for example.

But how to translate these findings into practices and policies that can strengthen families and children? How do caregivers help traumatized children and their families cope with adversity? How can the science be applied to what teachers, doctors, social workers, and others on the front lines do every day? And how should the science affect whole systems, so that every person, at every level, can do their part to help children and families thrive?

To answer those questions, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has formed a new partnership with the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities and Canada's Norlien Foundation. RWJF will invest \$1.7 million to help 10 U.S. and five Canadian agencies use the science of trauma and resilience to transform the way they deliver services to families.

The partnership will look closely to see how transformation takes place across a single agency, from the CEO to the front desk employee, and we will document how these changes can affect a whole community—the practice, policy, regulatory and fiscal structures that need to change. The grant will also enable the cohort of 15 agencies to learn from each other and share findings across the Alliance's network—more than 400 nonprofits spanning 8,000 communities.

We hope to uncover any policies that serve as barriers to using brain science effectively on the front lines of care. For example, the science tells us that parent-child bonds are vital to building resiliency in young brains. It's why so many of the most effective strategies treat parents and children together. Such strategies require time for communication and counseling, time that is often reimbursed poorly by insurance companies, if at all. This creates a huge financial disincentive, preventing doctors from taking the time needed to address such issues in depth during office visits. That's a policy that needs fixing.

This project will help us locate existing policies that limit impact. It will guide where we focus our policy efforts moving forward. In fact, by having participants in Canada and the U.S., we will be able to see first-hand how different policy conditions affect this work.

How often have you heard, when someone wants to make a point that a particular topic or task is easy, say, "It's not brain science." In fact, if we are going to realize our full potential to save lives and strengthen families, we need to make brain science easy as well. We believe this partnership is a good start.