

November 23, 2009

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Advisors of the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

FROM: Jon Baron

RE: Update on our work

I'm happy to report significant advances in our efforts to promote evidence-based reforms in government programs. Below is a brief summary for your review. Any thoughts or advice you have would be much appreciated.

1. Coalition's "Top Tier Evidence" initiative (to identify social programs backed by the strongest evidence of sizeable, sustained effects):

- Initiative findings are having important influence on legislation and government policy.
- New GAO report confirms the initiative's adherence to rigorous standards and overall transparency.

As you'll recall, we launched the Top Tier initiative last year to assist Congressional and Executive Branch policymakers in identifying social interventions meeting the top tier evidence standard set out in recent legislation: "well-designed randomized controlled trials [showing] sizeable, sustained effects on important ... outcomes" (e.g., Public Laws 110-161 and 111-8). Congress has expressed interest in the initiative, and officially asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to monitor and assess the effort. We're pleased to report that the initiative's findings have had an important influence on recent legislation and policy, including new federal initiatives to scale up evidence-based home visitation and teen pregnancy prevention programs (as described below). Furthermore, GAO's assessment, released earlier today, confirms the initiative's adherence to rigorous standards and overall transparency.

We've prepared a [one page summary](#) of these new developments, including a link to the GAO report and the latest Top Tier findings. Importantly, we believe these developments now provide a strong basis for Congressional legislation, agency grant solicitations, and other policy documents to reference the Top Tier initiative as an impartial, validated resource to identify interventions backed by the most definitive evidence of sizeable, sustained effects. The Top Tier initiative is supported through grants from the MacArthur Foundation and Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

2. Major new evidence-based legislative initiatives, for which the Coalition has provided key input, move closer to Congressional enactment:

- New evidence-based home visitation program is included in both the House and Senate health care reform bills.
- New evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention program is included in both the House and Senate FY10 appropriations bills.

The House-passed health care reform bill appropriates \$750 million over five years (2010-2014) for a major new program, proposed by the Administration, to scale up evidence-based home visitation programs for families with young children, and expectant mothers. The House bill allocates approximately 50% of the funding for program models with "the strongest evidence of effectiveness." As you'll recall, our Top Tier initiative has identified the [Nurse Family Partnership](#) as one such model, and the research findings on nurse home visitation were cited in the President's budget request for this program earlier this year. Similarly, the Senate's health care reform bill, now under floor consideration, appropriates \$1.5 billion over five years for this program, and allocates at least 75% of the funds for evidence-based models.

The Future of Children (a Princeton/Brookings project) recently published an excellent policy brief on the evidence and politics shaping this new home visitation initiative that, among other things, describes the Coalition's role (linked [here](#)).

Meanwhile, both the House and Senate Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bills for FY10 include funding for a smaller, previously-enacted evidence-based home visitation program at HHS, which incorporates the top tier evidence standard developed with our input (House - \$15 million, Senate - \$13.5 million). Both bills also include funding for a major new evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention program (House - \$114 million, Senate - \$114 million). The Top Tier initiative's findings for the [Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program](#) and [Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care](#) (MTFC) have helped inform this initiative; in fact, the Senate report draws on the Top Tier findings in citing MTFC as a type of program that should be eligible for funding.

The new home visitation and teen pregnancy prevention initiatives both follow the Administration's two-tiered approach to evidence-based policy, articulated by OMB Director Peter Orszag in a [summary](#) on the OMB website that includes a link to the Coalition's website. This approach includes (i) scale-up of program models backed by strong evidence, which he identifies as "the top tier," and (ii) additional funding for models backed by "supportive evidence," with a requirement for rigorous evaluation that, if positive, could move them into the top tier.

3. A recent independent assessment of the Coalition's work has positive findings, as well as valuable suggestions for the future.

Under our grant agreement with the William T. Grant Foundation, we engaged an independent investigator to conduct not-for-attribution interviews with policy officials and analysts familiar with our work, and to prepare an assessment for submission directly to the Foundation. A central conclusion of the assessment report, [linked here](#), is that "Over the past five years, the Coalition has successfully influenced legislative language, increased funding for evidence-based evaluations and programs, helped shape OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tool, and raised the level of debate in the policy process regarding standards of evidence." The report also contains a number of excellent suggestions to strengthen our work in the future, which we are studying carefully.

I hope this update is helpful, and I'll continue to keep you posted. We're grateful to the MacArthur, William T. Grant, and Edna McConnell Clark Foundations for their support of our work.