

## Using Developmental Screening to Improve Children's Health



*Many children with behavioral or developmental disabilities, such as autism, are missing vital opportunities for early detection and intervention.*

- In the United States, 17% of children have a developmental or behavioral disability such as autism, mental retardation, and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder; in addition, many children have delays in language or other areas, which also impact school readiness. However, less than 50% of these children are identified as having a problem before starting school, by which time significant delays may have already occurred and opportunities for treatment have been missed.
- Recent surveys indicate that parents want information and guidance from their health care provider about their child's development, but studies sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics show that 65% of pediatricians feel inadequately trained in assessing children's developmental status.
- Although developmental screening is widely recommended, there are currently no national data tracking the state of this practice and how it is integrated into primary care.

*Developmental screening—a brief assessment designed to identify children who should receive more intensive diagnosis or assessment—can improve child health and well-being, especially for children with autism and other developmental disabilities or delays.*

- Research has demonstrated that early detection of developmental disabilities and appropriate intervention can significantly improve functioning and reduce the need for lifelong interventions. For example, children with autism identified early and enrolled in early intervention programs show significant improvements in their language, cognitive, social, and motor skills, as well as in their future educational placement.

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following steps to help children develop and reach their full potential:*

- Develop and test community-based model programs in primary care settings (and potentially other settings that care for young children) to screen children early on, identify those with autism and other developmental disabilities or delays, and ensure that children with these conditions receive appropriate care.
- Increase health care providers' knowledge and skills in developmental screening by incorporating developmental screening into professional health care training.
- Monitor the use of screening for autism and other developmental disabilities or delays in primary care settings.
- Raise awareness about the need for and benefits of developmental screening to identify and care for children with autism and other developmental disabilities or delays.