



**The Center for Mental Health  
Services Research (CMHSR)**

*Center Description*

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Enola Proctor, PhD, Director; J. Curtis McMillen, PhD, Associate Director

The Center for Mental Health Services Research, Washington University in St. Louis, conducts a research agenda to improve mental health care in the social services. Our agenda addresses the challenges posed in the Surgeon General's Report and in the Bridging Science and Services Report—extending evidence-based care to the most vulnerable of our society's members. Improving the quality of mental health care to social service clients has potential to ensure treatment to persons whose disorder currently goes undetected, to extend evidence-based care to those who are now served poorly, and to reduce racial disparities in care.

Our research agenda builds on our prior decade of mental health research in the social services. Our 61 externally funded research projects (41 NIH, 11 other public funding, 9 privately funding) represent some of the pioneering clinical epidemiological, service systems, and quality of care research at the mental health-social service intersect.

The CMHSR supports practice and service systems research aimed at improving the quality of mental health care for persons with psychiatric disorders. Working in and partnering with community-based social service agencies, we develop and test interventions to help improve their response to mental disorder. The research agenda requires that we confront and creatively address critical conceptual and methodological challenges across two potential divides: (1) the divide between systems of care—in our case, the social service system and the mental health system, and (2) the divide between research and practice, or “bench and trench.” To meet these challenges, we engage the expertise of a variety of disciplines, including social work, anthropology, epidemiology, gerontology, health economics and policy, journalism, public health, library science, biostatistics, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, law, bioethics and sociology. Ultimately, our research aims to inform treatments and system modifications in public social service agencies that will result in better detection of mental disorder and access to evidence-based treatment.

Principal Research Core studies address three overarching aims: (1) developing new understandings of what constitutes quality of care for mental disorder in the social services from the perspective of key stakeholders—payers, administrators, front-line providers, consumers, and

family members; (2) within the context of competing demands, assessing practice variation in quality of care for mental disorder in the social services and identify provider, client, and system ecostructure influences, including financing, on that variation; and (3) working “trench to bench and back to trench,” developing and testing a menu of quality improvements for mental health care in the social services. The Research Methods Core advances the requisite methodology for quality of care research in non-specialty settings.

## **Research Network Development Core (RNDC)**

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Wendy Auslander, PhD, Director; Nancy Morrow-Howell, PhD, Associate Director; Enola Proctor, PhD, PI

The RNDC creates, strengthens, and formalizes a network of relationships among the Center's academic researchers, key mental health stakeholders, and targets resources toward two primary public social service agency partners—the Children's Division, Missouri department of Social Services, and the Division of Senior Services. The collaboration is designed to improve mental health services, to incubate and develop ideas for quality improvements and future research projects that are perceived as mutually important and beneficial across the university-community practice divide, and to increase the capacity of the two agency partners to refine their services based on research and evidence-based practices. Building this capacity will serve as a model for other university-service provider collaborations. The RNDC aims to

- Improve the agencies' infrastructures to respond to mental health needs in their clients.
- Develop a base of "real world" or "local" knowledge from the partnering agencies
- Develop a sustainable network of social service providers, mental health professionals, and research leaders to guide research and its translation to improve mental health in the social