



**Our Vision:**

**All children and families in California experience relational health, resilience, and overall well-being**

# CalAIMH Newsletter

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## Meet Dr. Penny Knapp, Board Member at Large

Dr. Knapp is Professor Emeritus at UC Davis and former Medical Director of the CA Department of Mental Health.



She has been the project director of the CA First 5-funded Infant Preschool Family Mental Health Initiative, and co-director of the California BEST PCP project as part of ABCD II.

She is a member or Fellow of several national organizations including the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and American Academy of Pediatrics, serving on the Bright Futures Infancy Panel, the Mental Health Task Force and the Developmental Psychosocial toolkit task force.

Her principal current interests are prevention and early intervention for high-risk parents, infants and toddlers, evidence-based practices for mental health services and screening and intervention in primary care settings for social-emotional, behavioral, and relationship problems.

Dr. Knapp was the recipient in 2009 of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Irving Phillips Award for Prevention. She continues active teaching of child psychiatry and developmental behavioral pediatrics residents.

## Featured Article:

Side by Side

by Denise Godfrey-Pinn

It is through relationships that young children develop social emotional wellness, which includes the ability to form satisfying relationships with others, play, communicate, learn, face challenges, and experience emotions. In addition, nurturing relationships are crucial for the development of trust, empathy, compassion, generosity, and conscience. The bond between a parent and child builds the child's ability to form relationships with others, express emotions, and face difficult challenges. Through supportive relationships, young children can explore the world, develop empathy, and understand the difference between right and wrong (Zero to Three, website, 2017) and this bond starts at birth.

Child development, as well as parental well-being, is enhanced when parents and other caregivers are encouraged to understand each child's unique characteristics and respond with sensitivity and warmth. For infants and toddlers, social and emotional development is "the developing capacity to experience and regulate emotions, form secure relationships, and explore and learn—all in the context of the child's family, community, and cultural background." The ability to regulate one's own responses, actions, and emotions is a critical aspect of emotional and social development that supports school readiness. Again, in early childhood, this process requires the constant support of a nurturing adult.

During the earliest months and years of life, the architecture of the brain is being built at an unparalleled rate in response to nurturing early experiences. Neuroscience suggests that there are several important windows of opportunity for brain development – periods during which the brain is primed and ready to develop neural connections for particular skills, abilities, and knowledge. (Set for Life, 2014, p.5). Many of these optimal moments of development are related to the social and emotional domains (p.5).



This means that young children's brains are more open to learning and enriching influences. But it also means that young children's brains are more vulnerable to developmental problems should their environment prove especially impoverished or un-nurturing. It is estimated that approximately 16% to 18% of children have disabilities or developmental delays. For these infants and toddlers intervening early can make all the difference in the world. Coordinated collaborative early intervention provides services and supports to promote the best

(continued on page 3)

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(continued from page 2)

possible developmental outcomes, and it enhances the capacity of families to meet their child's needs. For children at significant risk, early intervention can serve as a protective buffer against the multiple adverse influences that may hinder their developmental progress.

The earlier children are identified and provided with carefully designed intervention and family supports, the more they benefit by gains in cognitive, language, and social development, and later in higher academic and life achievement. One in three infants and toddlers who received early intervention services did not later present with a disability or require special education in preschool.



Engaging families and caregivers in the planning of services, embedding services into the family's caregiving routine, and making resources available in the family's preferred language are family-centered skills that facilitate successful relationships between service providers and families. When professionals implement a family-centered approach, they demonstrate an understanding that the child cannot be separated from the family context.

In addition, cultural and linguistic responsiveness respects and acknowledges the effect culture has on child and family development. Professionals should seek to understand culturally specific practices and family preferences, and implement culturally responsive methods in their work with families.



We can take a retrospective approach and recognize all that we have learned about infants and toddlers, their relationships with their parents and family members, their brain development, cultural influences, and their communities. We can accept the challenge to work collaboratively, across disciplines, seeking to learn from others, sharing our own knowledge and a common language, while engaging the families of our youngest children. We can enhance their social and emotional readiness for relationships, as well as prepare them for success in school settings. We have an opportunity to make a difference, a lifelong alteration in developmental progression. We can create a new future for many.

## CalAIMH in Rome

CalAIMH made its presence known at the 16th Annual WAIMH World Congress in Rome. Founding committee members Mary Claire Heffron and Josh Feder were among the CalAIMH Members proudly displaying their CalAIMH T-shirts. Workshops were presented by CalAIMH Members Connie Lillas, Laura Andrade, and Rachel Acereto, to name a few.



Save the date for the 17th Annual WAIMH World Congress to be held on June 7-11, 2020 in Brisbane, Australia.

## Making a Difference in Our Community—Become a CalAIMH Member!

We welcome passionate spirits and helping hands. Please visit our website and become a member at [calaimh.org](http://calaimh.org)

(Please note that the current membership year will end in December 2018, the new membership year will begin in January 2019).

Members, please consider participating in a working committee.

Meet our committees:

- Clinical/Interventions Committee
- Membership and Bylaws Committee
- Public Policy Committee
- Strategic Planning
- Training and Education Committee

Please contact us at:

[volunteer@calaimh.org](mailto:volunteer@calaimh.org)

for questions regarding volunteering

[hello@calaimh.org](mailto:hello@calaimh.org)

for general questions