

USC Social Work Partners with Borrego Health for NIMH-Funded Study to Implement Screening for Adverse Childhood Experiences During Wellness Visits

Research team seeks to support the implementation of the California state policy in Federally Qualified Health Centers.

CONTACT: Joanna Scott at joannas@usc.edu

Los Angeles, CA (August 11, 2021) – The USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work has received an R21 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) for a collaborative pilot study with Borrego Health, a prominent Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in inland Southern California, to refine and test an implementation strategy to screen for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) during childhood wellness visits. ACEs are defined as traumatic events occurring before age 18, such as maltreatment or exposure to violence, that place children at high risk for toxic stress and associated physical and mental health conditions, including asthma, ADHD and anxiety.

Mónica Pérez Jolles, PhD, assistant professor at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, will lead an interdisciplinary research team along with clinical partners at Borrego Health. The California Surgeon General enacted the [ACEs Aware](#) policy in 2020 to promote screening for ACEs in primary care settings during wellness visits.

“We are delighted to partner with Borrego Health and support their efforts to successfully implement the ACEs Aware state policy by using a participatory approach to refine and pilot test a multifaceted strategy,” Pérez Jolles said.

Jorge O. Cervantes, MD, interim chief clinical officer and adult medicine department chair for Borrego Health, sees a need in our communities for studies like this and is excited to partner with USC.

“We at Borrego Health believe that mental health is essential for a healthy life,” Cervantes said. “We feel very happy and proud to have been given the opportunity to collaborate with USC and be part of the successful implementation of the ACEs Aware initiative.”

The two-year project will provide a rare opportunity to leverage the field of implementation science to maximize the impact of a state-wide policy intended to improve child health in under-resourced settings, and scale up the tested strategy across FQHC systems.

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About the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work

The USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work is a leader in social work and nursing education and research. The school champions social justice for the well-being of individuals, families and communities through innovative teaching of evidence-based practice and practice-based skills, pioneering transformative research, and cultivating leadership for social change.

The school is a recognized leader in academic innovation, experiential learning, online education and translational research. For more information, visit dworakpeck.usc.edu.

About Borrego Health

Borrego Health provides high quality, comprehensive, compassionate primary health care to the people in their communities, regardless of their ability to pay. They serve these communities and adjoining regions with respect, dignity and cultural sensitivity as a medical home and safety net for essential health care and social services. Borrego Health is a non-profit, Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). Visit www.borregohealth.org/ for more information.