



Children's Justice Act Three-Year Assessment and Annual Report, 2025

Nebraska Commission for the Protection of Children

Submitted February 28, 2025

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Executive Summary

The report that follows serves as the State of Nebraska's Children's Justice Act (CJA) Three-Year Assessment and reviews and evaluates Nebraska's handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, required pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §5106(c)(d). It also serves as the annual report on CJA activities from March 2024 – February 2025. During this timeframe, the Commission met four times quarterly and worked towards addressing the recommendations from the 2022 Assessment.

This report was prepared on behalf of the Nebraska Commission for the Protection of Children (Commission), which serves as Nebraska's CJA Task Force. For this assessment, the Commission drew information from the work of its subcommittees, results from a comprehensive survey of MDT members across the state, activities conducted at two Commission meetings, and work of the MDT Committee, and publicly available data. The following areas were identified as priorities by the Commission for review as part of its 2025 Three-Year Assessment:

- Information sharing between multidisciplinary team members during Child Abuse and Neglect Cases
- Information gathering amongst multidisciplinary team members during Child Abuse and Neglect Cases
- The purpose of medical exams provided by child advocacy centers

Based on the results of this 2025 assessment, the Commission makes the following recommendations to the State of Nebraska to improve children's justice:

1. Continue efforts to enhance MDT functioning through training and technical assistance on protocols, roles and responsibilities, and case review.
2. Identify strategies to improve communication and the sharing of reports between multidisciplinary partners in order to complete a comprehensive assessment and facilitate a thorough investigation.
3. Create statewide recommendations and best practices for immediate MDT coordination on open investigations in sensitive cases, like fatalities, near fatalities/serious injuries, human trafficking.
4. Increase awareness and access to mandatory reporter training.
5. Identify strategies to increase education and awareness of medical examinations conducted at child advocacy centers.
6. Enhance collaboration with child advocacy centers through training and education.
7. Increase awareness and access to existing resources created by the MDT Committee.

The Commission will monitor and assist with the implementation of these recommendations as it is able over the course of the next three years.

This report also contains a comprehensive update on the action taken on the 7 recommendations which were made through the State of Nebraska's 2022 assessment. The full chart can be found in the Appendix.

Introduction and Overview

This report represents Nebraska's Three-Year Assessment, a requirement for maintaining eligibility for the Children's Justice Act (CJA) grant. It provides a comprehensive update on three areas. The first area is the progress made in response to the previous recommendations from Nebraska's 2022 CJA Three-Year Assessment. The second area includes an in-depth evaluation of multidisciplinary team (MDT) member practices in information sharing and information gathering, as well as their understanding of medical examinations conducted at child advocacy centers, with a focus on the years 2023 and 2024. Finally, the report outlines strategic recommendations that will guide the efforts of the Nebraska Commission for the Protection of Children (Commission) from 2025 through 2027.

Background on the Nebraska Commission for the Protection of Children

The Commission has two active subcommittees which have contributed important work to the assessment and have helped with system improvements identified in the prior three-year assessment:

- **Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Committee:** This Committee was formed in 2016 to review the current practices and protocols of multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) across the state, the use of forensic interviews and CACs, the effectiveness of MDTs, and joint investigations between law enforcement and DHHS. It includes both Commission and non-Commission members from the larger community. This Committee was tasked with leading the Three-Year Assessment for the Commission in 2024.
- **Citizen Review Panel (CRP):** The CRP was developed in 2016 to focus on the review of serious injury and near fatality cases due to child abuse and neglect. It includes both Commission and non-Commission members from the larger community.

Three-Year Assessment Process

The Nebraska Commission for the Protection of Children (Commission) serves as the state's Children's Justice Act (CJA) Task Force. The MDT Committee was tasked by the Commission to lead the Three-Year Assessment throughout 2024 and the first few months of 2025 that resulted in this final report.

In the last quarter of 2024, the MDT Committee conducted a comprehensive assessment through an anonymous survey of MDT partners and judges statewide. Nearly 500 participants completed the survey, providing the MDT Committee with a broad overview of the needs to inform the next strategic plan. These results were reviewed at the December 2024 Commission meeting, where members participated in an activity to provide insight and feedback. The Commission agreed to prioritize the review of information sharing between MDT members, information gathering among MDT members, and the purpose of medical exams provided by child advocacy centers. The Commission tasked the MDT Committee with finalizing the report, focusing on these three areas.

Throughout 2024, the MDT Committee met regularly to gather resources, combine information, and review feedback from Commission members. Committee members offered their expertise to help formulate the report. The Commission then reviewed the information, assessment results, and discussed recommendations at its December 2024 and February 2025 meetings. Final revisions were made based on feedback from these meetings.

Progress since 2022 Three-Year Assessments

The Commission submitted its prior three-year assessment in 2022 with 7 different recommendations:

1. Continue efforts to enhance MDT functioning through training and technical assistance on protocols, roles and responsibilities, and case review.
2. Identify strategies to improve communication and the sharing of reports between multidisciplinary partners in order to complete a comprehensive assessment and facilitate a thorough investigation.
3. Create statewide recommendations and best practices for immediate MDT coordination on open investigations in sensitive cases, like fatalities, near fatalities/serious injuries, and human trafficking.
4. Recommend policy reforms to ensure key professionals (e.g. - medical, education) receive mandatory reporting training.
5. Assess the current Central Registry process as it relates to sexual abuse and sex trafficking for any needed policy and process improvements.
6. Create a statewide, culturally competent mandatory reporter training curriculum.
7. Provide training and education on youth problematic sexual behavior (PSB).

Over the past three years, the Commission has taken steps towards addressing recommendations from the previous assessment. The Appendix contains the full strategic plan with the status of each of the items identified.

Please note only two of the recommendations were completed. Barriers to the completion of the additional recommendations are outlined further in this report.

Completed Recommendations (2 of 7)

[Recommendation #5: Assess the current Central Registry process as it relates to sexual abuse and sex trafficking for any needed policy and process improvements.](#)

The Commission assembled heard a presentation from the Department of Health and Human Services about the Central Registry Process. This included information on expungement processes with cases that were court involved, involved specific types of abuse, or were repeat cases. At the same meeting, a panel of representatives of different disciplines presented on their data tracking systems, information sharing and the positive impact on team collaboration, and barriers such as staffing capacity and limited resources for rural areas. The lessons from information sharing are being included in the investigative protocol guide, which will encompass recommendations 1-3.

[Recommendation #7: Provide training and education on youth problematic sexual behavior \(PSB\).](#)

The Commission heard a panel of representatives across different disciplines present on the current community-based responses to youth with problematic sexual behaviors. Commission members learned about identification of problematic sexual behaviors, effective approaches to addressing those behaviors, and recommendations for improvement by multidisciplinary team members. Some of these suggestions were utilizing appropriate language across systems, educating and supporting schools, engagement and involvement of caregivers, and increasing the number of therapists that are qualified to treat this population.

Due to the barriers, the Commission focused efforts in additional areas that impacted the 2022 Three Year Assessment recommendations, such as:

- Expanding the triage center model that exists in urban child advocacy centers across the state.
- Enhancing the Child Abuse and Neglect hotline to include additional training, an online reporting portal, and statistical insights on emerging themes.
- Facilitating activities with Commission members around the investigative protocol guide, led by the MDT Committee.
- Providing legislative updates on bills affecting the child welfare system and their potential impact on investigations.
- Sharing information on child advocacy center's efforts to serve youth experiencing trafficking.
- Discussing programmatic efforts to serve high risk and missing youth in Nebraska.
- Presenting education and outcomes related to system-involved youth.
- Highlighting several initiatives by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Investigative Protocol Guide

In response to the recommendations outlined in the 2022 Three Year Assessment, the MDT Committee initiated the development of an Investigative Protocol Guide. This comprehensive tool is designed to equip MDT Coordinators and County Attorneys with essential resources, including statutory requirements and language examples. These resources can be utilized to create new investigative protocols or to cross-check and enhance existing ones, ensuring they meet current legal and procedural standards.

The development of this guide is an ongoing project, reflecting the Committee's commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving needs. With recommendations 1-3 in the 2022 Three Year Assessment, the project will extend into 2025, with the aim of incorporating it into the 2025 Three Year Assessment. By providing a standardized framework, the Investigative Protocol Guide will support more consistent and effective investigations across the state, ultimately contributing to better outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system.

2025 Three-Year Assessment Results

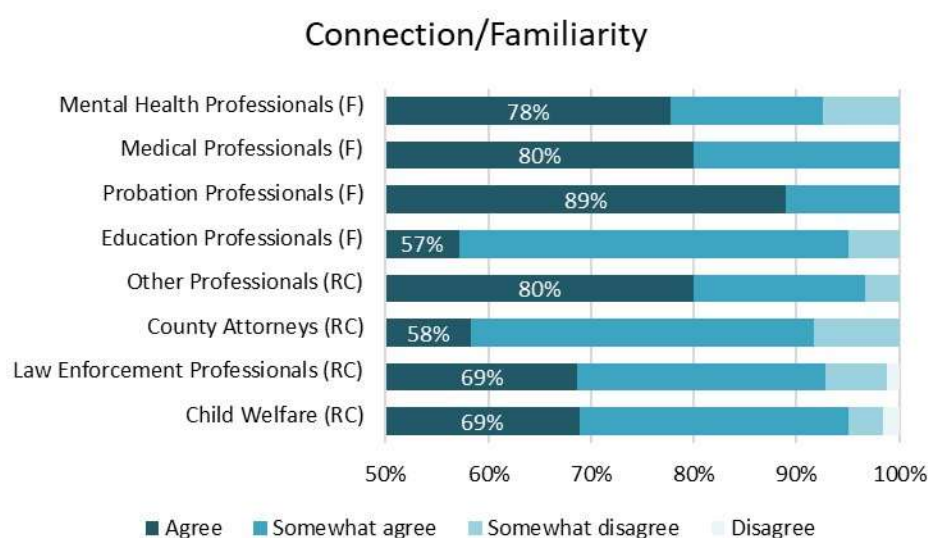
In 2024, the MDT Committee was tasked with conducting the assessment for the 2025 Three Year Assessment. A comprehensive survey with nearly 500 respondents was conducted. Those results were reviewed by Commission members through facilitated activities as well as MDT Committee members. The MDT Committee also reviewed publicly available reports on trends in the child protection and child welfare system over the past few years from the Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare, the Foster Care Review Office, and the Department of Health and Human Services, Children and Family Services (DHHS).

The results of the survey and research were categorized into three areas of focus: Information gathering by MDT members, information sharing by MDT members, and medical exams provided by child advocacy centers.

1. Information Gathering by MDT Members

Respondents to the 2024 CJA Three Year Assessment survey were asked about their collaboration with local Child Advocacy Centers (CACs). The majority of respondents reported agreement with various items related to their connection or familiarity with their CACs and the collaborative information gathering activities. This indicates a general positive perception of collaboration with CACs among the respondents.

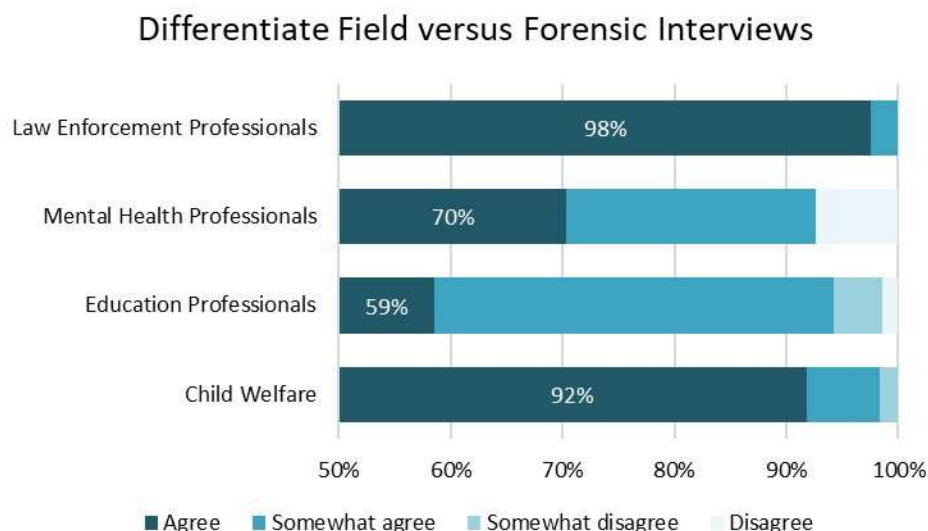
Figure 1: MDT member connection and familiarity with child advocacy centers



Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers. (2024). Children's Justice Act Three-Year Assessment Survey.

Further analysis reveals that the majority of law enforcement indicated they understand the difference between field interviews and forensic interviews. However, other professions reported a lower level of understanding. Addressing these gaps is crucial for ensuring that all team members are well-equipped to contribute information during multidisciplinary team meetings.

Figure 2: Understanding of the difference between an interview in the field versus an interview at a child advocacy center

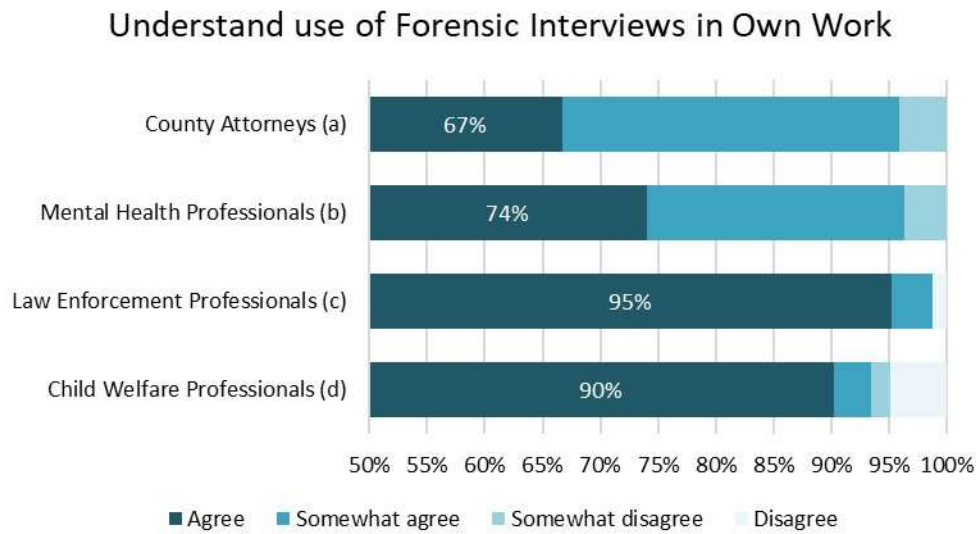


Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers. (2024). Children’s Justice Act Three-Year Assessment Survey.

Figure 3 below includes the results of a combination of coded data from the following questions:

- I know how to prepare direct questions to ask forensic interviewers and medical personnel at trial.
- I understand when to coordinate with my local forensic interviewer when disclosures or recantation occurs during therapy.
- I understand my role in observing forensic interviews is to provide input and ask clarifying questions for the forensic interviewer to strengthen my investigation.
- I understand that in my role I can observe forensic interviews.

Figure 3: Understanding how a forensic interview can inform my work



Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers. (2024). Children's Justice Act Three-Year Assessment Survey.

The CAC plays a pivotal role in the child welfare system, providing specialized, trauma-informed assessments of children's health and safety. However, data collected highlights a gap in knowledge among some MDT members regarding their collaboration with CACs and the information gathering activities conducted collaboratively. This gap underscores the critical need to strengthen the collaboration between MDT members and CACs to ensure effective information gathering and comprehensive investigations.

Roles and Responsibilities

In the 2022 Three-Year Assessment report, it was noted that there continues to be concerns about the lack of knowledge around roles and responsibilities with MDT members.

The Outcome Measurement System (OMS) is a National Children's Alliance tool that helps Child Advocacy Centers define their successes in serving children and families while helping them benchmark their progress against the work of a nationwide movement. The MDT OMS system is designed to collect feedback from MDT partners, the then results are used to demonstrate the impact of the team as well as improve services by identifying training needs. Upon reviewing the 2023 OMS results, it was found that only **52%** of the 512 respondents statewide felt that other team members understood their role on the team. Open-ended comments suggested this could be due to irregular attendance at MDTs and high turnover in the field.

The MDT Coordinator plays a crucial role in onboarding and orienting new MDT members. In 2023, the Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers, the MDT Committee, and MDT Coordinators across the state developed an MDT Orientation Guidebook to help new members acclimate to the team. Given the data above, there is a continued need for training on existing tools to enhance the knowledge of MDT members across the state.

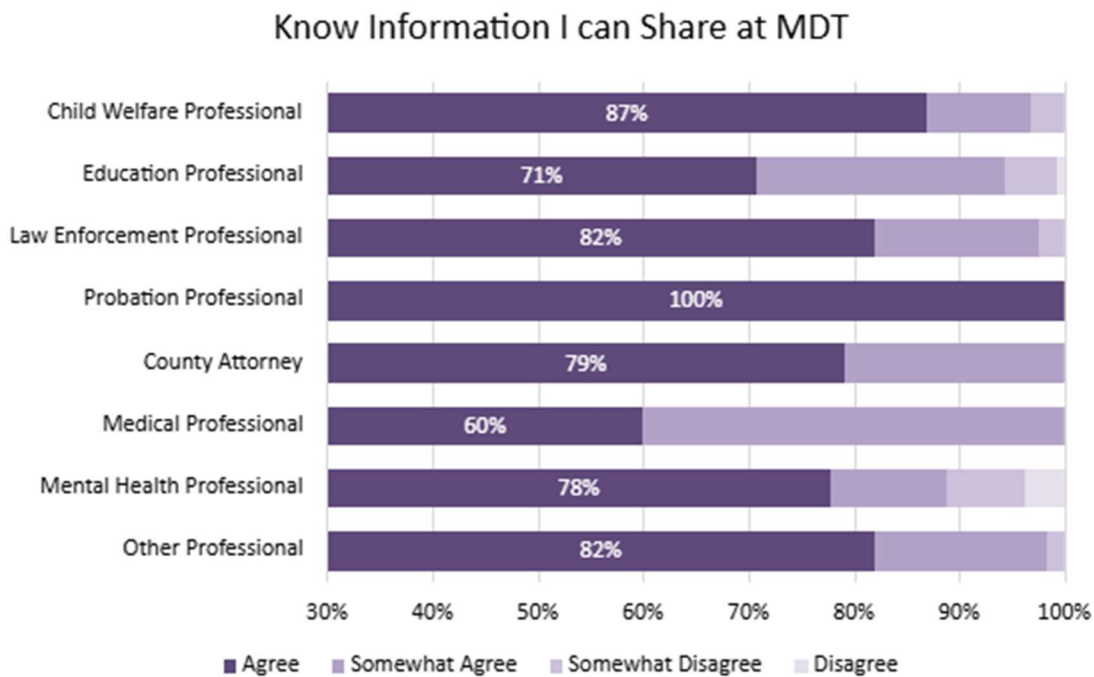
2. Information Sharing Amongst MDT Members

Respondents to the 2024 CJA Three Year Assessment survey were asked about their knowledge around information sharing amongst MDT partners and at MDT case reviews. The data reviewed by Commission and MDT Committee members indicated a continuous need to strengthen knowledge in this area.

Report Sharing at a MDT

Report sharing was identified as a need in the 2019 and 2022 three-year assessments. There are still reports of confusion regarding the reporting process. Upon reviewing the 2023 OMS results, out of 535 respondents statewide, **72%** of respondents indicated team members willingly share information relevant to their cases. This is consistent with the 2024 CJA Three Year Assessment survey, with an average response of **71.5%**. However, when broken down by profession in the figure below, one can see the mixed response levels throughout different disciplines. The Commission believes there is still education and training needing to be done in this area.

Figure 4: Knowledge of information I can share at a MDT



Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers. (2024). Children's Justice Act Three-Year Assessment Survey.

These responses from MDT members indicate that some team members are not getting the necessary information to complete a comprehensive investigation. Along with other reasons indicated, report sharing continues to be a concern amongst team members. One solution the Commission would like to explore is the adoption of a policy for emergency MDT meetings, and to ensure that this process is outlined in team protocols. An emergency meeting would allow all MDT partners to come together and discuss their concerns in an effort to obtain all pertinent information and make sure no details were missed.

Mandatory Reporter Training

As highlighted in the 2022 Three-Year assessment, Nebraska currently lacks a standardized curriculum for mandatory reporter training. While some child advocacy centers offer Child Abuse and Neglect 101 (CAN 101) as a form of mandatory reporter training, this is not uniformly adopted across the state. To address this gap, it is crucial that mandatory reporter training be made widely accessible to all professionals and mandatory reporters involved in child welfare.

Ideally the training curriculum should encompass comprehensive information addressing those disproportionate in the system specific to Nebraska. Reviewing a national model of best practices can provide a foundational framework, but it is essential that the training be customized to address the unique needs and context of Nebraska.

The 2023 Child Abuse and Neglect report indicates the following in Nebraska:

- School representatives were the highest reporters at **27%**, with only **26%** of those reports assessed, and a very low **5% of this reports are substantiated**. Oppositely in 2023, law enforcement were **20%** of reports with **20%** of those being assessed and **25% of those reports being substantiated**.
- Another notable mention are medical reporters. In 2020, they were **13%** of all reporters, with **18%** of those reports being assessed but only **11% being substantiated**.

These percentages have changed minimally since the 2022 Three-Year Assessment.

The Commission did not take action on the following recommendations from the 2022 Three Year Assessment:

- **Recommendation 4:** Recommend policy reforms to ensure key professionals (e.g. - medical, education) receive mandatory reporting training.
- **Recommendation 6:** Create a statewide, culturally competent mandatory reporter training curriculum.

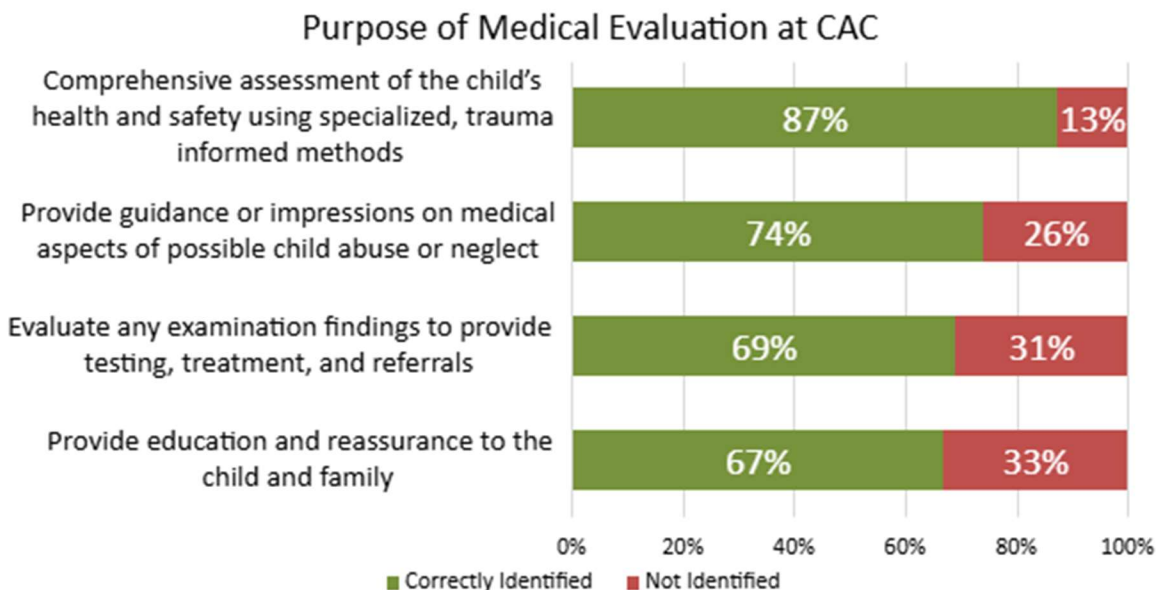
During the reporting period, the Department of Health and Human Services reported they were internally developing a mandatory reporter training that would be released in March 2024. Through quarterly updates shared by the Department of Health and Human Services to the Commission, The Department of Health and Human Services has reported no advancement of this project. Through facilitated activities with the Commission, Commission members want to continue exploring this topic in the 2025 Three Year Assessment, though reported they wanted to revise the recommendation to be around increasing awareness and access to mandatory reporter training.

3. Medical Exams Provided by Child Advocacy Centers

Through its assessment process, the Commission examined data on MDT member knowledge of medical exams provided at child advocacy centers and found information of note.

In the CJA Three Year Assessment survey, participants were asked to select the purpose of a medical examination conducted at a child advocacy center through a series of multiple-choice questions. The correct answer includes all four options given. The results are as follows in Figure 5:

Figure 5: Knowledge of the purpose of a medical evaluation conducted at a child advocacy center



Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers. (2024). Children's Justice Act Three-Year Assessment Survey.

Per these results, the most understood element of a medical exam conducted at a child advocacy center is that it includes a comprehensive assessment of the child's health and safety using specialized, trauma-informed methods. This thorough evaluation is crucial for identifying any physical or psychological harm the child may have experienced, ensuring their immediate and long-term well-being.

However, the least understood element is that the medical professional conducting the exam can provide education and reassurance to the child and family. This aspect is vital as it helps alleviate the fears and anxieties that children and their families may have about the examination process. By offering clear explanations and emotional support, medical professionals can foster a sense of safety and trust, which is essential for the child's recovery and cooperation during the investigation.

The field would greatly benefit from more education about how a medical examination conducted at a child advocacy center can be a valuable tool in the investigative process. These exams not only document evidence of abuse but also play a critical role in the holistic care of the child, addressing both their physical and emotional needs. Educating MDT members and other stakeholders about the full scope and benefits of these medical exams can enhance their effectiveness and ensure that all parties involved understand their importance.

Given these insights, the Commission agrees that this should be a key recommendation in this three-year assessment. Emphasizing the dual role of medical exams in both investigation and support can lead to better outcomes for children and more informed, cohesive efforts among MDT members.

2025 Recommendations

As part of its three-year assessment, state task forces are required to provide a number of recommendations in the categories of the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases; demonstration programs; and reform of state laws and policies.

The Commission looks forward to assisting the State of Nebraska in adopting these recommendations and making progress to improve the handling of child abuse and neglect.

- Continue efforts to enhance MDT functioning through training and technical assistance on protocols, roles and responsibilities, and case review.
- Identify strategies to improve communication and the sharing of reports between multidisciplinary partners in order to complete a comprehensive assessment and facilitate a thorough investigation.
- Create statewide recommendations and best practices for immediate MDT coordination on open investigations in sensitive cases, like fatalities, near fatalities/serious injuries, human trafficking.
- Increase awareness and access to mandatory reporter training.
- Identify strategies to increase education and awareness on medical examinations conducted at child advocacy centers.
- Enhance collaboration with child advocacy centers through training and education.
- Increase awareness and access to existing resources created by the MDT Committee.

System Improvement – Section 107(e)(1)(A)

- Continue efforts to enhance MDT functioning through training and technical assistance on protocols, roles and responsibilities, and case review.
- Identify strategies to improve communication and the sharing of reports between multidisciplinary partners in order to complete a comprehensive assessment and facilitate a thorough investigation.
- Identify strategies to increase education and awareness on medical examinations conducted at child advocacy centers.
- Enhance collaboration with child advocacy centers through training and education.
- Increase awareness and access to existing resources created by the MDT Committee.

Policy Reform – Section 107(e)(1)(C)

- Create statewide recommendations and best practices for immediate MDT coordination on open investigations in sensitive cases, like fatalities, near fatalities/serious injuries, human trafficking.

Model Projects for Expansion and Research - Section 107(e)(1)(B)

- Increase awareness and access to mandatory reporter training.

Commission Work Plan for Recommendations

Over the course of the next three years, the Commission will monitor and assist with the implementation of its recommendations through:

- **Strategic planning:** The Commission will develop and adhere to a strategic plan containing the recommendations. Each recommendation will contain tasks that will help the Commission successfully address the recommendations in the next three years.
- **Updates from key agencies and groups:** The Commission will continue to receive regular updates from its members and other system stakeholders on work related to the recommendations it has made.
- **Committee work:** The Commission will assist in providing leadership and technical assistance related to several recommendations through its committee work. In addition to its existing committees, the Commission will consider whether new committees may need to be formed based on its recommendations.

Appendix

Strategic Plan: Commission for the Protection of Children CJA Recommendations, 2022-2025

#	Recommendation	Action	Final Status
1	Continue efforts to enhance MDT functioning through training and technical assistance on protocols, roles and responsibilities, and case review.	Create a child abuse best practices guide for investigation protocols that includes best practices, Nebraska statutory requirements, language examples, and resources.	
2	Identify strategies to improve communication and the sharing of reports between multidisciplinary partners in order to complete a comprehensive assessment and facilitate a thorough investigation.		
3	Create statewide recommendations and best practices for immediate MDT coordination on open investigations in sensitive cases, like fatalities, near fatalities/serious injuries, human trafficking.		
4	Recommend policy reforms to ensure key professionals (e.g. - medical, education) receive mandatory reporting training.	The Commission will gather information on what mandatory reporter training looks like in other states and will engage in a facilitated discussion around next steps.	No Action Taken
		The Commission will recommend a statutory change requiring education and medical providers to complete mandatory reporter training.	No Action Taken
5	Assess the current Central Registry process as it relates to sexual abuse and sex trafficking for any needed policy and process improvements.	The Commission will participate in a presentation given by the Department of Health and Human Services regarding the Central Registry process.	Completed – December 2022
		The Commission will assemble a panel of statewide representatives to share their standards of practice for assessing and tracking sexual abuse and trafficking victims.	Completed – December 2022
6	Create a statewide, culturally competent mandatory reporter training curriculum.	The Commission will engage in a facilitated discussion and brainstorm which educational and medical professionals should be involved in the development of the mandatory reporter training.	Completed – September 2022
		The Commission will research how other states include multicultural	No Action Taken

		sensitivity in their mandatory reporter training.	
		The Commission will assemble a panel of representatives from throughout the state to share ideas on mandatory reporter training.	No Action Taken
7	Provide training and education on youth problematic sexual behavior (PSB).	The Commission will assemble a panel of representatives to share information on the current community-based responses to youth problematic sexual behaviors.	Completed - May 2022
		The Commission will receive an update from the mental health panelists on the programming offered in 2022.	Completed - December 2022