



Prevention and Early Intervention Project
Presenter and Panelist Biographies
April 5th, 2021

Imelda Padilla-Frausto, PhD, MPH, is a research scientist at the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. She received her PhD and her Master of Public Health degree from the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health in the Department of Community Health Sciences and her Bachelor of Science in psychology from the University of New Mexico. Her research agenda focuses on the structural and social determinants related to inequities in mental health, access to mental health care, and economic security.

Dr. Padilla-Frausto currently leads research on mental health outcomes using data from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). She is project manager for a tele-psychiatry evaluation among older adults. She is also the program director of the California Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index (Elder Index), which highlights and addresses the hidden economic insecurity faced by many older adults in California.

Dr. Padilla-Frausto is a commissioner for the Los Angeles County Mental Health Commission, appointed by Hilda Solis, Board of Supervisor for District 1. She also serves on the Adult, Adolescent, and Child Technical Advisory Committees, and the Mental Health and Substance Use Workgroup for the California Health Interview Survey.

Tara Niendam, PhD, is an Associate Professor in Psychiatry and completed her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is the Executive Director of the UC Davis Early Psychosis Programs (EDAPT and SacEDAPT Clinics). She has developed 4 early psychosis programs in Northern California based on the coordinated specialty care model of early psychosis, sharing expertise on the course of early psychotic illness, evidenced based treatments for psychosis, and the use of standardized clinical assessments of early psychosis symptoms, functioning, and outcomes. Overall, her research focuses on improving clinical and functional outcomes for youth with serious mental illness. She is the Principal Investigator for the Early Psychosis Intervention Network of California, or EPI-CAL, which is part of the new NIMH-funding EPI-NET project. EPI-CAL will bring together 12 county and 6 university EP programs to bring client-level data to the clinician's fingertips and enable large scale data-driven approaches to improve outcomes for EP care.

Pia Escudero, LCSW, is a mental health leader and social work professional with over 30 years of experience in mental health and health programs for the Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest school district in the United States. As Executive Director of the Student Health and Human Services (SHHS) Division, she directs the services of over 2000 school mental health and health professionals including social workers, nurses, pediatricians, child psychiatrists, human relations and restorative practices experts, wellness programs and positive behavior intervention and supports district wide. Her expertise includes the development,



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implementation, and evaluation of high-quality interventions that promote resiliency, healing, and lifelong health.

Richard Knecht, MS, has delivered program operations, leadership, strategic planning and training services to public and private healthcare and human service systems for more than 30 years. He presently serves as an advisor and consultant to CDSS and its partners, providing guidance and cross-system statewide technical assistance toward shared management processes for children and families. Richard is the former Chief Operating Officer at Olympus View Hospital, and the former Sr. Vice President of Program Operations at the River Oak Center for Children. He served in Placer County for nearly a decade, directing its highly regarded children's system. He is a past Chair of the Board of Directors at Ifoster.org, and presently sits on the advisory board at the California Children's Trust and OPEEKA, a unique software development company.

Brenda Grealish, MA has over 25 years of State of California experience and is currently serving as the Executive Officer for the Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health. Prior to her appointment to the Council, she worked in multiple positions at the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) including Chief of the Medi-Cal Behavioral Health Division, Acting Deputy and Assistant Deputy Director of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services and Chief of the Mental Health Services Division. While at DHCS, she was responsible for overseeing the planning, implementation, and evaluation of DHCS mental health and substance use disorder services, programs, and policies relating to Medi-Cal. Ms. Grealish has experience in planning, organizing, and directing program operations and policy formulation for both Medi-Cal and non Medi-Cal community mental health services, as well as administration of the Specialty Mental Health Services 1915 (b) waiver and the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Mental Health Block Grant. Early in her career, she worked in several research positions at the former Department of Mental Health and at the California Department of Corrections Office of Research, the latter of which she was appointed as Deputy Director in 2012. Ms. Grealish earned a master's degree in Psychology from the California State University, Sacramento, and a bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of California, Davis.