



Puerto Rico Cohort 6, Funding Period 2014–2019

Grantee Overview

Puerto Rico LAUNCH is being implemented in three municipalities—the islands of Culebra and Vieques and on the mainland in Fajardo (Barrio Pueblo)—through the Puerto Rico Department of Health Northeast Region (Institute of Violence Prevention and Control) in partnership with its mental health partner, the Mental Health and Addiction Services Administration (ASSMCA, for its Spanish acronym). Puerto Rico LAUNCH supports collaborative efforts and the integration of multiple components of a model system of care and prevention strategies for children ages birth to 8 years and their families. The local pilots were selected based on environmental and service need: Fajardo has a high incidence of poverty and violence and an elevated high school dropout rate; Vieques and Culebra are islands, making access to services in these regions particularly challenging (ferry or airplane). The residents of Vieques have been challenged by significant poverty and geographic isolation as well as longstanding concerns about the risk of exposure to environmental pollutants caused by 60 years of military operations on the island. Culebra Island is the municipality with the smallest population; it is challenged by its geographic location as well as access to health and education services. Puerto Rico LAUNCH is committed to increasing access to health services through screening and referrals and to increasing the availability of resources in rural municipalities. It strives to establish a sustainable model of integrated services in the Northeast Region that can be replicated in other regions.

Project Milestones

All [Project LAUNCH](#) grantees implement five promotion and prevention strategies intended to increase access to preventative care and to raise the quality of prevention and promotion services available to children and families. In Puerto Rico LAUNCH, these five strategies are implemented through the following activities:

- **Screening and Assessment:** After identifying community strengths and needs regarding developmental and social–emotional screenings, Puerto Rico LAUNCH staff worked with multiple external stakeholders, including the Governor’s Multi-Sectorial Early Childhood Council and the Puerto Rico departments of education, health, and the family, to increase the number of children screened. Trained staff now use the [Ages and Stages Questionnaire® \(ASQ-3™\)](#), the [Ages & Stages Questionnaires®: Social–Emotional \(ASQ:SE-2™\)](#), and the [Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers](#) in various contexts, including Head Start centers, clinics, public housing projects, and primary schools. LAUNCH staff continue to hold trainings to increase staff capacity to conduct these child assessments. In addition to supporting the needs of children in the community, staff have worked to train health and education professionals on adult screening

using the [Healthy Families](#) model. This model identifies screenings for maternal depression, alcohol consumption, parental relationships, and domestic violence. Community members, including pediatricians, school nurses, and Head Start personnel, have also been successfully recruited to join local early childhood councils in the three Puerto Rico LAUNCH municipalities.

- **Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:** Curricula from the [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning](#) (CSEFEL), [Parent-Child Interaction Therapy](#), and [Teacher-Child Interaction Training](#) have been selected as evidence-based practices to support mental health consultation efforts in Puerto Rico. They will be implemented in child care and early education centers as well as primary schools, which serve students in pre-K through grade 2. LAUNCH psychologists have been recruited to implement the curricula in each setting. Social workers and other mental health professionals will be trained to continue the curricula in each setting. LAUNCH staff have also been trained in CSEFEL and have begun identifying classrooms in need of support through classroom observations and conversations with school staff.
- **Integrating Behavioral Health into Primary Care:** Puerto Rico LAUNCH staff have worked to secure informal collaboration agreements with regional medical insurance directors and local health centers in all three municipalities to collaborate on behavioral health integration efforts. Using the [Healthy Steps](#) model, LAUNCH personnel are trained to work in doctors' offices both to provide screenings and to train health provider staff in coordinated referrals. Looking into the future, staff plans to further identify any existing barriers to integrated models of care and to formalize collaboration with the local health insurance provider contracted by the government to support this work.
- **Enhancing Home Visiting:** The Puerto Rico Department of Health conducted a scan of Home Visiting curricula and selected [Healthy Families America](#) as the model and [Growing Great Kids](#) for the Home Visiting curriculum. Growing Great Kids is being implemented within the Healthy Families America Home Visiting program in Vieques and in one region of the mainland. Project LAUNCH staff have attended trainings to increase capacity. Healthy Families focuses on violence prevention, conflict management, and parenting skills and will be used to support pregnant women, parents, and caregivers for children ages birth to 3 years. LAUNCH staff have also engaged local nurses from the Department of Health and the Family Department to participate in local councils and environmental scans roundtables on Home Visiting.
- **Family Strengthening:** Puerto Rico LAUNCH staff selected the CSEFEL parent curriculum to build parenting capacity and knowledge around social-emotional development. Local coordinators in two of the three Puerto Rico LAUNCH municipalities have been trained on the curriculum, which has also been adapted by the Department of the Family to better fit the Puerto Rico context.

Systems Integration

Puerto Rico LAUNCH aims to promote a local system of service integration that is available, accessible, and of high quality while addressing physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of children ages birth to 8 years and their families. They are accomplishing this goal in part through a collaboration with the Puerto Rico Administration of Mental Health and Anti-Addiction Services, which includes participating in their monthly Community Council meetings and in Interagency Community Council meetings. Puerto Rico LAUNCH is also collaborating with governmental agencies and non-governmental agencies that serve children ages birth to 8 years and universities to provide public



education and awareness about LAUNCH at community health fairs. At the community level, Puerto Rico LAUNCH is conducting surveys to increase and enhance referrals to necessary services for children and families and to improve service delivery and coordination.

Vignette

At two recent “Let’s Play for Peace” workshops, in which Project LAUNCH collaborated in the annual “Ni Una Bala Mas” (No More Bullets) campaign of the Public Housing Department, mothers and fathers who participated expressed satisfaction with what they had learned in the workshop. For example, they appreciated learning about games they could play with their children and grandchildren to promote their development and relate positively to them. They also expressed pride about the positive impact they are having on their children, while accepting that they have to learn to promote the development of their parenting skills and the social–emotional skills of their children. In these workshops, children and parents participated together. Children were smiling when they were simply allowed to be children and were able to play with their parents/caregivers through active participation. Many of them were able to identify the positive differences between playing with guns and other war toys versus playing with educational toys. One parent who participated in the workshop expressed, “My child is hyperactive, but with this toy he has managed to stay quiet for more than five minutes.” Another parent remarked, “I’ve had a lot of fun; these activities should be done more often.”

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