



History

The Pennsylvania Association for Infant Mental Health (PA-AIMH), founded in 2011, is an interdisciplinary, professional, non-profit organization established to build, promote, and support an infant and early childhood mental health workforce across the state. The establishment of the association was a recommendation by the Pennsylvania Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Committee because of the key recommendations to:

- Adopt and promote a system of early childhood mental health competencies for professionals across all levels of service provision for families with children from conception through age five
- All individuals who work with very young children have training exposure and the opportunity for reflective practice consultation consistent with their professional standards

In 2009, the funding climate did not support a fiscal investment in a framework to support the advisory committee's recommendations, however a dedicated group of infant and early childhood mental health professionals worked tirelessly to make the dream of an infant mental health association a reality in PA. Annually, even before the formal establishment of the association, this group ensured that specialized professional development was available to the PA workforce. Additionally, this group was included in various, multidisciplinary stakeholder groups so that they could be the "voice" for babies. We thank them for their fortitude and leadership!

In 2014, representatives from PA-AIMH were asked to serve on the PA Project LAUNCH Partnership Young Child Wellness Council. Project LAUNCH was awarded to the PA Department of Human Services Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, to engage in prevention and promotion activities aimed at improving the social-emotional development, behavioral health, and overall wellness of children birth to 8 years of age. One key objective of the Project LAUNCH initiative was to "increase workforce knowledge of children's social emotional development" whereby to ensure that all community members share a common knowledge of social/emotional development and a common vision for child wellness and quality services. Through the state and local strategic planning process, it became evident an ardent desire remained to fulfill the 2009 recommendations of the ECMH Advisory Committee in the creation of infant and early childhood mental health competencies that would provide a professional development path for PA's cross sector professionals supporting the health and wellness of very young children. PA-AIMH would like to thank the PA Project LAUNCH Partnership who generously provided funding and support for the implementation of the *Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-focused Practice Promoting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health*[®].

PA-AIMH promotes uniform and nationally recognized competencies and standards to ensure that individuals engaged in multidisciplinary fields supporting young children and their families are trained in the current science of child development, infant mental health principles and relationship-based practices. PA-AIMH is responsible for implementing the statewide competency system, *Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-focused Practice Promoting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health*[®] (developed by the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health MI-AIMH), and for providing professional development through training and continuing education opportunities designed to build a more skillful infant and early childhood workforce.

PA-AIMH became the 27th member of the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health® in September 2016. The Alliance is a global organization that includes those states and countries whose infant and early childhood mental health associations have licensed the use of the *Competency Guidelines*® and/or *Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health*® under their associations' names. The Alliance seeks to build and sustain a reflective, skilled, culturally competent, and relationship-based workforce that supports infants, young children and their families so that all children begin their lives with warm, sensitive, stable and responsive caregiving relationships.

Since 2011, PA-AIMH has been an affiliate of the World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH), an international, not-for-profit organization for scientific and educational professionals whose central aim is to promote the mental wellbeing and healthy development of infants throughout the world, taking into account cultural, regional, and environmental variations, and to generate and disseminate scientific knowledge.

PA-AIMH is a membership organization open to all individuals in Pennsylvania who work with infants, young children and their families. PA-AIMH acts as a professional home and resource for professionals, policy makers, state systems partners, parents and caregivers, and the community at large. PA-AIMH offers educational opportunities such as conferences, regional networking events and workshops, and provides web-based information designed to enhance professional skills and knowledge and educate stakeholders about the importance of infant and early childhood mental health. More detailed information about our history, mission, strategic plan, leadership, and professional development opportunities can be found on our website: www.pa-aimh.org.