

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

California has a large and rapidly expanding children's population. Presently there are approximately 6.9 million children under 18 years of age in the State. Between 1980 and 1985, the State's population of infants and young children under six years of age increased by 25 percent. Moreover, the projected number of births is expected to remain at this higher level for the rest of the century.

The rapid rise in the number of children in the State combined with sweeping social and economic changes in California during the past 40 years have resulted in dramatic changes in family patterns, including an increased number of households headed by single parents and a greater number of women working in the labor force. In fact, the "traditional family," with a working father and a mother at home with the children, is becoming a modern day dinosaur.

Unfortunately, the demographic, economic, and social changes in California have had a severe impact on the ability of many parents to provide adequate nutrition, shelter, and medical care for their children. For example, the number of children living in poverty has doubled over the last six years. Nearly one-half of the young children who live in poverty live in homes headed by women. In addition, among three- to five-year olds living with single mothers, the incidence of poverty is 57 percent and among children under three it is 78 percent.

The rapid transformation that has taken place in family patterns has increased the need and demand for publicly-funded children's services in California. As these needs and demands have evolved, the State of California has responded by adding a host of individual programs, organizational units, and funding sources to address specific problems and concerns. This incremental growth in children's services agencies and programs over a period of time has resulted in a delivery system in California that is unmanageable and disjointed.

California presently administers more than \$5.9 billion annually to provide a wide variety of services for children in need, exclusive of the more than \$15 billion annually that the State spends on its kindergarten through grade 12 public school system. Approximately \$1.2 billion of the \$5.9 billion is spent by the State to fund 35 different programs for neglected and abused children, homeless children, and children in need of child care services.

The Commission's study revealed that California's children's services delivery system is in a state of utter confusion and disarray. It is administered by a hodge podge of state and local agencies that are unable to effectively serve the growing number of youth in need of services. Moreover, due to a vacuum of leadership, direction, and cooperation among children's services agencies, there are tremendous inequities in service levels, disproportionate costs of services, inefficient use of resources, and gaps in service delivery.

The disproportionate costs of services provided by the State's children's services delivery system is best exemplified by the varying types of treatment a neglected and abused child may receive. For

example, a neglected and abused child may be placed in a short-term county operated group facility where, due to the lack of available foster care homes, the child may remain indefinitely at an annual cost of approximately \$68,000 per year. In contrast, a similar neglected and abused child may end up in a licensed foster care home at an annual cost of approximately \$4,300.

The lack of direction and sound organization in the children's services delivery system is nowhere as painfully evident as in the tremendous confusion and waste of resources that is occurring in the state's child protective system. For example, the "assembly line" approach to investigating allegations of child abuse that the counties in the State are now using may involve as many as 22 separate interviews with different child welfare professionals. Besides being lengthy, exhaustive, and potentially traumatic to a child and his or her family, it is an extremely duplicative process that unnecessarily wastes the relatively limited resources available for children's services.

Due to the fragmented organization for serving children in California, there are also numerous gaps in the provision of services. For example, while portions of the Welfare and Institutions Code are designed to address the problems relating to neglected and abused youth and status offenders, there is no state agency charged with providing services for runaway/homeless youths. As a result, although at least 75 percent of the hard-core "street kids" engage in either criminal activity, drugs, or prostitution to support themselves, there are no statewide programs to help these youths.

The tremendous inequity in the provision of children's services in the State is starkly demonstrated in the area of subsidized child care. The State Department of Education funds approximately 90,000 full-time spaces for children whose parents qualify for the State's child care subsidy. However, a recent study conducted by a private non-profit child development organization indicated that for every child in Los Angeles County receiving subsidized child care, there are seven to eight children whose parents are equally or more needy and do not receive State supported child care services.

Without a dramatic rethinking and restructuring of our State's children's services delivery system, a significant portion of our next generation of children will not be able to assume responsible roles as productive members of society. Moreover, many of these youths ultimately will end up in the State's criminal justice institutions, the welfare systems, state hospitals, or other state-supported care facilities and programs.

The Commission's preliminary report presents the results of Phase 1 of a two-part study. Specifically, Phase 1 focused on identifying the major problems in the delivery of services to children in California. The preliminary report summarizes the 23 findings and 15 recommendations for improving the system. The recommendations include the following:

1. The State should adopt a uniform children's services policy that addresses the needs of the whole child.

2. The State should develop an integrated and cohesive structure for delivering children's services.
3. The State should encourage a coordinated network between state, local and private agencies for delivering children's services.
4. The State should consider short-term changes to allow the current system to function more effectively.
5. The State should rethink and restructure the method it uses to administer the child protective services system.
6. The State should encourage the development of child care facilities.

Phase II of the study will begin immediately and will result in a final report which will be issued in August 1987. This report will contain a detailed review of each of the long-term recommendations and an implementation plan.