SERVICES OFFERED & FUNDING GAPS OF PENNSYLVANIA CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS

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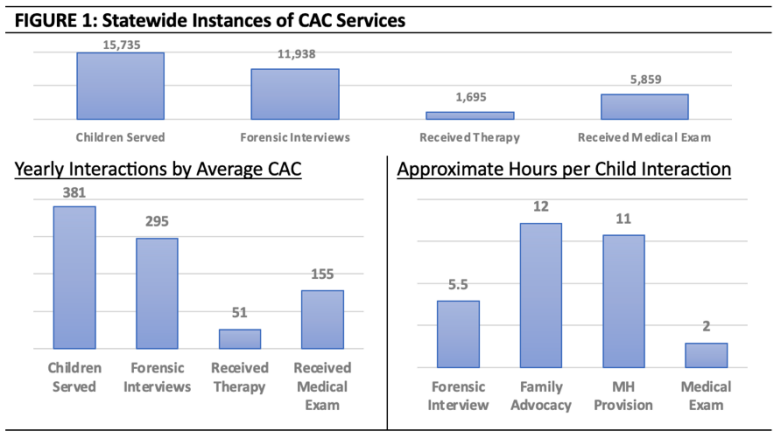
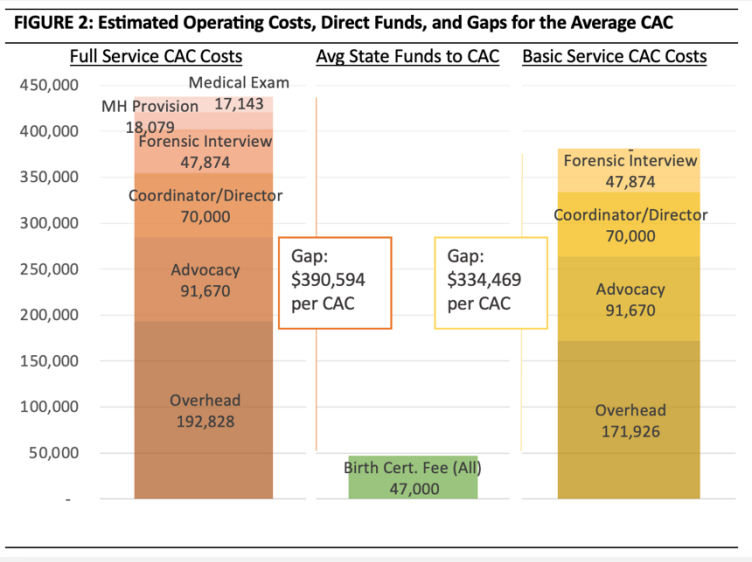
In 2022, 41 Child Advocacy Centers across the state of Pennsylvania served over 15,000 children and their families because of suspected abuse. Among services offered, the facilitation of forensic interviews and victim advocacy are the most prevalent. Many children also receive mental health services and medical assistance, as shown in Figure 1. The average PA CAC served 380 children in 2022, with 295 receiving a forensic interview and advocacy supports (*Source: National Children's Alliance Statistics and NCATrack Report, 2022*). The largest ten CACs see 400 to 1,600 children per year. Each professional service offered to a child and their family requires multiple hours by CAC personnel to perform, with approximations presented in the Figure (based on informal surveys of CACs around the nation). In addition to the direct services provided to suspected child abuse victims, every CAC must have personnel in coordinating roles to facilitate the multi-disciplinary investigative team and perform case review and case tracking.



Combining this data of actual numbers of services offered and typical hours required to perform them with salary data provided by the *NCA Staffing & Salary Survey, 2022*,[1] we estimated the operating costs for the average CAC in Pennsylvania, presented in Figure 2. A CAC offering all services (at an average rate across PA CACs), represented by the left-hand bar, will have estimated operating costs of over $437,000 per year.[2] One offering only forensic interview and advocacy services incur costs of over $380,000.



The only guaranteed, direct funding that a CAC in Pennsylvania receives is $47,000, budgeted statewide from $2.5 million collected annually from fees on certified birth certificate copies. After accounting for this funding, the average CAC faces a gap of well over $300,000, which must be found from other sources.[3]

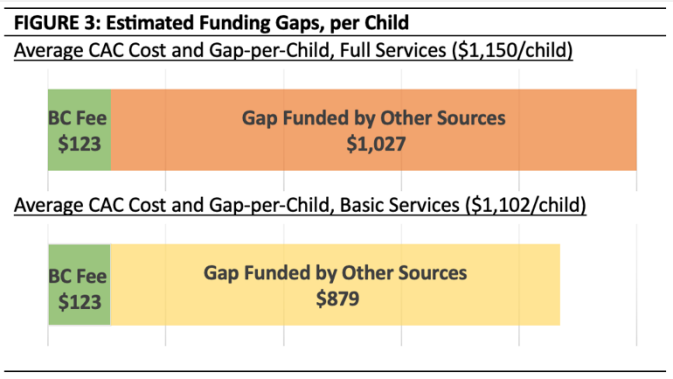
CACs address these funding gaps in a number of ways, including fundraising in their local communities, applying for competitive state and federal grants,

[1] Personnel figures are based on annual salary rates that were converted to hourly rates and multiplied by the number of hours estimated to perform a service, multiplied by actual number of services performed on average. These cost estimates should be considered conservative, as actual services are typically provided on a per case basis at a rate higher than what these annual salary rates provide.

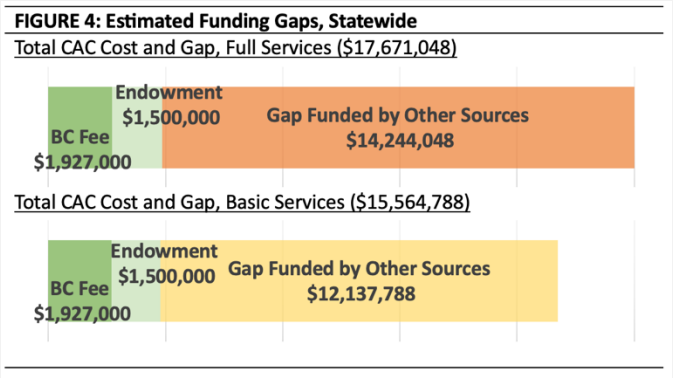
[2] A conservative estimate for overhead is based on an office space of 100 sq. ft. per FTE required to perform services (4 on average) at an average rate of $20 per sq. ft. per month, multiplied by 2 for other office and utility costs.

[3] Even with more conservative operating costs of half the estimate shown, the funding gap is well over $200,000 per CAC.

seeking support from other local stakeholder groups (e.g. local children and youth agencies, district attorney's offices) and seeking support from county budget offices. However, none of this funding is steady, guaranteed or consistent amongst our 41 operating CACs. Many CACs may address the funding gaps by offering fewer services or referring victims to other organizations (i.e. outsourcing mental health and medical exams to other providers). Figure 3 illustrates this gap on a per-child basis. Of the estimated $1,150 it costs to serve the average child who seeks services at a CAC, only $123 is covered by direct, guaranteed funding while over $1,000 must be sought through other sources. For the CAC that does not directly provide mental health and medical services, that gap is still over $800 per child. It should be noted here that addressing this gap requires substantial attention by CAC personnel, with full-time resources targeted towards fund-raising and grant writing, and perhaps away from direct services to children. As a point of comparison, North Carolina funds CACs at a rate of $1,141 per child; New Jersey at $2,613 per child, and New York at $349 per child (*Source CACPA, 2023*).



On a statewide basis, these estimates suggest that the state could and should play a larger role in direct, guaranteed funding for CACs. The services provided by CACs are relied upon in their communities by law enforcement, prosecutors and social workers to ensure that children who are the subject of abuse allegations have access to the best possible care. With the help of CACs, children are able to share their story without multiple agencies interviewing them and with hope for the best possible outcomes in safety and healing for the child and accountability for perpetrators of abuse. Even after adding the statewide allocation for competitive Endowment Act funding of approximately $1.5 million per year (thus, not applicable to the average CAC since receipt of this funding is limited to only those who are able to "win" it), the estimated gap is over $14 million per year for services actually rendered in 2022, shown in Figure 4. For the basic services offered by CACs (forensic interviews and advocacy), the gap that has to be covered through other funds is over $12 million.



In summary, conservative operating costs estimates of Pennsylvania CACs suggest that the direct, guaranteed funding provided by the Commonwealth, of $47,000 per CAC ($123 per child served), covers only a very small fraction of the costs of actual service provided. The policy proposal suggested by this analysis is to increase the amount that every CAC receives on an annual basis. The effects that this funding change would have on CACs would be immediate and large, including:

- Investing in the growing role that CACs are playing in abuse investigations, which are growing in numbers in Pennsylvania;
- Ensure CACs have staff capacity to respond to all cases in a timely manner
- Shifting resources and time from closing the funding gap to directly serving families.
- Increasing services, such as mental health support and medical exams, including follow-up, that have long-term effects on family health;
- Helping CACs attract and retain qualified professionals.
- Supporting CAC personnel training, which is required as research on forensic interview and family support is increasing in pace OR. Ensure CAC personnel maintain current training on evidence-based research and best practices for responding to child abuse.

CONCLUSION: Children's Advocacy Centers are key to delivering an effective, trauma-informed, multidisciplinary team response to child abuse; to achieving healing and justice for child victims; and to making communities safer. However, to achieve these objectives and to serve every child with the full array of services needed, CACs must be better funded by the Commonwealth. This report was requested by members of the PA Senate Aging and Youth Committee during the August 8, 2023 hearing focused on CACs. Related to this information, included is the link for the Case for Support developed by Children's Advocacy Centers of PA, providing more information about the need for increased funding of CACs in the state.