

# Experts' Perspectives toward a Population Health Approach for Children with Medical Complexity<sup>1</sup>

**INTRODUCTION:** Children with medical complexity<sup>2</sup> (CMC) have serious and complex chronic illnesses that result in very different health trajectories than other children. It is unclear how well traditional pediatric health outcome measures apply to CMC. We sought to identify potential measures that align with a broader view of health for CMC – one that might also help redefine health for all children. Research was conducted at UCLA and University of Wisconsin-Madison by Elizabeth Barnert, Ryan Coller, and colleagues.

**METHODS:** We interviewed 23 national experts on CMC to better understand population health for CMC. Interviewees included child and family advocates; health and social service providers; and research, health system, and policy leaders.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:** Population health for CMC requires a view of health that is child-specific and changes over time. The health of families and the health of CMC are tightly interdependent. The health of CMC is also highly impacted by the child's social environment.

## RESULTS: THEMES AND REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

**THEME 1:** CMC share unifying characteristics that can help guide all health systems in caring for this population.  
*"[All CMC] share the interface of their disease with the community and how they can adapt to living with their condition in the community."*

**THEME 2:** Optimal health for CMC is dynamic and means something different for each child.  
*"I think what [health for CMC] means is living as well as possible for as long as possible."*

**THEME 3:** Health of CMC is intertwined with health of families.  
*"Let's face it—these kids are a huge responsibility for the family to take care of. Unless we support the family, we're going to see these kids in emergency rooms in our hospitals over and over again."*

**THEME 4:** Social conditions and environments are especially important for the health of CMC.  
*"Despite getting the best possible care, mortality and morbidity go up with poverty in all of the conditions in the CMC group."*

**THEME 5:** Measuring population health for CMC is challenging but necessary.  
*"Really great measures for typically developing kids exist for all the different age groups, but they really do not work very well for atypically developing kids."*

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1 Barnert et al., Experts' Perspectives Toward a Population Health Approach for Children with Medical Complexity, Acad Pediatr. 2017 Aug;17(6):672-677. doi: 10.1016/j.acap.2017.02.010.

2 CMC are most commonly conceptualized as having a combination of significant family-identified service needs; chronic, severe conditions; functional limitations; and high healthcare use (Cohen et. al, 2011).