Primary Prevention Framework

For Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

Summary Version

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILD PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

This summary version provides an overview of the main concepts in the Framework. Please visit the [Prevention Initiative](#) webpage of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action for the full version.

The Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (the Framework) provides guidance for humanitarian workers on the key actions and considerations to apply when developing or implementing programming to prevent harm to children in humanitarian settings at the population-level.

1.0. THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIMARY PREVENTION

Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPHA) is "the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children in humanitarian action."[1] While significant effort and improvements have been made in the sector on responding when harm has already taken place, less focus has been placed on how we can **prevent** harm to children before it occurs. Investment in primary prevention is essential to ensuring accountability to children and the centrality of protection within humanitarian preparedness and response efforts.

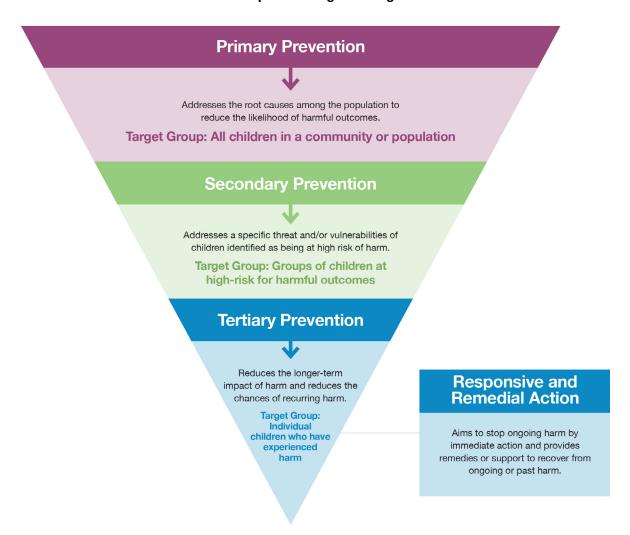Primary prevention is critical in humanitarian settings for three main reasons:[2]

- An ethical responsibility to prevent harm to children before it occurs whenever possible by all humanitarians;
- Improving the sustainability and long-term impact of humanitarian responses; and
- Increased cost-effectiveness of child protection interventions.[3]

Prevention and response programming work together. Prevention approaches may reduce, but will never eliminate, the need for effective response services.[4] Primary prevention and response programming are integrated and both essential components of child protection systems. Interventions to strengthen child protection systems -- such as building workforce capacities, increasing awareness on child developmental needs, or investing more in the social service workforce -- will support both prevention and response approaches.

2.0. A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO PREVENTION

In accordance with the public health model of prevention, there are three levels of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary prevention is about identifying and addressing trends or patterns of risk within the population, as opposed to identifying individual cases for service provision. The definitions for each level of prevention as stated in the [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)](#) are provided below.[5]

Levels of CPHA Prevention and Response Programming

Primary Prevention

Addresses the root causes among the population to reduce the likelihood of harmful outcomes.

Target Group: All children in a community or population

Secondary Prevention

Addresses a specific threat and/or vulnerabilities of children identified as being at high risk of harm.

Target Group: Groups of children at high-risk for harmful outcomes

Tertiary Prevention

Reduces the longer-term impact of harm and reduces the chances of recurring harm.

Target Group: Individual children who have experienced harm

Responsive and Remedial Action

Aims to stop ongoing harm by immediate action and provides remedies or support to recover from ongoing or past harm.

This Framework focuses on primary prevention. Primary prevention addresses the root causes of harm to children within a population or community, leading to an overall reduction in the number of families and children in need of secondary and tertiary prevention services and response services. Investment in primary prevention is essential to ensuring accountability to children and the centrality of protection within humanitarian preparedness and response efforts.

3.0. KEY TERMS FOR PRIMARY PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

Understanding the root causes of harm to children and protective factors that mitigate harm within a context is the foundation of primary prevention efforts.

- Risk factors are threats in a child's environment and vulnerabilities that increase the probability of harmful outcomes for children. These include root causes of harm to children.
- Protective factors reduce the probability of a harmful outcome and support well-being.

Increased Protective Factors + **Reduced Risk Factors** = **Prevention of Harm to Children**

Harmful outcomes for children refer to dangers and injuries, physical and emotional maltreatment, sexual and gender-based violence, mental health and psychosocial distress, association with armed forces or armed groups, child labor or family separation.

What does population-level in primary prevention mean?

Primary prevention aims to reduce the risk of harm for all children within a population or a subgroup of the population. A **population** can refer to a whole society or a part of it. For example, a subgroup of the whole society could be a geographic community and include all the children within that community. It can also refer to a sub-group of children within the broader society. For example, all children living in refugee camps within a country, or all children aged one to five years old in the broader society.

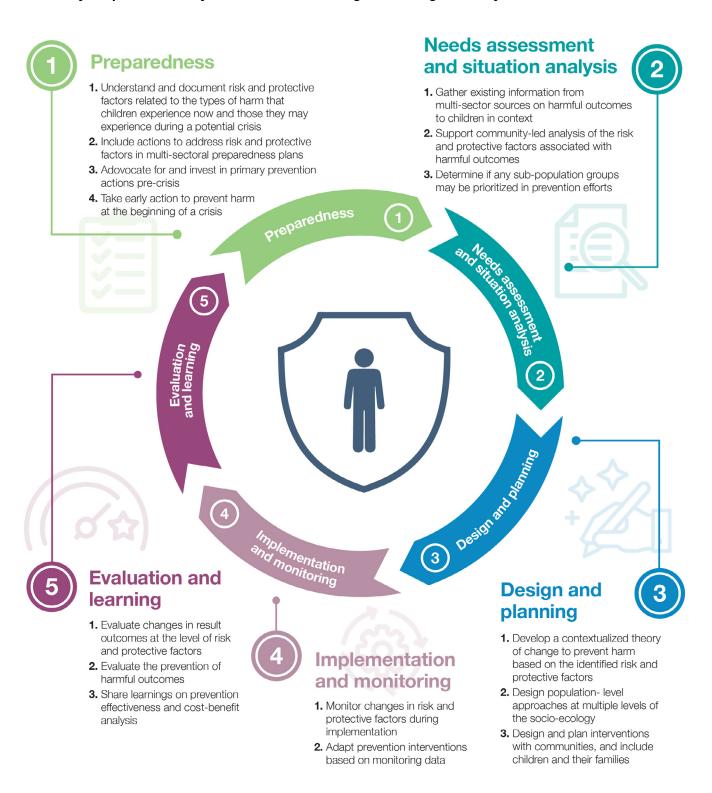# 4.0. PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE CPHA PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS

Eight principles for effective primary prevention interventions have been identified based on existing evidence.[6] **These principles are to be applied at all steps of the Framework**.

Measure outcomes

Use a strengths-based approach

Use a holistic, multi-sector approach

Facilitate community-ownership

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Address multiple levels of the socio-ecology

02 07

Be child centered and inclusive

8 CPHA PREVENTION PRINCIPLES

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Be context specific

Bridge development and humanitarian systems

5.0. THE FIVE STEPS OF PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

An overview of the key actions for primary prevention interventions during the program cycle is provided below. This is followed by further details on actions to take for each step covered in the full Framework document.

Key Steps for Primary Prevention in the Program Management Cycle

1 Preparedness

1. Understand and document risk and protective factors related to the types of harm that children experience now and those they may experience during a potential crisis
2. Include actions to address risk and protective factors in multi-sectoral preparedness plans
3. Advocate for and invest in primary prevention actions pre-crisis
4. Take early action to prevent harm at the beginning of a crisis

2 Needs assessment and situation analysis

1. Gather existing information from multi-sector sources on harmful outcomes to children in context
2. Support community-led analysis of the risk and protective factors associated with harmful outcomes
3. Determine if any sub-population groups may be prioritized in prevention efforts

5 Evaluation and learning

1. Evaluate changes in result outcomes at the level of risk and protective factors
2. Evaluate the prevention of harmful outcomes
3. Share learnings on prevention effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis

4 Implementation and monitoring

1. Monitor changes in risk and protective factors during implementation
2. Adapt prevention interventions based on monitoring data

3 Design and planning

1. Develop a contextualized theory of change to prevent harm based on the identified risk and protective factors
2. Design population- level approaches at multiple levels of the socio-ecology
3. Design and plan interventions with communities, and include children and their families

The Primary Prevention Framework for CPHA provides further details on actions to take when developing and implementing prevention programming at each step of the program management cycle. The document also provides several programmatic examples and further discussion on:

- Undertaking primary prevention efforts in both short and long-term funding cycles;

- Addressing social norms and behavior change in humanitarian settings when social norms are identified as risk factors associated with harmful outcomes for children; and

- Measuring prevention outcomes in humanitarian settings, including links to tools to identify and prioritize risk and protective factors as well as suggested monitoring and evaluation methodologies.

ENDNOTES

1 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019). *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019 Edition), Annex 1: Glossary. https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/cpms/#ch008_001

2 For more information on the importance of primary prevention, refer to The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2021). *From Theory to Practice: Towards a Framework for Primary Prevention in Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: A Position Paper.* https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/position-paper-theory-practice-towards-framework-primary-prevention

3 While studies specifically evaluating cost-effectiveness of primary prevention efforts for child protection in humanitarian settings are lacking, evidence from the non-humanitarian child protection efforts and other humanitarian sectors indicates that prevention interventions are more cost-effective than response-focused programming. See also The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2021), 2021-2025 Strategy, *The Centrality of Children and their Protection: A Clarion Call,* p.30. https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/alliance-strategy-2021-2025-clarion-call-centrality-children-and

4 Runyan, C. and Runyan, D. (2019). Re-Visioning Public Health Approaches for Protecting Children. Lonne, B. Scott. D, Higgins, D. & Herrenkohl, T.I. (Eds.), *Using an Injury Prevention Model to Inform a Public Health Approach to Child Protection* (p. 79-95). Child Maltreatment: Contemporary Issues in Research and Policy 9. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05858-6_6

5 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019). *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019 Edition), Annex 1: Glossary. https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/cpms/#ch008_001

6 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, (2021). Prevention Framework of Action: Desk Review Synthesis. https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/prevention-framework-desk-review-synthesis