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Family decision-making in children's' use of psycho pharmaceuticals.

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Over the last decade, the use of medications as a frontline treatment in the management of child and adolescent emotional, behavioral and mental health disorders has become accepted practice. Recently, concerns have been raised over increased prescribing, use in younger children, use of multiple medications and lack of research on safety and efficacy for children. Additionally, the FDA recently issued black box warnings for certain medications. Debate on these issues is ongoing among policy makers and clinicians. However, an important stakeholder has gone unheard--families of children taking these psychiatric medications. For many families, psychiatric medication has dramatically improved daily life. But, the decision making process around medication is often lengthy and complex.

To better understand the perspective of families, authors conducted a state-wide structured survey and focus groups with parents. Issues explored include the process and support families experience when deciding to use psychiatric medication, use of alternative treatments, experiences with prescribers, and barriers to accessing therapy and medication visits. The mail survey targeted families across Massachusetts with children 18 years old or younger who had taken psychiatric medication in the last twelve months. Families were identified through member lists from PAL, a state-wide consumer advocacy agency for families whose children have mental health needs, and through other consumer and advocacy organizations focusing on child mental health. Focus groups were conducted with families through the PAL parent support specialist network. This presentation will discuss the policy and practice implications of the findings for families with children mental health needs.