



The business community cares about **the workforce of today and building a strong, lasting workforce for tomorrow**. Business leaders recognize the critical role that families play to keep our economy going and our nation thriving.

Now is the time to invest in our nation's greatest resource—our youngest children and the families who love and nurture them. We must expand Early Head Start and ensure all families have the wraparound support they need during the most critical years of a child's development—prenatal to age three—to help parents and families build a strong foundation for a brighter future.

- Early Head Start provides comprehensive, no-cost, wraparound support, such as home visiting, enriching child care, and parental skill-building and education, to pregnant families and children from income-eligible households during the most crucial years in a child's development—prenatal to age three.
- By providing infants and toddlers and their families with wraparound support focused on prenatal to age three early development and learning, parents and families are better equipped with the skills they need to build a strong foundation for their young children's future.

The Need

Our youngest children are our future leaders and our future workforce, and their brains are rapidly developing right now. They only get one chance at a head start.

- Prior to the pandemic, Early Head Start only reached 11% of eligible infants and toddlers and their families. Because of COVID-19, even more children and their families have fallen behind.
- A child's brain develops the most in the first three years, setting the stage for lifelong physical, social, and emotional health.



Only **11%** of eligible children and their families had access.

- ✓ We have a unique window of opportunity—prenatal to toddler—to build a young child's foundational physical, mental, social, and emotional health, and support their lifelong character- and skill-building, growth, and development.
- ✓ One in six children in the United States has a disability. By identifying children's developmental delays early, we can intervene early, reducing the likelihood of their disabilities worsening, decreasing the need for later services, and saving money in the long run.

When we invest in working parents and their young children from the start, we are not only elevating child development but workforce development.

- Policies and programs that support working families are a priority among America's business leaders, and rightly so. When businesses offer policies that support working families and their infants and toddlers, such as paid maternity and paternity leave, on-site child care, or child care reimbursements, employers see increased employee retention, better health and wellness among their employees, and even a greater ability to attract talent.
- [One-third of the workforce](#) are working parents. We can't rebuild our economy without offering working parents and families the wraparound support that helps them care for their infants and toddlers.
- COVID-19 has resulted in an exodus of working parents—especially working mothers—from the workforce to care for children during child care and school disruptions. In fact, [1.8 million women](#) who left the workforce during COVID-19 have yet to return, largely because of child care needs.

Today's families, especially income-eligible families, are struggling to support their infants and toddlers. Without access to wraparound support, our country's economic and community structures are at risk.

- Investing in families and communities is investing in our future workforce. If we hope to turn around the record low birth rate among U.S. families and eliminate a potential economic downturn, we need to ensure that we provide young children—prenatal to age three—and their families with wraparound support.
- Parents, especially parents from income-eligible households, are better positioned to support their young children when they have the skills and resources to help them foster this development.

Why Increase Funding for Early Head Start?

For over 25-years, Early Head Start has helped millions of young children and their families thrive.

- **We meet families where they are and successfully serve the needs of diverse communities.** Our model offers a range of locally-driven options, including year-round and home-based support, and robust partnership opportunities with child care partners.
- **We build a strong foundation for infants and toddlers AND their families.** When parents and families can access the prenatal to age three wraparound support they need, at no cost to their family, they strengthen their parenting skills and their bond with their children.
- **By ensuring young children have what they need during those first years, we create a strong foundation for their future.** Research shows that investing money to lift kids out of poverty, especially young children, has enormous long-term, economic benefits:
 - ✓ They do better in school, they're more likely to graduate high school, and more likely to attend college.
 - ✓ They're less likely to be recipients of public assistance.
 - ✓ When they're older, their health is better.
 - ✓ They're less likely to be engaged in criminal activity, and they live longer.
- **We build parents' and families' parenting skills and give them the support to put these skills into practice every day.** We offer income-eligible families no-cost wraparound support, such as full-day, high-quality child care, healthcare screenings, and home visiting, putting parents and families in a better position to pursue education and work opportunities, all of which build their child's foundational and long-term health and wellness.
- **We build communities of care and cross-sector collaborations.** Through Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, Early Head Start programs have partnered with over 1,400 child care centers and 1,000 in-home child care providers to provide 38,000 infants and toddlers and their families quality wraparound support. By working together, we can more effectively and efficiently extend Early Head Start resources to more early learning settings.
- **We make sure families and young children see themselves, their culture, and backgrounds through our services and care providers.** Recognizing that families, especially Hispanic families, underutilize government assistance programs that serve families who experience poverty, Early Head Start is committed to prioritizing diversity. We integrate cultural competencies directly into our standards and hire child care teachers and staff and health care providers who represent the families, infants and toddlers they serve.
- **We create a bridge to Head Start and kindergarten.** Our connection to Head Start allows us to continue to support children through age five. Research shows that Early Head Start infants and toddlers who continue to Head Start are more ready for kindergarten.
- **We help break the generational cycles of poverty.** Research shows that:
 - ✓ Early Head Start mothers who enrolled during pregnancy are better able to emotionally support their children, which leads to improved social-emotional health and cognitive development.
 - ✓ investing money to lift kids out of poverty, especially young children, has enormous lifelong benefits, including improved academic performance, and better health.

How it Gets Done

Only one in 10 infants, toddlers, and families who should have access to Early Head Start based on their income currently do. Why? Because of insufficient funding. Increasing funding is a necessary first step to ensure all families have access to the crucial support and services they need during their child's earliest years. It's a good investment, too. For every dollar spent on early childhood education, the return is between \$4 and \$9.



- To support young children and their families through an expansion of Early Head Start, the federal government must:
 - ✓ permanently expanding the number of Early Head Start spaces funded on an annual basis by 500,000; and
 - ✓ make sure all income-eligible children, age zero to five, can access Early Head Start and Head Start services
- State governments also have a significant role to play to expand Early Head Start, including:
 - ✓ allocating COVID-19 recovery funding to expand Early Head Start and create or improve facilities; and
 - ✓ encouraging partnerships with child care programs to reach more children.
- The business community has a strong voice to advocate on behalf of working families and infants and toddlers.
 - ✓ Contact your local Head Start Association to learn more about how they are helping working parents and young children in your community.
 - ✓ Contact your state and federal representatives to advocate for additional Early Head Start funding.

The Vision

Early Head Start helps families navigate and access the comprehensive, wraparound support they need during the most critical years of their children's development—prenatal to age three. **When all families are able to build a strong foundation for their children, we all have a brighter, healthier future.**