



Healthy brain development is important to parents and families, as is the social and emotional development that happens most during a child's earliest years. **They recognize the value of helping their children learn and grow new skills to ensure their child's success.**

Our youngest children, and their families who help them grow, are our nation's greatest resource. Now is the time to level the playing field and make sure they all have the wraparound support they need during the most critical years of a child's development—prenatal to age three. We must expand Early Head Start to ensure that all families can access the support that will help them build a strong foundation for a brighter future.

- Early Head Start provides no-cost, comprehensive, wraparound support, such as home visiting, quality 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.
- It is the only federal program focused on prenatal to age three early development and learning for families from income-eligible households, with a proven impact on the lives of infants and toddlers and their families.
- Early Head Start strengthens families by:
 - ✓ giving parents and families early intervention support, education, and resources that build lifelong skills;
 - ✓ increasing parent and family engagement and creating closer bonds; and
 - ✓ [helping families navigate and access critical services](#), especially children and families of color who historically have faced inequitable access.

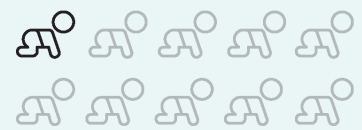
The Need

Every parent wants the best for their children, and children only get one chance at a head start—prenatal to age three.

- The window of opportunity for parents and families to build their infant’s and toddler’s foundational physical, social, and emotional health is small.
 - ✓ The first three years of a child’s life are the most critical for brain development, setting the stage for lifelong physical, social, and emotional health.
 - ✓ In a baby’s first three years of life, the brain forms more than [one million neural connections each second](#). Connections that get reinforced stay, but over time, connections that aren’t reinforced are lost.

- Rising child care costs, a lack of prenatal, pregnancy, and postpartum services, and no federal paid family leave policy make it difficult for parents and families to access quality development support, leaving their young children at a disadvantage.
 - ✓ This is especially true among families from income-eligible households. 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 are struggling [as poverty rates for children and families increase](#).

- Parents know the value of building a strong healthy physical, social, and emotional foundation; it is the key to lifelong happiness and success.
 - ✓ When all parents and children are able to access no-cost wraparound support, education, and resources to help them intervene early, strengthen their parenting skills, and support the development of children in their earliest years, we can level the playing field for all families.



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

Why Increase Funding for Early Head Start?

Through Early Head Start, there are no-cost wraparound supports available to help families build their child's foundational health.

- **Early Head Start builds a strong foundation for infants and toddlers AND their families.** When parents and families can access prenatal to age three wraparound early intervention support, education, and resources, their parenting skills and bond with their children grow stronger, ensuring their children's healthy development. Research shows that:
 - ✓ children in Early Head Start make gains in social-emotional skills, such as expressing and managing emotions, and sustain the positive impacts through at least fifth grade.
 - ✓ children also make gains in language and cognitive development, or how they think, explore and figure things out.
 - ✓ parents who participate in Early Head Start improve their parenting skills.
 - ✓ fathers who participate in Early Head Start are more engaged in their children's lives.
- **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 make sure families and young children see themselves, their culture, and backgrounds through our services and child care teachers and staff.** We integrate cultural competencies directly into our standards and hire child care teachers and staff and health care providers who represent the families and 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 provide equitable access to wraparound support so we can level the playing field for all families.** 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 provide early support for children and families, 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.



- At the local level, this means that parents and families have an essential role to play, advocating on behalf of young children prenatal to age three, along with the parents and caregivers who work so hard to foster their development.
 - ✓ Contact your local Head Start Association to learn more about how they are helping working parents and infants and toddlers in your community.
 - ✓ Contact your state and federal representatives to advocate for additional Early Head Start funding.
- At the state level, this means:
 - ✓ 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.
- At the federal level, this means:
 - ✓ permanently expanding the number of Early Head Start spaces funded on an annual basis by 500,000; and
 - ✓ making sure all income-eligible children, age prenatal to five, can access Early Head Start and Head Start services.

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 toddler. **When all families are able to build a strong foundation for their children, we all have a brighter, healthier future.**