



Partners are a critical resource for disseminating information about Early Head Start. **Their membership, advocacy wings, and parent connections are all avenues to help share your message,** alongside their own research-based information.

Our youngest children, and their families who support and nurture them, 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 these services that will help them build a strong foundation for a brighter future.

- Early Head Start provides comprehensive, wraparound support, such as home visiting, enriching child care, and parental skill-building and education, at no cost 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:
 - ✓ equipping parents and families with early intervention 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 strong start—prenatal to three.

- The window of opportunity for parents and families to build their child’s foundational physical, social, and emotional health is small.
 - ✓ The first three years of a child’s life are the most critical years 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.

→ 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.

→ Parents know the value of building a strong healthy physical, social, and emotional foundation; it is the key to lifelong happiness and success.



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

The image shows a light blue rectangular box. At the top, there are ten stylized icons of a baby crawling, arranged in two rows of five. The first icon in the top row is solid black, while the other nine are light grey. Below the icons, the text reads 'Only 11% of eligible children and their families had access.' The '11%' is in a larger, bold, pink font.

- ✓ When all parents and children are able to access prenatal to age three wraparound support, education, and resources to help them intervene early, boost their parenting skills, and support the development of young children in their earliest years, we can level the playing field for all families.

Today’s families, especially income-eligible families, are struggling to support their infants and toddlers.

- Rising child care costs, a lack of prenatal, pregnancy, and postpartum services, and no federal paid family leave policy, among other factors, all contribute to parents and families struggling to access quality development support, leaving their infants and toddlers at a disadvantage. This is especially true among families from income-eligible households.
- Working families are better positioned to support their infants and toddlers when they have the skills and resources to help them support and foster this development.

Why Increase Funding for Early Head Start

Young children develop the most from prenatal to age three and for over 25 years, Early Head Start has encouraged this development among millions of young children and their families, helping them thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

- **We build a strong foundation for infants and toddlers AND their families.** When parents and families can access no cost prenatal to age three wraparound early intervention support, education, and resources, their parenting skills and bond with their young children grow stronger, ensuring their children's healthy development. Research shows that:
 - ✓ children in Early Head Start develop new social-emotional skills and sustain the positive impacts through at least fifth grade.
 - ✓ children also make gains in language and cognitive development.
 - ✓ 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 elevate standards of care for infants and toddlers and their families through high-quality program standards and evaluations.** Our programs are grounded in research, from child development to cultural competencies, and we offer families high-quality wraparound support from prenatal to age three.
- **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.



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