

Early Head Start



STROLLING THUNDER
May 8, 2018

Early Head Start supports the healthy development of babies, toddlers, and pregnant women living in poverty to ensure that all children have the same opportunities to succeed. But Early Head Start reaches only 7% of eligible children and families.

Early Head Start is an evidence-based and community-driven program that serves infants, toddlers, and pregnant women living in poverty. It uses a two-generation approach to provide services that meaningfully address the many risks common to poverty. Programs support healthy prenatal outcomes and enhance the intellectual, social, and emotional development of infants and toddlers to promote later success in school and life.

How Early Head Start programs work:

- Conduct annual community assessments to ensure that they are offering the most meaningful program options to address local family needs, identifying resources and gaps in services, and targeting the families that are most in need.
- Address the multiple risks of poverty through a full range of individualized services for young children and their families, including child development, health and mental health, nutrition, and family support services, often through referrals.
- Offer child development services through either early childhood education settings (high-quality centers or family child care homes meeting EHS requirements) or weekly home visits with qualified program staff. Local communities determine the “program options” that will best serve the most vulnerable children and families in their communities.

Early Head Start research shows success:

- Compared to children in the control group, Early Head Start children showed the following positive impacts at ages 2 and 3: enhanced cognitive and language skills, decreased aggressive behaviors, increased engagement with parent during play, and increased rates of immunization.
- At age 3, Early Head Start parents were more likely to be reading to their children and initiating “teaching” activities with them. Parents also reported engaging in more stimulating activities with their little ones, and exhibited greater supportiveness during play. They were less likely to report spanking their kids.
- Children fare best when they receive developmentally appropriate, high-quality services from birth – age 5.

Increase investments in Early Head Start so that more families living in poverty can give their babies a strong start.

For more information, visit <https://www.zerotothree.org/policy-and-advocacy/early-head-start> or contact Bernard Fulton, Director of Government Affairs at bfulton@zerotothree.org.