

Early Head Start



Early Head Start supports the healthy development of babies, toddlers, and pregnant people living in poverty to ensure that all children have the same opportunities to succeed. But Early Head Start reaches only 11% of eligible children and families.

Early Head Start is an evidence-based and community-driven program that supports infants, toddlers, and pregnant people living in poverty. Programs use a comprehensive approach to support healthy prenatal outcomes and enhance the intellectual, social, and emotional development of infants and toddlers to promote later success in school and life. As a two-generation program, Early Head Start creates opportunities for both parents and children, helping parents improve their prospects for economic security while simultaneously ensuring their children are on a solid path from the earliest age to engage in lifelong learning. Early Head Start is the only federal program specifically focused on the early education experiences of babies and toddlers living in families with low income.

Early Head Start programs:

- **Provide child development services** through early childhood education settings (high-quality centers or family child care homes meeting Early Head Start requirements) or weekly home visits with program staff. Local agencies determine the program options that will best serve eligible children and families in their communities.
- **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.
- **Conduct annual community assessments** to ensure the programs offer the most meaningful program options to address local family needs, identify resources and gaps in services, and reach the families that are most in need.

Early Head Start research shows success for children and parents:

- Children in Early Head Start showed positive impacts at ages 2 and 3, including enhanced cognitive and language skills, decreased aggressive behaviors, increased engagement with parent during play, and increased rates of immunization.
- Parents in Early Head Start were more emotionally supportive, provided more support for children's language development and learning, and were less likely to use harsh discipline strategies such as spanking. Enrollment in Early Head Start also promoted parents' participation in education and training as well as their employment.
- Positive impacts on children's development were still evident two years later upon entry into kindergarten. In particular, children who followed Early Head Start with formal pre-K programs between the ages of 3 and 5 fared the best.

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/FederalAgenda2021> or contact Jim Bialick, Director of Government Relations, at jbialick@zerotothree.org.