

# GOOD HEALTH = GREAT KIDS

BUILDING A FOUNDATION

FOR ACHIEVEMENT



With one of the lowest high school graduation rates in the nation, Oregon's educational disparities are vast, particularly for low-income children and children of color. Such disparities reinforce cycles of poverty and inequality, and make it even harder for kids to succeed in school and life.

When children aren't healthy, they have difficulty learning. That is why promoting health and development is a crucial strategy to improve school readiness and build a foundation for third-grade achievement, two of the greatest predictors of high school graduation and later success. Children's Institute champions early investment in kids and families to boost education, health, and socio-economic outcomes.

Serving more kids in high-quality preschool is a critical step toward ensuring all children arrive at kindergarten

ready for school. **And to get the greatest return on our investments, we must also focus on the needs of younger children and families during their most critical period of brain development, ages prenatal to three.** We know that good health and strong families are the first building blocks for positive early learning experiences, and coordinating health and education services is crucial for Oregon.

Unfortunately, Oregon lacks a coherent system for helping vulnerable families. As a result, infants and toddlers in the state face grim realities and lack the support they need to thrive.

In order to stop achievement gaps before they become entrenched and promote lifelong well-being, Oregon must direct more attention and increased resources to the first few years of a child's life, and that must include a stronger focus on healthy development.



BABIES BORN IN OREGON EACH YEAR WHO QUALIFY FOR MEDICAID



CHILDREN IN OREGON WHO EXPERIENCE CHILDHOOD TRAUMA



OREGON CHILDREN IN POVERTY WITH ACCESS TO EARLY HEAD START



## Begin Before Birth

Ensuring that all kids are ready for school means building a foundation of good health and promoting on-track development during a child's earliest years — starting before they are even born. This is a critical period: 80 percent of lifelong brain development occurs by age three, and this is when the child's brain is most able to adapt and learn.<sup>2,3</sup> Because of this rapid development, the early experiences of infants and toddlers have an enormous impact on their academic and life trajectories, including their economic stability and health outcomes.

**Healthy moms are critical for healthy beginnings for children, with 80 percent of lifelong brain development occurring prenatally to age three.**

A child's development should be viewed holistically. We know that strong physical, cognitive, social and emotional health are all essential. Together, these make up the foundation for school readiness and success. Development in these areas depends upon nurturing relationships, stable families, and healthy environments. To guarantee vulnerable children get the strong start they need, we must support parents and caregivers alongside children. Doing so will not only ensure that children are ready for school and life, but that entire families grow healthy together in strong and supportive communities.

## Healthy Parents are Key

Health spans all developmental domains and is dependent on nurturing parents and a stable environment.

### Supporting maternal wellness

- **Timely prenatal care** ensures babies get essential nutrients.
- **Maternal depression screenings and follow-up** connect moms to services so babies develop in supportive environments, protected from toxic stress.

### Nurturing healthy infants

- **Talking, singing and reading to babies** helps them develop language and early literacy.
- **Breastfeeding** helps babies develop strong immune systems and promotes their lifelong health.
- **Loving and engaging relationships with caregivers** cultivate babies' ability to manage their emotions.

### Growing active and engaged toddlers

- **Periodic screenings of a child's development** help to identify delays and connect families to tailored services, which helps children reach age-expected development.
- **Knowledge and skills for positive parenting** help caregivers create safe and stable environments in which toddlers feel comfortable exploring.
- **Reading interactively and asking questions** expands vocabulary and language skills.



# Promotion, Prevention, Intervention

Young children have countless needs, and parents and caregivers often face overwhelming demands. They shouldn't have to do it all on their own. Research clearly shows that high-quality support for vulnerable infants and toddlers and their parents is essential for school readiness and is effective at producing positive outcomes. Children's Institute works toward an Oregon where all young children and their families have access to a continuum of support that is well-coordinated and responsive to their unique needs.

- **Promotion** of healthy habits that support child development
- **Prevention** of delays before they arise
- **Intervention** to address identified problems

**PROMOTION SUPPORT** focuses on encouraging positive behaviors, relationships, and environments that promote healthy and on-track development.

**PREVENTION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES** are delivered to children and families that may be at risk for toxic stress or other barriers to healthy development. The goal is to prevent adverse childhood experiences as well as delays in development before they occur.

**INTERVENTION SUPPORT** is targeted to address identified risks and challenges. Support on this end of the continuum helps address root causes and ensures children and families have what they need to be successful.

PROMOTION

PREVENTION

INTER-  
VENTION

## Where Health Meets Early Learning

In Oregon, two essential components of a continuum of support for young children and their families are voluntary home visiting programs and Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education.

- **Voluntary home visiting programs** provide parents and their children with information about child development, coaching on positive parenting, and connections to needed resources.
- **Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE)** is a statewide program that delivers a range of targeted services to help infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who experience disabilities or significant developmental delays. These services support families in promoting their child's on-track development and school readiness.





# 2017 Children’s Institute Focus on Home Visiting, Early Intervention

In the 2017 legislative session, Children’s Institute will drive change by advocating for increased access and improvements to the state’s home visiting system and Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) program. We

encourage Oregon to build on initial progress and take on the remaining work needed to improve these services that help our kids and families. We detail that work in forthcoming briefs.

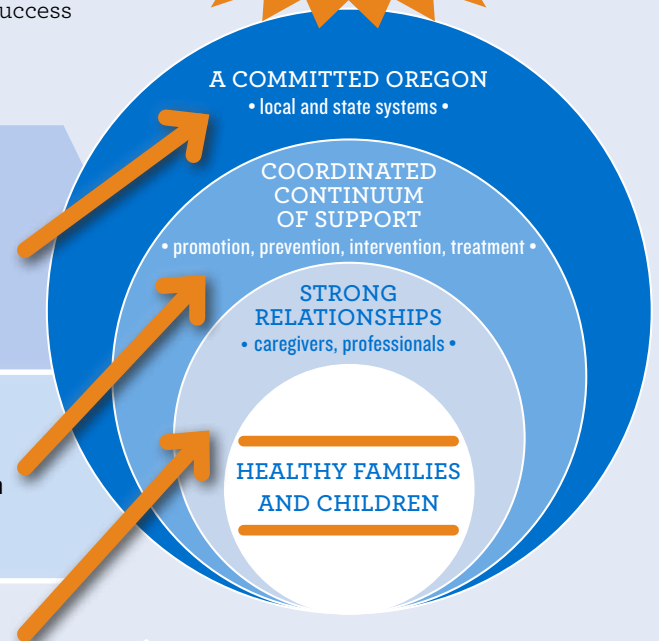
## Recommendations for Oregon

Oregon has demonstrated its commitment to young children by making important early childhood investments, but still has much work to do to reach more young children and families with high-quality services. **Oregon must build a continuum of support that is flexible and accessible for children and families beginning prenatally.** This will be a long-term effort, but will help shape a future where all children and families are healthy and thriving. That success will yield exponential benefits for all Oregonians.

In order to achieve this vision, we recommend that the state:

1. **INVEST ADDITIONAL DOLLARS** to ensure more young kids and families have access to the high-quality support they need. This must include more funding to increase access to home visiting services and meet the demand for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education services.
2. **EXPLORE NEW STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING STREAMS**, including Medicaid, that can maximize the impact of our state investments.
3. **INCENTIVIZE COORDINATION AND ALIGNMENT** between the programs and services that support young children and their families.
4. **IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE REFERRAL PRACTICES** to improve enrollment and participation in public benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).
5. **STRENGTHEN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE** by providing professional development opportunities aligned with workforce needs.

**Our Vision for Healthy and Thriving Families and Young Children**



Pictures for this report were taken at Oregon Child Development Coalition in Gresham. On the cover: Rosa Maria Sanchez. Page 2: staff member Leticia Virrueta; Sergio Vidal and Ruby Lopez with daughter Dahlia; Anahi Lopez; and Joshua Melesio Garcia. Page 3: From left, George Vidal, Araceli Oliveros, Jayden Zurita. Page 4: Brandon Garcia. *Photography by Heidi von Tagen*



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Our mission is moving research to action by promoting cost-effective public and private investments in our youngest children birth through third grade.

- 1 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT “Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of 3rd Grade Matters” The Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2010; 9.
- 2 Johnson, M.H. (2005) Sensitive periods in functional brain development: Problems and prospects. *Dev Psychobiology*, 46(3), 287-292.
- 3 Skaliara I. Experience-dependent plasticity in the developing brain. *International Congress Series*. 2002;1241:313-320.