

Starting Off Strong: Making Infants and Toddlers a Priority in New Jersey



March 2015

Infant Toddler Policy Action Team

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Decades of brain research clearly demonstrates the importance of the first three years of a child's life. During this critical time, the architecture of a baby's brain is shaped, laying the foundation for a child's future growth and development. To get off to the right start, all children need good health, strong families and positive early learning experiences.

Evidence-based programs that support healthy early childhood development, combined with state policies that promote high-quality early learning environments, are the foundation for a system of early care and education that supports children's maximum growth and development. This must include adequate healthcare starting prenatally, parent education and support services and high-quality child care.



Recognizing the critical importance of a child's first three years of life, Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), through the New Jersey BUILD Initiative, has been leading efforts to improve this system for infants and toddlers and to secure greater state investments, improve policies and programs and develop an aligned and coordinated system of services for very young children. While it is evident that work is taking place across the state to improve this system, child care and other existing services need to be improved, expanded and better coordinated. Critical health, development and parent support services are not available to all New Jersey children and the quality of existing services is inconsistent across the state.

**"We must remember:
The first few years of
life are not a rehearsal.
This is the real show.
Children do not really
have an opportunity to
try to get it right later."**

*Irving Harris, author, Should Public
Policy Be Concerned with Early
Childhood Development?*

Giving Every Child A Chance

To help create and advance a shared strategic policy agenda with a specific focus on infants and toddlers, Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), with technical assistance from the Zero To Three National Center for Infants and Toddlers, convened an Infant-Toddler Policy Action Team. The team was comprised of influential state and private sector leaders in the early childhood field.

Beginning in 2013, over a two-year period, the team conducted two statewide stakeholder surveys and held a full-day retreat that was attended by more than 50 people, including staff from every state department that administers infant and toddler services and representatives from child care, home visitation, early intervention, parent education, physical and mental health providers and funders.

The goal was to identify gaps in service and determine what changes in New Jersey's policies and practices were essential to ensure infants, toddlers and their families have access to a high-quality system of early care and education to support their maximum growth and development.

Following is a summary of the top priority areas and recommendations identified by stakeholders.

Priority 1: Improve the quality of infant-toddler child care.

- Collect data on the infant-toddler child care workforce to determine educational needs and the impact of efforts to improve the quality of care for these young children.
- Provide a range of professional development opportunities based on the needs of the child care workforce. This training should be affordable and accessible for all those caring for infants and toddlers in all settings, including center-based, state-approved home-based and family, friends and neighbor providers.

- Ensure a variety of specialized training, including non-credit and credit-bearing options, to those caring for infants and toddlers.
- Provide scholarships to encourage infant-toddler caregivers to pursue advanced training, such as the Infant Toddler Child Development Associate and/or the New Jersey Infant Toddler Credential.
- Ensure all infant-toddler professionals are trained in the New Jersey Birth-to-Three Early Learning Standards.
- Incorporate coaching and mentoring as part of professional development offerings for child care providers.
- Encourage and support culturally and linguistically diverse populations to successfully participate in and complete training programs by offering training in multiple languages, as well as remedial education services.
- Strengthen agreements with higher education institutions to facilitate the transfer of credits, courses and other professional development so that more child care providers can earn degrees.
- Explore the feasibility and impact of raising state licensing standards for the educational requirements people need to care for infants and toddlers.
- Strengthen standards for people providing in-home care who are registered with the state to require fingerprinting and background checks.
- Raise the reimbursement rate for publicly-subsidized child care to reflect the real cost of providing high-quality care to infants and toddlers.
- Provide access to consulting professionals in the area of early childhood mental health to assist with early identification of and interventions for social/emotional issues.

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Priority 2: Increase the availability and accessibility of culturally-relevant, evidence-based/evidence-informed parenting supports for all types of families beginning prenatally.

- Conduct a mapping study to identify gaps in parent education services.
- Provide training in a range of family support and educational topics for all those who come in contact with infants, toddlers and their families, including people working in home visitation programs, pediatricians, obstetricians, child care providers and child welfare staff.
- Identify, create and expand multiple communications vehicles, such as websites, parent apps, texting and warm lines, to ensure families are aware of available services and to help them access those services.
- Engage families in identifying parent support and education needs.
- Expand and develop initiatives to encourage breastfeeding.
- Develop a Parent Guide for the New Jersey Birth-to-Three Early Learning Standards.
- Explore ways to improve health insurance coverage for parent education and mental health services.

Priority 3: Create a financing mechanism to sustain and expand services for infants, toddlers and their families.

- Identify and engage foundation and business champions and develop public-private partnerships to increase funding for infant-toddler services.
- Research creative financing options utilized by other states to determine what would work best in New Jersey.

- Explore how new and existing federal funding opportunities can be used to help strengthen infant-toddler services.



CONCLUSION

It will take an organized, long-term, strategic advocacy effort to secure the necessary investments that will result in improved policies and programs for New Jersey’s infants and toddlers. The above strategies and ideas generated at the Infant Toddler Stakeholder Retreat will be used to create a multi-year work plan, involving key stakeholders from diverse sectors, with the goal of giving all infants and toddlers the foundation they need to be successful in school and in life.

“As a nation, we cannot simply stand on the sidelines and wish parents the best in supporting their children’s earliest development. Our shared vision of a prosperous future will be realized only if it includes a robust quality of life for babies today.”

Closing the Opportunity Gap for Babies and Families: ZERO TO THREE’S ROAD MAP TO REACH AMERICA’S POTENTIAL 2015. ZERO TO THREE Policy Center

**To read the full report or for more information on how you can get involved contact:
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Infants and Toddlers in New Jersey

Number of Infants and Toddlers (2014)	310,588
Number of Births (2011)	105,474
% Births to Unmarried Women (2011)	35%
Births to Teens 10-19 (2011)	5,342
Babies born preterm (2011)	9.70%
Babies born with low birth weight (2011)	8.40%
Children under 3 living in poverty (2012)	18%
Children under 3 living in families with income less than 200% Poverty Level -2012	35%
Children under age 3 living in single parent homes (2012)	28%
Infants and toddlers with at least one risk factor known to increase chance of poor health, school and development outcomes (2012)	51%
SNAP recipients under 5 (2012)	29%
WIC recipients that are infants (2012)	24%
Children 0-3 under Child Protection and Permanency Supervision (2014)	24%
TANF families with at least one child under age 3 (2011)	40%
Mothers with infants in workforce (2012)	64%
Avg. Price of Child Care for an Infant in a Child Care Center (2013)	\$11,534
All Uninsured Children Ages 0-5 (2011)	24%
Families Receiving State-Funded Home Visitation (2014)	6,489

Data Sources:

Number of Infants and Toddlers: retrieved from www.census.gov . Estimates of the Components of Resident Population Change: June, 2011 to July 1, 2014.

Number of Births, Births to Unmarried Women, Births to Teens Babies born Preterm, and Babies born with low birth weight: As reported by NJ Department of Health <https://www.state.nj.us/doh-shad/>.

Children Under 3 Poverty Statistics, % Living in Single Parent Homes, % With Known Risk Factors, % Receiving SNAP, % receiving WIC and % Receiving TANF: As reported by the National Center for Children in Poverty "Young Child Risk Calculator" www.nccp.org.

% Under Supervision of Division of Child Protection and Permanency: As reported by the NJ Department of Children and Families, Division of Child Protection and Permanency , 2014.

Mothers in Workforce: As reported by US Census Bureau Table B13012 (2012) www.census.gov .

Average Cost of Child Care: The High Price of Child Care 2013, New Jersey Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (2012).

Children under age 3 receiving CDBG Support: As reported by CLASP www.clasp.org.

Uninsured Children: As reported by the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey chart B27001.

Families Receiving Home Visitation: As reported by the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.

Special thanks to Barbara Gebhard of the Zero To Three National Center for her assistance to the New Jersey Infant Toddler Policy Action Team throughout the planning process and in the development of this report.



Right From the Start

This report is part of Advocates for Children of New Jersey's ongoing Right from the Start Campaign, aimed at improving the safety, health and well-being of New Jersey's youngest children. With generous support from The Turrell Fund, this initiative examines issues and advances change to give children from birth to three years the strongest possible start.