

# Parents Across the State Are Calling on New Jersey Legislators to Invest in Babies

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, families with infants and toddlers have faced challenges that existed long before 2020. If state legislators don't prioritize the accessibility and availability of supports for families with young children, New Jersey's youngest citizens will be left behind.

To bring attention to what babies and families need, Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) is holding the fifth annual Strolling Thunder in May. This year parents will be connected with their legislators for a virtual conversation about their experiences raising their baby in New Jersey and the programs and policies they need to support their child's healthy development.

Over the next few weeks, parents from around the state will be meeting with their legislators to share their stories. While the details may vary, there are some common threads that are consistent throughout.

Parents across New Jersey struggle to access basic services to support their babies and families. From maternal health services, to paid family leave, child care, and postpartum care, it is not easy for parents to access the services and resources they need to help their babies and families thrive. However, while all families have experienced challenges and barriers, we know that families that are low-income face greater hurdles.

Though devastating, the COVID-19 pandemic has also afforded the state a unique opportunity to not only address existing issues, but to plan for and address long-standing problems that impact the optimal development of our infants and toddlers. That's why we are calling on our state representatives to take the first step towards a brighter future for our children.

ACNJ recently released a report, Pennies to the Dollar, that showed New Jersey invests less in infants and toddlers than older children. The research shows us that the ages of 0-3 are a critical time in brain development, and can lay the foundation for the rest of a child's life. We cannot wait until children are older to provide needed supports and interventions.

## The State Must Invest in Our Youngest Citizens Because New Jersey's Future Begins with Babies

**5th Annual  
Strolling Thunder  
New Jersey  
May 23rd - 27th**



**STROLLING  
THUNDER**  
New Jersey



  
**ADVOCATES**  
for CHILDREN OF NEW JERSEY  
**ACNJ.ORG**

# ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, QUALITY CHILD CARE CHANGES LIVES

## QUALITY INFANT AND TODDLER CHILD CARE...



fosters healthy brain development.



prepares babies for future learning and success.



promotes communication, social and emotional skills.



enables parents to join the workforce.

## BUT HERE'S THE PROBLEM:

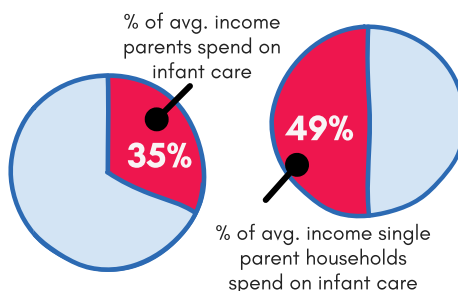
### NEW JERSEY'S CHILD CARE SYSTEM IS IN CRISIS

#### CHILD CARE IS HARD TO FIND



**40%** of NJ municipalities are **child care "deserts"** - communities where few, if any, centers accept infants and toddlers in their care.

#### CHILD CARE IS UNAFFORDABLE FOR MANY FAMILIES<sup>2</sup>



#### OUR CHILD CARE WORKFORCE IS UNDERPAID



**PROVIDERS STRUGGLE TO PAY EVEN THE BARE MINIMUM WAGE:**<sup>3</sup>

Child care programs are unable to pay their teachers what they're worth at a price families can afford. This has led to limited staff and high turnover.

## STATE LEADERS CAN HELP **#REIMAGINEchildcare** BY INVESTING TO:



increase teacher compensation.



improve access to child care tuition assistance for more families.



provide grants for programs to improve facilities.



develop pathways to help establish more family child care providers and eliminate child care deserts.

# HOME VISITORS ARE ESSENTIAL

PROVIDING A LIFELINE FOR EXPECTANT PARENTS AND YOUNG FAMILIES

**HOME VISITORS REACH FAMILIES WHERE THEY LIVE, BRINGING:**



**positive parenting and emotional support.**



**prenatal and postnatal services,** offering wellness checks and a range of services.



**education support,** empowering parents as their baby's first and best teachers.



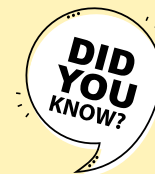
**access to food and supplies,** linking families to community resources like food and diaper banks.



**AND THERE'S GREAT NEWS:**

**NEW JERSEY PASSED A UNIVERSAL HOME VISITING LAW!**

Every parent welcoming a newborn can receive at least one free home visit from a nurse within two weeks of their child's birth, with the option of two more visits within the next three months.



The universal home visiting program builds upon the state's current intensive home visiting programs available to a limited number of families.

**STATE LEADERS CAN ENSURE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION BY FUNDING:**

**A WELL-COMPENSATED WORKFORCE**



Our current home visiting workforce is underpaid, leading to high turnover.

**A COORDINATED SYSTEM OF CARE**



Strong partnerships between state and local agencies ensures families are well-supported and connected to intensive programs if needed.

**CONTINUED INVESTMENTS TO SUSTAIN SERVICES**



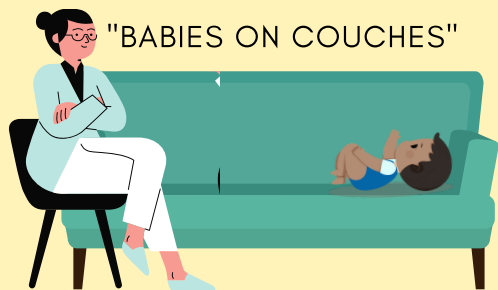
A decade of flat funding has severely impacted current staffing and program operations.

# HEALTHY BABIES START WITH HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS!



INFANT MENTAL HEALTH IS **NOT**

"BABIES ON COUCHES"



**INFANT MENTAL HEALTH** IS PROMOTING THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF A BABY, HELPING THEM DEVELOP THE CAPACITY TO:

- form close and trusting relationships
- experience and manage emotions
- explore their environment and learn



**IT CAN** ALSO PREVENT AND REPAIR THE DAMAGE TOXIC STRESS CAUSES TO THE DEVELOPING BRAIN.

**BUT HERE'S THE PROBLEM:**

**AWARENESS AND ACCESS TO INFANT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ARE LIMITED**



ONLY **4** infant mental clinics exist in the Garden State.<sup>5</sup>



24 clinicians have an Endorsement® to provide infant mental health services.



There is inconsistent Medicaid and health insurance coverage for mental health services.

**STATE LEADERS CAN USE FUNDING TO SUPPORT INFANT MENTAL HEALTH AND:**



ensure Medicaid and NJ FamilyCare cover necessary infant mental health services.



grow and develop the infant mental health workforce by offering scholarships and trainings.



sustain and grow interdisciplinary pediatric primary care models that embed infant mental health in their practice.

# SAVE MOMS. SAVE LIVES. SUPPORT MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH

NJ RANKS  
**47TH**  
IN THE NATION  
FOR  
MATERNAL  
MORTALITY



**OUR HEALTH SYSTEMS MUST DO MORE TO SUPPORT MOTHERS AND IN PARTICULAR, BLACK MOTHERS AND BABIES.**

## ELIMINATING RACIAL BIAS IS KEY TO IMPROVING MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH OUTCOMES



**BLACK MOTHERS ARE**

**3x**

more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications compared to the state average.<sup>8</sup>



**BLACK BABIES ARE**

**2x**

more likely to die before their first birthday compared to the state average.<sup>9</sup>

This disparity cuts across all education levels of the mother.<sup>10</sup>

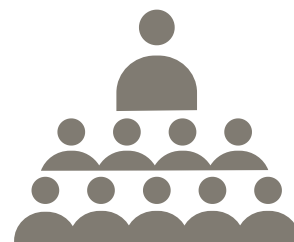
## STATE LEADERS CAN HELP MAKE NEW JERSEY THE SAFEST AND MOST EQUITABLE PLACE IN THE NATION TO DELIVER AND RAISE A BABY BY:



ensuring access to culturally sensitive and supportive healthcare at every stage.



investing in community programs that offer one-stop comprehensive services.



ensuring providers receive training to address implicit and racial bias.

# DATA SOURCES AND TECHNICAL NOTES

1. **Forty percent of New Jersey's municipalities are child care deserts.** Advocates for Children of New Jersey. (2018). Infant-Toddler Child Care Deserts, New Jersey. Retrieved September 14, 2021 from [www.acnj.org/downloads/Child\\_Care\\_Deserts\\_Legislative\\_Maps/New\\_Jersey.pdf](http://www.acnj.org/downloads/Child_Care_Deserts_Legislative_Maps/New_Jersey.pdf)
2. **Percent of average income spent on center-based infant child care.** United Way. (2020). ALICE IN NEW JERSEY: A FINANCIAL HARDSHIP STUDY 2020. Retrieved September 13, 2021 from [https://docs.unitedwaynj.org/main/2020ALICEReport\\_NJ\\_12\\_3\\_2020.pdf](https://docs.unitedwaynj.org/main/2020ALICEReport_NJ_12_3_2020.pdf), page 12.
3. **Median wage for a child care worker.** The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE). (2020). Early Childhood Workforce Index 2020, New Jersey State Profile. Retrieved September 13, 2021 from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/new-jersey/>.
4. **New Jersey's universal home visiting law.** Retrieved September 13, 2021 from [https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2020/Bills/S1000/690\\_S2.PDF](https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2020/Bills/S1000/690_S2.PDF).
5. **Only four infant mental health clinics exist in New Jersey.** As reported by Advocates for Children of New Jersey's infant mental health partners as of September 14, 2019. On file with Advocates for Children of New Jersey. New Jersey's infant mental health clinics consist of Montclair State University Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health, Youth Consultation Services Center for Infant and Preschool Mental Health, The Center for Great Expectation, and Family Intervention Services.
6. Only 20 clinicians endorsed to provide infant mental health services. As reported by the New Jersey Association for Infant Mental Health. On file with Advocates for Children of New Jersey.
7. NJ ranks 47th in the nation for maternal mortality. Nurture New Jersey 2021 Strategic Plan. (2021). Retrieved September 13, 2021 from <https://nurturenj.nj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20210120-Nurture-NJ-Strategic-Plan.pdf>, page 6.
8. Black mothers are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than the state average. Nurture New Jersey 2021 Strategic Plan. (2021). Retrieved September 13, 2021 from <https://nurturenj.nj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20210120-Nurture-NJ-Strategic-Plan.pdf>, page 23.
9. Black babies are more than two times more likely to die before their first birthday than the state average. N.J. Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, New Jersey State Health Assessment Data, New Jersey Death and Birth Certificate Databases, Office of Vital Statistics and Registry (2018). Retrieved September 13, 2021 from <https://www-doh.state.nj.us/doh-shad/indicator/view/EPHTInfMort.NJ.html>.
10. Infant Mortality Rates by Mother's Race and Education Level, 2014-2018. N.J. Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, New Jersey State Health Assessment Data, New Jersey Death and Birth Certificate Databases, Office of Vital Statistics and Registry. Retrieved September 14, 2021 from <https://www-doh.state.nj.us/doh-shad/query/builder/infantfetal/Infant/InfMortRate.html>.

*Advocates for Children of New Jersey is the trusted, independent voice putting children's needs first for more than 40 years. Our work results in better laws and policies, more effective funding and stronger services for children and families. And it means that more children are given the chance to grow up safe, healthy and educated.*