A Roadmap to Making New Jersey the Safest, Healthiest and Most Supportive Place to Give Birth and Raise a Family

More than 100,000 babies are born every year in New Jersey. All babies possess unlimited potential, yet many of New Jersey’s youngest children face daunting odds that hurt their ability to reach it fully. Too often, opportunities are affected by race, income or geography. For some, disparities begin before they are even born, due to uneven maternal health and prenatal care. At the very time of life when a healthy start, a strong family and access to high quality care and education are most critical to a baby’s foundation, these gaps can have a life-long impact on a child’s growth and development.

The J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation challenged states to do more to build a healthy foundation for our youngest, most vulnerable children from birth to age 3. New Jersey rose to the challenge. *Unlocking Potential* articulates a vision and action plan to unlock the potential of every child in New Jersey to grow up healthy, safe and educated.

“The Pritzker Children’s Initiative (PCI) is dedicated to expanding equitable access to and participation in high-quality services for infants, toddlers, and their families across the United States.”
Women Receiving Late or No Prenatal Care (2018)

- **14.8%** White
- **30.5%** Hispanic
- **35.1%** Black

Maternal Death Rate

- New Jersey ranks 47th in maternal deaths (2019).
- On average, 46.4 New Jersey women die for every 100,000 live births, compared to 29.6 nationally.

Infant Mortality Rate (2017)

- **Black Babies:** 9.4 deaths
- **Hispanic Babies:** 4.8 deaths
- **White Babies:** 2.7 deaths

New Jersey Home Visiting Availability

- 310,000 NJ children under age 3
- < 2% funded home visitation slots

New Jersey Statistics At-A-Glance
In a series of meetings held between July and December 2019, a team of public and private sector leaders, supported by early childhood experts from across the state, met to develop an action plan to ensure that an additional 25 percent of low income infants and toddlers in New Jersey – 27,000 young children – have access to high-quality services by 2023, including child care, home visiting, health and mental health services. Unlocking Potential is the culmination of this collaborative effort.

Unlocking Potential articulates a vision and action plan to unlock the potential of every child in New Jersey to grow up healthy, safe and educated. The plan also aims to unlock the potential for every parent, guardian, educator and service provider to be the best they can be in their critical role in the lives of infants and toddlers. Tackling racial, economic and geographic disparities will be essential to realizing success.

Unlocking Potential lays out the rationale for taking action. It provides goals and strategies for improvements in vital services for babies and their families, providing specific targets for impact, the financing needed, and the leaders poised to move the plan from vision to reality. It also proposes a system integration approach that calls for improved coordination among early childhood organizations and alignment with maternal and infant health initiatives to ensure a seamless array of services beginning prenatally.

There is much work ahead. Policies and programs will need to change and resources will need to be secured. Families will need to be engaged to ensure the services and systems are designed to meet their needs. And, additional stakeholders on the state and local level will also need to embrace the plan and use it to support their decision-making and actions.

The foundation for change is in place; the opportunity is now.
Brain science teaches us that early healthy development—the first 1,000 days—is consequential, right from the start. However, depending on their zip code, race, and family income, a baby’s early experiences could be vastly different. Racial and income disparities seen in early life persist as children grow and enter school and progress toward adulthood. Ensuring access to essential supports at the beginning of a child’s life is a foundational and effective approach to avoid disparities of outcomes that can lead to a lifetime of impact for individuals, families, and communities.

**Goal Area 1:**
More low-income infants and toddlers will have access to high-quality subsidized child care.

**2023 Target:**
8,750 more infants and toddlers in high quality child care.

**Estimated Cost:**
$29.7 million in increased annual investments

**Infant-Toddler Child Care Strategies**
- Require all child care centers and family child care homes to be rated at level 3 or above by GNJK in order to continue participation in the subsidy program.
- Develop more high-quality licensed slots for low-income infants and toddlers in child care centers.
- Increase the supply of high-quality family child care in low-income and under-served communities with limited or no access to regulated child care.
- Fully utilize opportunities to expand Early Head Start to reach more infants and toddlers.
- Improve the credentials and compensation for infant-toddler educators in child care settings.

**Goal Area 2:**
More low-income parents of infants and toddlers will have access to evidence-based home visiting.

**2023 Target:**
9,867 more families served annually.

**Estimated Cost:**
$25.3 million in increased annual investments

**Home Visiting Strategies**
- Increase service capacity and program completion rates within the current system of evidence-based home visiting.
- Expand the capacity of the current evidence-based programs to provide intensive home visiting supports to additional families.
- Reframe and develop home visiting as inclusive of all families who want to participate.
Goal Area 3:
More low-income infants, toddlers and their parents will have access to services to support their mental health.

2023 Target:
7,247 more low-income infants and toddlers will receive mental health services annually.

Estimated Cost:
$10 million in increased annual investments.

Infant Mental Health Strategies
• Expand the availability of infant mental health consultation services in child care settings.
• Provide intensive mental health services for infants and toddlers and their families identified by the infant mental health consultant serving child care settings.
• Build the capacity to offer infant mental health consultation services in pediatric settings.
• Increase availability and access of infant mental health treatment services.
• Increase the supply of well-trained infant mental health professionals.
• Improve documentation to demonstrate the need for mental health supports and services for infants and toddlers.

Goal Area 4:
More low-income women will have equitable access to maternal and infant care supports and services to ensure a healthy birth.

2023 Target:
3,000 more low-income women will receive perinatal supports and services annually.

Estimated Cost:
$4.1 million in increased annual investments.

Maternal and Infant Health Strategies
• Coordinate and align activities with the Healthy Women Healthy Families Initiative to ensure equitable maternal and infant care among women and children of all races and ethnicities.
• Support the Nurture NJ campaign.
• Establish metrics to assess birth outcomes, monitor progress and promote positive practices among health care community.

Goal Area 5:
A system is in place to enable more low-income families with infants and toddlers to be connected to critical services to ensure healthy growth and development.

Estimated Cost:
$3.3 million in increased annual investments.

System Integration Strategies
• Strengthen the county-based Central Intake Hubs in their role as the system connection between families and critical maternal and child health and early childhood services.
• Maximize parent voice and leadership. Ensure the voice of under-served and minority parents are intentionally included in leadership.
• Support the NJ Council for Young Children (NJ CYC) as the coordinating entity to align services, assist families and inform the system of needs, gaps and opportunities.
• Continue to convene the New Jersey PCI Leadership Team and the NJ Think Babies Coalition.
The plan outlined in this report articulates a long-term vision to unlock the potential of every child in New Jersey to grow up healthy, safe and educated. It is a bold and ambitious vision, but one that we firmly believe is achievable. The leaders and supporters of this plan are poised and ready to take the next steps to responsibly stage and sequence the reforms outlined within this plan; secure financing to implement the plan; and continue to engage stakeholders and the public in the urgency of this plan and its profound potential to improve New Jersey communities. We urge you to read Unlocking Potential and use this plan as a roadmap to making New Jersey the safest, healthiest and most supportive place to give birth and raise a family.

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Acknowledgements

Advocates for Children of New Jersey would like to thank the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation for their generous support to develop this plan.

We would also like to thank the following for their help and cooperation on this project:

Harriet Dichter, Project Consultant
Natalie Renew, Project Consultant
Ajay Chaudry, Project Consultant
Taryn Morrissey, Project Consultant
The Nicholson Foundation
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Turrell Fund
ZERO TO THREE

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.

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