

2026 Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap

Methods and Sources

Effective Strategies

EARLY HEAD START

What is Early Head Start and why is it important?

All references for this section are provided in the Notes and Sources section at the bottom of each webpage. Additionally, search the [Prenatal-to-3 Policy Clearinghouse](#) for an ongoing inventory of rigorous evidence reviews, including more information on Early Head Start.

What impact does Early Head Start have?

The following studies meet standards of strong causal evidence to demonstrate the impacts of Early Head Start for the health and wellbeing of young children and their families:

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- C. Chazan-Cohen, R., Ayoub, C., Pan, B. A., Roggman, L., Raikes, H., McKelvey, L., Whiteside-Mansell, L., & Hart, A. (2007). It takes time: Impacts of Early Head Start that lead to reductions in maternal depression two years later. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 28(2), 151–170. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.20127>
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- G. Jones Harden, B., Chazan-Cohen, R., Raikes, H., & Vogel, C. (2012). Early Head Start home visitation: The role of implementation in bolstering program benefits. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 40(4), 438–455. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20525>

- H. Jones Harden, B., Sandstrom, H., & Chazan-Cohen, R. (2012). Early Head Start and African American families: Impacts and mechanisms of child outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 27(4), 572–581. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2012.07.006>
- I. Love, J. M., Eliason Kisker, E., Ross, C. M., Schochet, P. Z., Brooks-Gunn, J., Paulsell, D., Boller, K., Constantine, J., Vogel, C., Sidle Fuligni, A., & Brady-Smith, C. (2001). *Building their futures: How Early Head Start programs are enhancing the lives of infants and toddlers in low-income families*. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/building-their-futures-how-early-head-start-programs-are-enhancing-the-1>
- J. Love, J. M., Eliason Kisker, E., Ross, C. M., Schochet, P. Z., Brooks-Gunn, J., Paulsell, D., Boller, K., Constantine, J., Vogel, C., Sidle Fuligni, A., & Brady-Smith, C. (2002). *Making a difference in the lives of infants and toddlers and their families: The Impacts of Early Head Start*. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/impacts_vol1.pdf
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- L. McKelvey, L., Schiffman, R. F., Brophy-Herb, H. E., Bocknek, E. L., Fitzgerald, H. E., Reischl, T. M., Hawver, S., & Deluca, M. C. (2015). Examining long-term effects of an infant mental health home-based Early Head Start program on family strengths and resilience. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 36(4), 353–365. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.21518>
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- S. Vogel, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Martin, A., & Klute, M. M. (2013). III. Impacts of Early Head Start participation on child and parent outcomes at ages 2, 3, and 5. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 78(1), 36–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5834.2012.00702.x>
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- CC. Chazen-Cohen, R., Ende, A. V., & Lombardi, C. (2023). Parenting and family self-sufficiency services contribute to impacts of Early Head Start for children and families. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1302687>

What is the key policy lever to support Early Head Start?

In the absence of an evidence-based state policy lever to ensure eligible children have access to EHS, we identified one key policy lever to more effectively implement EHS:

- State support for EHS programs through direct funding to programs, becoming an EHS-CCP grantee, and/or creating a state-specific program similar to EHS.

We performed individual outreach to each state's Head Start Collaboration Office Director, or other relevant contact, regarding the state's funding of Early Head Start as of September 1, 2026, and whether state-specific funds are appropriated or leveraged to fund EHS programming. State's responses informed research pertaining to state-specific models similar to EHS. For state-funded and administered programs, researchers analyzed the design (e.g., center-based, home-based, or partnership programs) and performance standards (e.g., low child-to-staff ratios, evidence-based curricula, family

engagement and comprehensive services) to assess if programs were similar to EHS. We were unable to confirm information with the relevant personnel in ten states, Alabama, Georgia, Hawaii, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin (for additional details, see below in Measure 2). The datasets, calculations, and sources referenced for each state are listed below.

To assess state progress to more effectively implement Early Head Start, we also performed an electronic search using Quorum State between September 1, 2025 and August 15, 2026 to assess legislative progress pertaining to state funding of Early Head Start programs, or EHS-like models. The main search strategy used keywords for Early Head Start (Early Head Start). Research staff conducted searches, analyzed results for relevant state legislation, and summarized the progress states made towards supplementing federal EHS funding at the state level.

How does access to Early Head Start vary across states?

To assess if a state serves a high share of eligible infants and toddlers, we calculated the percentage of income-eligible children in a state with access to EHS, using 2024 funded enrollment data from the Office of Head Start and population-level estimates from the 2023-2024 American Community Survey. Additional details on the calculation of this measure can be found below (see Measure 1). States identified as serving a share of children slightly above or below from the median are those that were roughly one percentage point away from the national median of 12.4%. States with the highest and lowest share of eligible children served through EHS were also identified.

Measure 1: Estimated percentage of income-eligible children under age 3 with access to Early Head Start

Definition:

The estimated percentage of income-eligible children (those in families whose poverty status was at or below 100% of the federal poverty level) under age 3 with access to Early Head Start (as measured through the total number of funded EHS slots).

Notes:

1. **Numerator:** The total number of EHS slots (regardless of funding source) available in all EHS programs (traditional EHS, American Indian, Alaska Native (AIAN) and migrant EHS) as provided in Head Start Notice of Award data
2. **Denominator:** The number of children under the age of 3 whose family poverty value was at or below 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL) based on population level estimates from the 2023-2024 American Community Survey (ACS) Public-Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).
3. The percentage reported represents the percent of income-eligible children under age 3 with access to Early Head Start but does not account for other eligibility factors.
4. The data for the numerator (the number of funded EHS slots for children under age 3) came from the Notice of Grant Award data. Previously, we used the number of funded EHS slots that came from the self-reported Program Information Reports (PIRs) populated by grant recipients. Beginning in 2023, we switched to the Notice of Grant Award data upon guidance from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)¹ and the National Institute for Early

¹ J. Escobar, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children & Families, personal communication, September 14, 2023.

Education Research (NIEER)² that the Notice of Grand Award data is a more authoritative source for funded enrollment than the PIRs.

5. Sample size estimates were calculated in Stata 19 using person-level weights. Given the age and income limits imposed on the sample (children under age 3 living in families below 100% of the FPL) and the estimates by state, two years of ACS data were combined to improve data quality and accuracy and all weights were appropriately adjusted to account for the two combined years of data. Children living in group quarters or whose family poverty status was not available (e.g., foster children or children who were unrelated to the head of household) were excluded from the calculation.
6. We considered weighted estimates of the count of children living in families at or below 100% FPL with a relative standard error of 30% or greater as having questionable reliability. The relative standard error for all states' estimates was below this threshold. Estimates are impacted by both the numerator and denominator. For example, a state's value of the percent of children with access to Early Head Start could decrease both because of decreases to the numerator (fewer funded EHS slots) or increases to the denominator (more children in poverty). Annual estimates should be compared conservatively, because two factors drive changes in the overall estimate of the percent of children without access to Early Head Start.
7. The US Census calculation of poverty is based on the total income of all individuals aged 15 or older who are related to the head of household through marriage, birth or adoption. Income from cohabiting partners who are not married and unrelated children (including foster children) are not included in the calculation of family income. This family income is compared to federal poverty thresholds based on related family size and composition (*povpip*).³
8. A single year of the funded slot data from the EHS PIR, reflecting all program types and funding sources, was paired with two combined years of data from the ACS PUMS 1-year data, reflecting income-eligible children under age 3. The 2024 EHS Notice of Award data were paired with the 2023-2024 ACS samples.

Sources:

1. US Census Bureau. (2024-2025). *2023-2024 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS)* [Data Sets]. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/microdata.html>
2. US Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Head Start. (2025, August 14). *Head Start Program Facts: Fiscal Year 2023*. Retrieved on March 31, 2026, from <https://headstart.gov/program-data/article/head-start-program-facts-fiscal-year-2023>.

Measure 2: State support for Early Head Start

Definition:

States can provide support for Early Head Start in any of the following three ways: (1) provide funding directly to local EHS programs, (2) act as an EHS-Child Care Partnership grantee and contribute state matching funds, and/or (3) have a state-specific program with a similar structure and quality standards as EHS.

Notes:

1. Provide funding directly to local EHS programs is current as of September 1, 2026.

² A. Krauss, NIEER, personal communication, August 4, 2023.

³ US Census Bureau (n.d.). *How the Census Bureau measures poverty*. As of August 27, 2019. Retrieved on April 28, 2020 from <https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html>

2. Researchers were unable to successfully receive verification from ten states to confirm their state funding for EHS programs and status as an EHS-CCP grantee in 2026. These ten states were Alabama, Georgia, Hawaii, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin. Researchers used prior data sources and personal communication to inform the assumptions for their status on these indicators.
3. In 2024, Rhode Island was counted as not providing state funds to support Early Head Start. This year, the state verified data and noted that they allocated state funds in Fiscal Year 2025 to support Early Head Start.
4. Arkansas has been noted as not serving as an EHS-CCP prior to 2026. In 2026, the state confirmed for the first time that they serve as a grantee and have been doing so for several years.

Sources:

State	Sources
Alabama	1. T. Calloway, Alabama Head Start Association, personal communication, September 2, 2022.
Alaska	1. B. Zadalis, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, personal communication, May 12, 2026. 2. S.B. 214, 34th Leg., Second Reg. Sess. (Alaska 2026).
Arizona	1. J. Rivera-García, Arizona Head Start Association, personal communication, May 26, 2026.
Arkansas	1. B. Ishmon, Arkansas Department of Education (Office of Early Childhood), personal communication, April 28, 2026. 2. H.B. 1007, 95th Leg., Fiscal Sess. (Ark. 2026). 3. Arkansas Department of Education. (n.d.). <i>A vision for Arkansas education</i> . https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Files/2024_OEC_Annual_Report_Final_7.18.25_OEC.pdf
California	1. M. Cottrill, Head Start California, personal communication, April 21, 2026.
Colorado	1. H. Craiglow, Colorado Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 27, 2026.
Connecticut	1. K. Pascale, Connecticut Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 26, 2026. 2. S.B. 1, Leg., Reg. Sess. (Conn. 2026).
Delaware	1. J. Thomas, Delaware Office of Early Learning, personal communication, May 4, 2026. 2. H.B. 335, 153rd Gen. Assem., Reg. Sess. (Del. 2026).
District of Columbia	1. L. Torres, DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (Division of Early Learning), personal communication, April 23, 2026. 2. L. Torres, DC Office of State Superintendent of Education (Division of Early Learning), personal communication, September 9, 2025.
Florida	1. W. Minick, Florida Head Start Association, personal communication, June 11, 2026.
Georgia	1. R. O'Callaghan, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, personal communication, April 29, 2025.
Hawaii	1. C. Jackson, Hawaii Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, June 5, 2023.
Idaho	1. M. Woller, Idaho Head Start Association, personal communication, April 28, 2026.
Illinois	1. W. Williams, Illinois Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, May 4, 2026. 2. Raising Illinois. (2026, June 1). <i>Raising Illinois' response to approved Fiscal Year 2027 state budget</i> . https://raisingillinois.org/news_resources/raising-illinois-response-to-approved-fiscal-year-2027-state-budget/
Indiana	1. A. Moon, Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning, personal communication, April 20, 2026.
Iowa	1. M. Shuey, Iowa Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 24, 2026. 2. H.F. 2783, 2026 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Iowa 2026).
Kansas	1. K. Kennedy, Kansas Department for Children and Families - EES Division, personal communication, April 29, 2026.

State	Sources
Kentucky	1. K. Turley, Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood, personal communication, April 30, 2026.
Louisiana	1. K. Wahid, Louisiana Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 21, 2026.
Maine	1. S. McCoy, Maine Department of Education- Office of Teaching and Learning, personal communication, April 27, 2026. 2. H.P. 377, 2025 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Me. 2025).
Maryland	1. V. Jones, Maryland State Department of Education- Division of Early Childhood, personal communication, April 20, 2026. 2. S.B. 282, 2026 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Md. 2026).
Massachusetts	1. A. Whitehead-Pleaux, Massachusetts Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 23, 2026. 2. H.B. 5500, 195th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Mass. 2026).
Michigan	1. C. Derby, Michigan Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 15, 2025.
Minnesota	1. J. Dickhausen, Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families, personal communication, April 28, 2026. 2. H.F. 2, 94 th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Minn. 2025).
Mississippi	1. E. Beazley, Mississippi Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, May 12, 2026.
Missouri	1. S. Lomax, DESE Office of Childhood, personal communication, May 7, 2026. 2. R. Ratcliff, DESE Office of Childhood, personal communication, July 8, 2025.
Montana	1. M. Douglass, Montana Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 27, 2026.
Nebraska	1. S. Knust, Nebraska Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 22, 2026. 2. L.B. 1071, 109th Leg., Second Reg. Sess., (Neb. 2026). 3. Miller, K., Alvarez, L., Baird, S., Varshney, N., and Jadoobirsingh, A. (n.d.). Sixpence Early Learning Fund: 2024-2025 annual report. <i>University of Nebraska Medical Center</i> . https://www.singasongofsixpence.org/file_download/inline/c563320b-2b0f-4795-ab91-42028a4378c7
Nevada	1. P. Gardner, Nevada Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 22, 2026.
New Hampshire	1. A. Amaral, New Hampshire Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 29, 2026.
New Jersey	1. B. Eggenburg, New Jersey Head Start Association, personal communication, April 15, 2025.
New Mexico	1. C. Lafferty & S. Runck, New Mexico Early Education and Care Department, personal communication, April 28, 2026.
New York	1. P. Persell, NYS Council on Children and Families, personal communication, April 20, 2026.
North Carolina	1. M. Jones, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction- Office of Early Learning, personal communication, May 4, 2026.
North Dakota	1. C. Kueber, North Dakota Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 30, 2026.
Ohio	1. L. Jones-Perkins, Ohio Department of Children and Youth, personal communication, April 28, 2025.

State	Sources
Oklahoma	1. P. Brown, Oklahoma Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, May 11, 2026. 2. H.B. 430, 2026 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Okla. 2026). 3. Oklahoma Early Childhood Program (2024). <i>OECP annual report 2023-2024</i>. https://okecp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/OECP-Annual-Report-2023-2024_FINAL.pdf
Oregon	1. R. Elliott, Oregon Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, May 14, 2026.
Pennsylvania	1. K. McFalls, Pennsylvania Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 20, 2026.
Rhode Island	1. C. Green, Rhode Island Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, May 15, 2026. 2. H.B. 5076, 2025 Leg., Reg. Sess. (R.I. 2025).
South Carolina	1. M. Diggs, South Carolina Head Start Collaboration Office, personal communication, June 27, 2024.
South Dakota	1. J. Berscheid, Office of Early Childhood Services, personal communication, April 20, 2026.
Tennessee	1. H. Murphy, Tennessee Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, May 1, 2026.
Texas	1. A. Giles, Texas Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 14, 2025.
Utah	1. W. Byron, Utah Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 22, 2025.
Vermont	1. R. Kelly, Vermont Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 29, 2026.
Virginia	1. T. Jeffries, Virginia Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, May 12, 2026. 2. H.B. 211, 2026 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Va. 2026). 3. H.B. 30, 2026 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Va. 2026).
Washington	1. K. Warren, Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP, personal communication, April 27, 2026
West Virginia	1. B. Doss, West Virginia Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 23, 2026.
Wisconsin	1. J. Mauer, Wisconsin Head Start Association, personal communication, April 28, 2025. 2. S.B. 45, 2025 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Wis. 2025).
Wyoming	1. H. Wagner, Wyoming Head Start State Collaboration Office, personal communication, April 20, 2026.