

Creating a Strong Policy Framework to Support Infants and Toddlers at Risk

Planning Grant

In 2019, First Five Nebraska (FFN) was awarded a Pritzker Children's Initiative Prenatal-to-Age-3 planning grant focused on significantly improving, through policy change, the healthy development and school readiness of Nebraska children from the prenatal period to age 3.

A stakeholder-informed policy landscape analysis, conducted in close collaboration with the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Needs Assessment and Strategic Planning teams, identified policy changes that could create measurable improvements in children's outcomes in these categories:

- High-quality early childhood care and education services
- Parent engagement and support
- State system efficiencies and capacity to support integration
- State system efficiencies and capacity for data integration
- Access to essential services for early childhood development

First Five Nebraska aspires to equitably expand high-quality services to low-income infants and toddlers and their families with a target goal of a 25% increase (15,500) by 2023 and a long-term goal of a 50% increase (30,050) in children and families served by high-quality programs and policies.

Implementation Grant

In 2020, First Five Nebraska received a three-year grant to implement the strategies identified in the planning grant. The Nebraska Prenatal-to-Age-3 plan moves us toward a system in which state and community leaders work together to advance quality and equitable programs, services and systems for pregnant women, infants, toddlers and their families. This will be accomplished by supporting policies to:

- **Increase the number of families, especially low income, with children prenatal to age 3 who are connected to essential and high-quality health, development and social-emotional support services assuring equitable participation of families, children and providers of diverse race/ethnicity/language.**
 - Increase access to programs such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).
 - Increase access to screening, referrals and enrollment into quality programs through entities such as Nebraska Perinatal Quality Improvement Collaborative (NPQIC), Help Me Grow, Learn the Signs, Act Early and Early Developmental Network (EDN/Early Intervention (IDEA, Part C).

- Expand home-visitation programs by maintaining existing funding for Sixpence while securing new funding such as Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), Nebraska Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting (NMIECHV) and Early Head Start.
- **Increase availability of affordable, high-quality child care for low-income infants and toddlers across diverse settings assuring equitable participation of families, children and providers of diverse race/ethnicity/language.**

- Increase number of subsidy-eligible families with infants and toddlers enrolled in quality child care programs.
- Support child care as a business, including restructuring reimbursement rates to incentivize participation in subsidy and pay for the cost of quality.
- Support providers in enrolling and upward movement in Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) and accessing the School Readiness Tax Credit.
- Increase quality and capacity through local business partnerships and community engagement.
- Support information and resources for parents and families such as a public awareness campaign on quality child care and education, Learning Begins at Birth and Child Care Referral Network (CCRN).

- **Address equitability, sustainability, accountability and alignment in early childhood systems and infrastructure assuring equitable participation of families, children, and providers of diverse race/ethnicity/language.**

- Align with Nebraska's Early Childhood Strategic Plan and Workforce Commission recommendations to collaborate and leverage resources to achieve common goals.
- Support development and implementation of Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) buildout.
- Support recommendations to restructure Nebraska's early childhood governance and financing system to eliminate barriers to full-day, year-round, high-quality, affordable early care and education regardless of the setting parents choose.
- Develop strategies toward fully funding full-day, year-round early care and education, with special focus on infants and toddlers.
- All strategies will be implemented with activities/actions to assure equitable participation of families, children and providers of diverse race/ethnicity/language.

Nebraska's long-term goal is to ensure families have strong early childhood options supported by an aligned early childhood system. This involves community leaders working together to provide opportunities for high-quality early care and learning starting at birth, and coordinating with a full suite of health, mental health and social service supports so children and families can thrive.

Leadership: Prenatal-To-Three (PN-3) Coalition

State agency leaders, nonprofits, direct service providers, higher education, philanthropy and policymakers have long been recognized as leading the charge on behalf of our state's youngest and most vulnerable children. However, the PN-3 Coalition partnership also includes business and economic leaders to strengthen quality early childhood programming as a key strategy for economic development and workforce productivity. Collectively, PN-3 Coalition stakeholders represent the perspectives of working parents, employers, economic developers and child care providers, with special focus on infants, toddlers and prenatal mothers who face equity challenges.

For more information or to get involved, contact Amy Bornemeier, abornemeier@firstfivebraska.org