

EARLY CHILDHOOD

96%

THE PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE INFANTS AND TODDLERS NOT SERVED BY EARLY HEAD START DUE TO LACK OF FUNDING.

Early childhood is a once-in-a-lifetime window of opportunity for every child. Much of a child's brain development occurs during the earliest years of life, setting the stage for future physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.¹ In a healthy, safe environment, children receive the supportive and caring relationships they need to set them up for lifelong learning and success. However, 1 in 4 children under age 5 experiences the stressful environment of poverty with unmet physical and emotional needs, leading to developmental delays and other challenges. Income-related achievement gaps show up as early as nine months and often grow larger as children age, increasing the likelihood of intergenerational poverty.

High-quality early childhood development and learning interventions have been proven to buffer the negative effects of poverty and provide lifelong benefits, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable children. Studies have shown that children enrolled in high quality early childhood programs are more likely to graduate from high school, hold a job, and make more money and less likely to commit a crime than their peers who do not participate.² Nobel laureate economist James Heckman estimates a lifelong economic rate of return of 7 to 10 percent per year per dollar invested.³

Too few young children today benefit from high quality early childhood development and learning supports. The most recent early childhood data show:

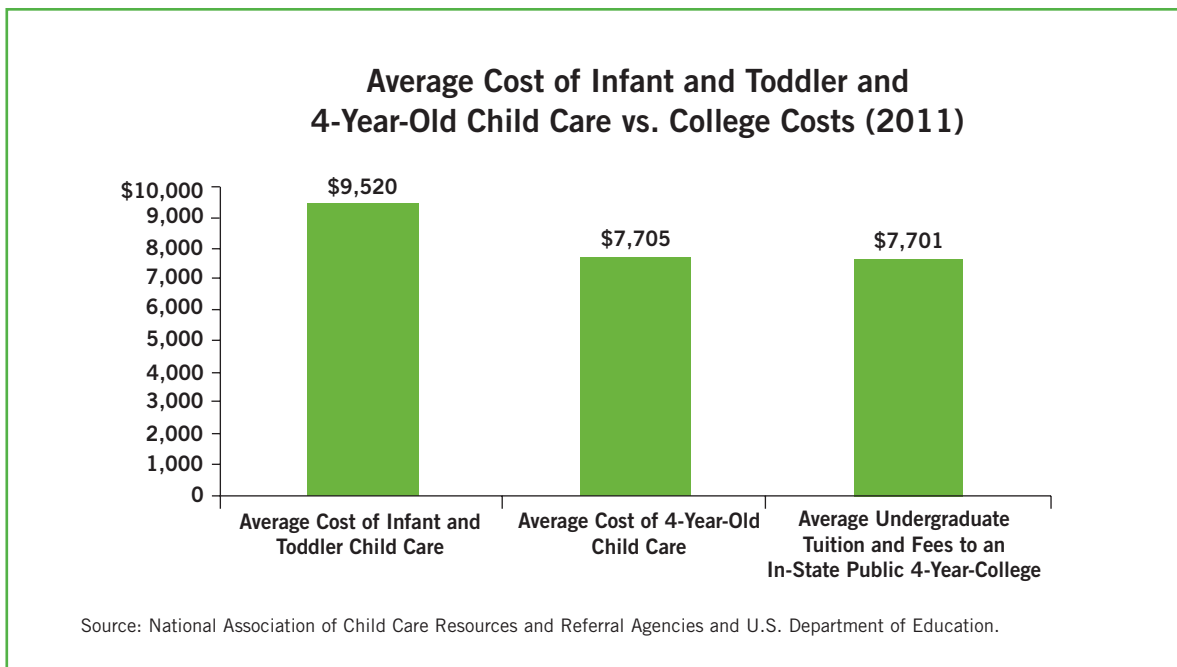
- In every state young children and parents are currently benefiting, and many more could benefit from voluntary evidence-based home visiting programs funded by the federal Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. These quality programs promote maternal and child health and improve school readiness among other benefits.
- Early Head Start, which provides comprehensive services for infants and toddlers through home visiting, center-based care, and family child care, was funded to serve only an estimated 4 percent of the 2.9 million poor children under age 3 who were eligible for the program on any given day in FY2012⁴ (see Table G-1).
- Head Start funding was only enough to serve an estimated 41 percent of the 2 million poor 3- and 4-year olds who were eligible for the program on any given day in FY2012⁵ (see Table G-2).
- Budget cuts have had a disproportionate impact on programs serving young children. From 2011 to 2012 total federal spending on children decreased 7 percent, and spending on early childhood programs decreased by 12 percent.⁶ The sequestration budget cuts eliminated more than 57,000 children from Head Start and Early Head Start in 2013.⁷
- Fewer than half of 3- and 4-year-olds were enrolled in preschool on average in the three year period from 2009 to 2011 (see Table G-3).

From Head Start to Harvard

The colors were brighter than any she had seen before. Shapes, letters, and lots and lots of colors adorned the walls; around the room, children worked together building high rises with colored blocks and “read” colorful picture books. “I had never seen so much color,” Angie vividly remembers her first days as a Head Start preschooler in Duarte, California. This was her first formal experience learning English. Her parents, who spoke mostly Spanish, enrolled her in the program knowing that their little girl would need English to succeed in school.

— Angelica Salazar, former middle school English teacher, graduate of Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, now CDF Policy Associate in California

- For many children, state preschool is the most affordable option. Sixteen percent of 3- and 4-year-olds were enrolled in state preschool programs during school year 2011-2012. Only four states had preschool programs that met all 10 of the National Institute for Early Education Research’s quality benchmarks in 2011-2012; 20 states met eight or more (see Table G-3).
- In 2011, the average cost of center-based care for infants was greater than the annual tuition and fees for an in-state public college in 35 states and the District of Columbia, and the cost of care for a 4-year-old was more than the cost of college in 25 states and the District of Columbia (see Figure and Table G-4).
- An average of nearly 1 million families every month in FY2011 received financial assistance through the Child Care and Development Fund to help pay for the high cost of child care, resulting in assistance for more than 1.6 million children monthly (see Table G-5). In 2013, income eligibility limits for federally supported child care assistance in all states were below the federally recommended 85 percent of state median income, and 19 states had child care waiting lists or had frozen intake (see Table G-6).



Find state data in Early Childhood tables in Appendix.