

What We Can Do

As a nation, **we know what to do** for America's infants and toddlers to create the sturdy architecture on which their future will be built. Now we need the **determination** to make these policies a reality.

- Improve the quality and availability of infant-toddler **child care**, because only 16% of eligible infants and toddlers receive CCDF support and poor quality care diminishes a child's in-born potential.
- Expand **Early Head Start** to provide its proven high-quality, comprehensive child development services, because only 4% of eligible children are receiving them.
- Provide infant and early childhood mental health services in all child-serving settings, because 12% of 2- and 3-year-olds experience **social-emotional** problems that negatively impact their functioning and readiness for school.

Now Is When the Payoff Begins

As Nobel Laureate James Heckman demonstrated, everyone gains when we invest in, develop, and sustain America's greatest natural resource – its people.

INVEST	in educational and developmental resources for disadvantaged families to provide equal access to successful early human development.
+ DEVELOP	cognitive skills and social skills in children early, from birth to age five when it matters most.
+ SUSTAIN	early development with effective education through adulthood.
= GAIN	more capable, productive and valuable citizens that pay dividends to America for generations to come.

The greatest opportunity for influencing a child's life begins on day one.

The future starts now – help all babies realize their full potential.

For more details about these policies and others, as well as the complete list of citations for the card, please visit www.zerotothree.org/policyguide. For further use: www.zerotothree.org/permissions.

The Future Starts Now

Help All Babies Realize Their Full Potential

Experiences in the first three years shape the architecture of a baby's brain and build the foundation for **lifelong learning, good health, and success in the workforce.**



Too many infants and toddlers are born into, and grow up in, environments that narrow the opportunities for realizing their potential. This comes at a great cost to all of us. Our nation's prosperity is jeopardized when the future of so many children is compromised.

Our state and federal policies should support families with young children – beginning at birth – so they have **good health and positive early learning experiences** that unfold within **strong family** relationships. All three are essential to healthy growth and development.

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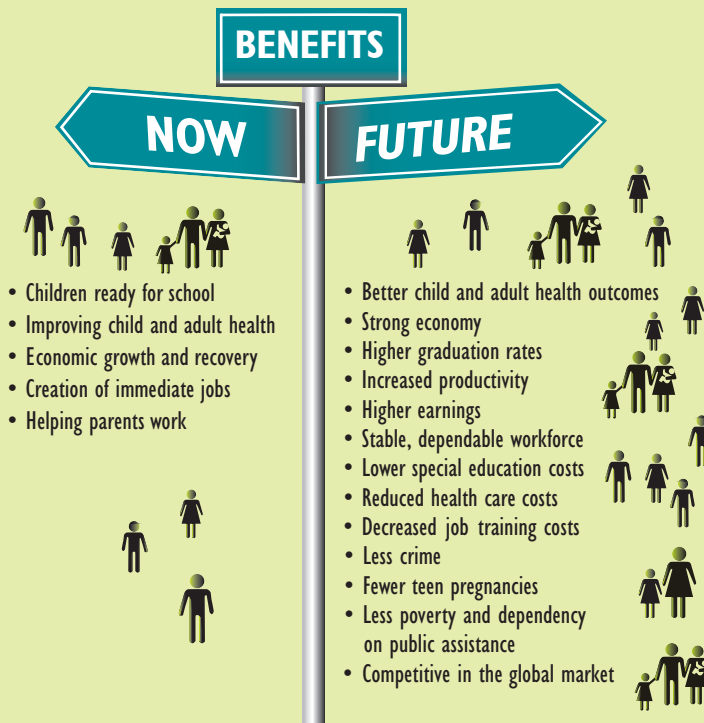


What We Know

- The brain develops rapidly in the first three years of life, forming **700 new neural connections every second**. Yet a baby's experiences and environment can change that course. For low-income babies, differences in word learning and development appear by 16 to 18 months of age, and patterns that suggest widening gaps are established by age 3.
- Almost **1 out of every 4 infants and toddlers is poor**, and almost half of all children under age 3 live in low-income families. Poverty in the early years is associated with challenges in adulthood, including fewer years in school, less earnings, higher crime rates, greater dependency on public assistance, and increased teenage pregnancy.
- Positive **cognitive development and social-emotional capabilities** – such as perseverance, self-esteem, motivation, and self-control – go hand in hand to promote a child's success. They drive educational achievement, which ultimately results in economic strength for individuals and society.
- **We all pay the price** when babies and toddlers experience trauma or other adverse experiences, because they increase the likelihood of developmental delays and problems in children, as well as heart disease, diabetes, and depression in adulthood.

We All Benefit From Quality Early Childhood Experiences

We all benefit now and in the future when children get a good start in life – with a talented workforce, stronger economy, a healthier society, and a responsible citizenry.



What We Can Do

- Prioritize abused and neglected infants and toddlers (who comprise almost 1 out of every 3 children entering foster care) by providing **child welfare** services that support their unique stages of development.
- Strengthen developmental screening, referral, and intervention by permanently authorizing and fully funding **Part C** of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, because two-thirds of infants and toddlers with a developmental delay or disability are not identified in a timely way resulting in more expensive and less effective special education services.
- Ensure infants, toddlers, and families have access to prenatal care, **well-child** visits, and nutritious food, because the origins of life-long illness and disability lie in early childhood.
- Ensure the TANF program includes a focus on **high-quality developmental** services for infants and toddlers, because the adverse effects of poverty are greatest for young children.