

BABIES IN THE BUDGET

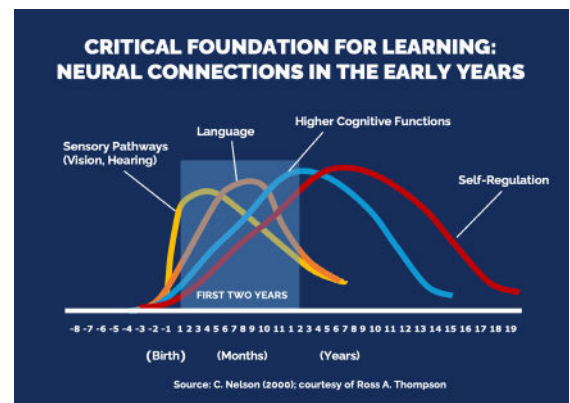
FEDERAL SHARE OF SPENDING ON INFANTS AND TODDLERS: FY2017-FY2023



The 11.4 million babies and toddlers in the United States represent 3.4 percent of the U.S. population. Yet, just 1.7 percent of the federal budget goes to support for infants and toddlers – underspending on our youngest children as they are developing the foundation that will shape the rest of their lives. Now, even this small share of the budget is under increased threat of spending cuts and caps. Congress should reject spending cuts to programs that support early development, and instead increase investments in our youngest children and their families, following the science of early brain development.

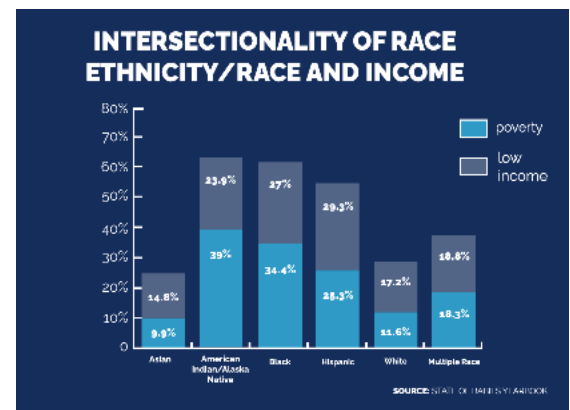
Early Years Lay the Foundation:

During the first three years of life, children's brains are making more than 1 million neural connections every second as babies and toddlers undergo rapid physical, cognitive and emotional development. Environments that support strong, nurturing family relationships, safe communities, and basic needs, help create a strong foundation for all development that follows. But when babies don't get what they need to thrive, this foundation can falter – undermining their futures through less success in school, reduced earnings, greater health problems and even early mortality.



Many Babies Experience Economic Insecurity that Threatens their Early Foundations:

Inequities start at birth and even before. Forty percent of all babies live in families with low income or in poverty, rising to two-thirds of Black and Indigenous babies and more than half of Hispanic/Latine babies. Moreover, economic hardship and emotional distress increased for young children and families of color and with low income during the pandemic. Babies in economically stressed families are more likely to live in unstable housing or have families with high food insecurity resulting in chronic, unrelenting stress that undermines brain development. Promoting equity starts with early investments in babies' healthy development that will yield long-term returns through better health and productivity.



Federal Investments Help Reduce Inequities:

Federal programs touch every aspect of infants and toddlers' development. They help fill gaps in family resources and reduce inequities by providing access to health care, reducing environmental hazards, boosting income, food security, and housing stability, and providing




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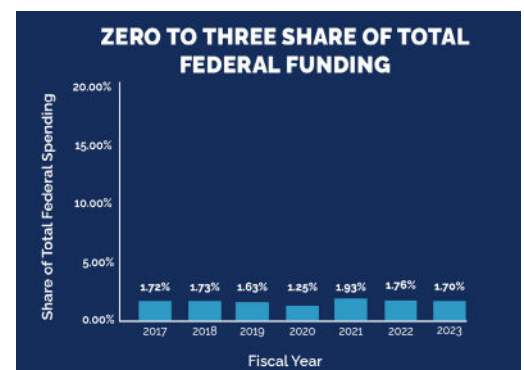
ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

access to child care and early learning programs, prioritizing support for families with the fewest resources. By reducing family stressors, providing enriching early learning opportunities, and mitigating factors such as pollution, these programs lead to happier, healthier, and better supported infants and toddlers - and the benefits of this strengthened early development reverberate over the course of their lives in terms of better health, stronger educational outcomes, and higher future earnings.

 GOOD HEALTH	 STRONG FAMILIES	 POSITIVE EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES
Federal investments in mental and physical health provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive health insurance like Medicaid and CHIP; Mental and physical health care services, such as Community Health Centers and health workforce development; and, Cleaner air and water through investments in renewable energy and initiatives that reduce lead in soil and water. 	Federal investments support strong families, shaping family and community environments in which development unfolds by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing child poverty through tax credits and direct assistance; Meeting material needs such as food and housing; and, Building family strengths through home visiting, family resource programs, and child welfare services 	Federal investments promote strong early cognitive, social emotional, and language development and help families work, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting access and paying for child care through the Child Care and Development Block Grant; Providing high quality early learning opportunities and comprehensive services through Early Head Start; and, Ensuring early intervention for babies with developmental delays and disabilities through IDEA Part C.

Federal Share Is Small and Doesn't Meet Needs:

Our budgets fail to prioritize the needs of infants and toddlers during the earliest years of foundational brain development. The baby share of the budget is less than two percent of the federal budget. This share falls well short of even investing in infants and toddlers relative to their share of the overall population and is in direct conflict with the science of brain development, where early investments yield a high return. Moreover, programs such as child care and housing are not able to meet the needs of the large proportion of babies and families with low to moderate income, an underinvestment that forgoes greater impacts.



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Proposed Cuts Would Heavily Impact Babies:

The House of Representatives recently passed legislation (H.R. 2811) that likely would result in a 22 percent cut across all non-defense discretionary spending in exchange for not causing the U.S. to default on its debt for the first time in history. These cuts are expected to disproportionately fall on the parts of the budget that include many of the programs that support infants and toddlers and their families, particularly in the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill, where many of these programs are concentrated, threatening to further reduce their share of the budget and destabilize their futures.

Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee Programs Play a Critical Role in Shaping Early Development

The Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee covers over 63 percent of non-defense discretionary spending on infants, toddlers, and their families. Programs support every aspect of children's lives from well-child care to child care and early learning. Potential cuts to Labor-HHS-Education top line funding disproportionately threaten the programs most key to supporting early development. Examples of program impacted by proposed cuts include:

- 1. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG):** CCDBG helps families with low-income afford child care in their communities. CCDBG currently serves just 1 in 7 eligible children. As proposed, a 22 percent cut would threaten access to child care for more than 100,000 children.
- 2. Early Head Start:** Early Head Start provides high quality learning opportunities and comprehensive for babies living in poverty. A 22 percent cut could mean more than 200,000 young children would lose access to Head Start and Early Head Start.
- 3. Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:** Part C provides early intervention services for babies that identify and address developmental delays and disabilities, but too many babies who would benefit from services aren't able to access them, a 22 percent cut would further reduce families' access to needed early intervention services for their children.
- 4. Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Grants:** IECMH grants help build state capacity to improve outcomes for very young children by developing, maintaining, or enhancing IECMH promotion, and treatment services. Reduced funding would impede these burgeoning efforts.

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Redouble Our Commitment to Babies:

Our budgets should follow the science and increase investments in the earliest years commensurate to their importance in shaping the rest of children's lives. We know these investments have near- and long-term positive outcomes for children and benefits our overall economy as well. We should prioritize investments to meet the needs of all our children, especially those facing the biggest barriers to economic mobility. Yet, the budget priority for the youngest children has waxed and waned. Overall spending on all children increased during the latter part of the pandemic, showing a priority placed on helping children recover. The share of spending on children ages zero to three also increased somewhat—but still remained under 2 percent. That share has since declined and now is below the pre-pandemic level. Congress must not allow further cuts to programs that support infants and toddlers and their families during the earliest years of foundational development, and instead invest in a robust support system for our youngest children that will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

Methodology

This analysis includes spending estimates for children under the age of three for nearly 120 of the programs included in the [First Focus Children's Budget 2022](#) publication. Each of these programs touches important aspects of early development.

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