

Early Head Start: Setting Babies Up for Lifelong Success



The Early Head Start program strengthens families and puts babies on the right track for school, work, and life.

Since 1995, Early Head Start has been an essential part of the Head Start program, providing comprehensive services to meet the needs of nearly 250,000 babies, toddlers, and their parents every year—including pregnant women. Early Head Start is specifically built to meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers facing the biggest barriers to learning and growth, helping parents meet their child's early learning needs.

Babies need Congress to:

- **Fund Head Start** for at least \$14.91 billion in FY 2026.
- **Maintain the Early Head Start funding allocation** at the current proportion of the Head Start program.



Early Head Start Delivers Measurable Results for Babies, Parents and Communities

Foundational gains for babies

Children living in low-income households face more obstacles to learning and development—and Early Head Start is proven to get them on track.



By age 2, children in Early Head Start show **stronger cognitive, language, and social-emotional skills than their peers** who aren't in the program. For many children, benefits are still seen into elementary school.

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Stronger parents, stronger babies

Early Head Start programs actively encourage and support parental involvement in a child's learning and development. Programs connect families with other community resources, including prenatal and other medical care, dental care, postpartum education and home visits.



Caregivers in the program are **more engaged during play and talk more with their children**—key drivers of early brain growth. They're also more likely to enroll in job training or education, boosting family income and economic stability. Children whose mothers enroll during pregnancy show some of the strongest outcomes.

A community pillar

Early Head Start is deeply responsive to community needs and offers parental choice, engaging families in the services they receive. Eligibility for Early Head Start is generally based on family income, family receipt of other specified services, and other factors (like homelessness or foster care) that indicate children may need additional supports to stay on track.



Head Start and Early Head Start serve children in every state and Congressional district across America, especially in rural communities. By being flexible in program structure and offering services in center-based and home-based settings, **Early Head Start gives communities options to support their families and to give babies the building blocks to pave their own path for lifelong success.**

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