Early Childhood Developmental Health Systems | EVIDENCE TO IMPACT CENTER

Evidence Summary for Investment in Early Childhood Development

This resource was originally developed for state- and community-level teams funded by the Transforming Pediatrics for Early Childhood (TPEC) program, which is designed to advance the delivery of early childhood development services in pediatric practice settings. The resource highlights the return on investment (ROI) in early childhood programs, providing evidence to help early childhood leaders make the case for sustained support and funding. The evidence included in this review ranges from investments in early childhood education and health programs to public health interventions for young children.

2020: A paper looking at the long-term effects of Head Start found that the program generated large increases in adult human capital and economic self-sufficiency, including a 2.7% increase in high school completion, 8.5% increase in college enrollment, and 39% increase in college completion.

2019: Researchers from Duke University examined the Family Connects program, a community public health intervention that aligns and evaluates services and resources while providing postpartum nurse visits.

- Children in Family Connects had 37% less total emergency care through 24 months. Billing records indicated a $3.17 decrease in total billing costs for each $1 in program costs.

2017: RAND conducted an updated comprehensive review of early childhood program evaluations that confirmed previous results showing such programs can improve a range of outcomes. The reviewed programs served children and their parents from the prenatal period to age 5 and included preschool settings, home visiting, parent education, and government transfers of cash and in-kind benefits.

- Close to 90% of evaluated programs showed positive effects; among programs with an economic evaluation, the typical rate of return was $2 to $4 for every $1 invested.

A study in *JAMA Network* showed that an additional hour per month of early intervention services (physical, occupational, speech therapy, and developmental intervention) was associated with a 3-point gain in functional outcomes.

2009: A high rate of return was revealed in a study of Perry Preschool, a high-quality program for kids ages 3-5 developed in Michigan in the 1960s that estimated a return to society of about $7-12 for each $1 invested. The program began at age 3 and lasted 2 years, with treatment consisting of a 2.5-hour preschool program on weekdays during the school year and supplemental weekly home visits by teachers.

- The Heckman Curve: The highest rate of return will result from the earliest possible investment in children.

2007: A study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* demonstrated that a Chicago program providing school-based educational enrichment and comprehensive family services from preschool to third grade continued to benefit its participants into adulthood.

- Adults who participated in the program as children showed better reproductive health and birth outcomes, higher cognitive skills, higher school achievement and performance, higher school attainment, higher earnings capacity, and lower rates of delinquency and crime.

Long-term research conducted by Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child has shown better outcomes for children who receive early intervention services in cognitive, language, and motor development; enhanced social-emotional skills; greater school readiness; and stronger family relationships. These outcomes contribute to a child's mental health and overall success in adulthood.

2005: A RAND study quantified the economic returns from effective early intervention programs that provide child development services from the prenatal period through kindergarten.

- Well-designed early childhood interventions were found to generate a return to society of $1.80-17.07 for each dollar spent on the program.

1990s: A Wisconsin study, which followed children through age 21 after their participation in an early intervention program, demonstrated that high-quality, multifaceted early intervention alters the course of intellectual development in young children.

- Participants demonstrated higher IQs and cognitive performance, improved language, decreased grade retention, decreased need for special education, delayed parenthood, and higher rates of high school education for teen mothers.
- Each child had an individualized program of educational activities, consisting of games incorporated into the child's day. These activities focused on social, emotional, and cognitive areas of development, with an emphasis on language.

This program was made possible through the support of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling $4,740,000 with 0% financed from non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit HRSA.gov.