

North Carolina Early Childhood Action Plan Implementation Update

Prepared for the North Carolina Children's Wellbeing Transformation Council
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

Background

The [Early Childhood Action Plan](#) sets a bold vision and goals to reach by 2025 for all of North Carolina's young children from birth through age 8 and their families. In August 2018, Governor Roy Cooper issued [Executive Order No. 49](#) charging the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) to collaboratively lead the development of a statewide early childhood plan, with support from the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), other departments and stakeholders. The plan centers on three themes: that North Carolina's young children are healthy, grow up safe and nurtured, and are well-supported be ready to succeed in school and beyond. There are 10 focused goals under those three themes. Each of the 10 goals features at least one measure of accountability by 2025, including statewide and county information, broken down by racial, ethnic, and geographic demographics. An [online data dashboard](#) provides public accessibility for the over 50 data measures available in the plan.

Collaboration was central in the creation of the NC Early Childhood Action Plan. In total nearly 1,500 people from across the state provided feedback and input on the plan. Feedback was provided by a broad range of stakeholders, including families, healthcare providers, child care providers, educators, school administrators, child advocacy groups and researchers. The plan builds off the extensive leadership of NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading led by the NC Early Childhood Foundation, NC Think Babies, the NC Perinatal Health Strategic Plan, the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Essentials for Childhood Taskforce, MyFutureNC, and others.

Goal 1: Healthy Babies | Babies across North Carolina from all backgrounds will have a healthy start in their first year of life.

Goal 2: Preventive Health Services | Babies, toddlers, young children and their families will have regular, ongoing access to high-quality health services.

Goal 3: Food Security | Babies, toddlers, young children and their families across North Carolina will have access to enough healthy food every day.

Goal 4: Safe and Secure Housing | Babies, toddlers, young children and their families across North Carolina will have access to safe, secure and affordable housing.

Goal 5: Safe and Nurturing Relationships | Babies, toddlers and young children across North Carolina will grow up with safe and nurturing family and caregiver relationships.

Goal 6: Permanent Families for Children in Foster Care | Babies, toddlers and young children in foster care will grow up in stable, consistent and nurturing families, whether that is with the child's birth family or through an adoptive family.

Goal 7: Social-Emotional Health and Resilience | Babies, toddlers and young children across North Carolina will express, recognize and manage their emotions in a healthy way, especially under stress.

Goal 8: High-Quality Early Learning | Babies, toddlers and young children across North Carolina will have access to high-quality opportunities to engage in early learning.

Goal 9: On Track for School Success | Young children across North Carolina will enter kindergarten on track for reaching their developmental goals.

Goal 10: Reading at Grade Level | Young children across North Carolina will read on grade-level in elementary school, with a particular focus on African American, American Indian and Hispanic children who face the greatest systemic barriers to reading success.

Implementation

As collaboration was central in the creation of the Early Childhood Action Plan, so too it is central to reaching the goals of the plan. Since the Early Childhood Action Plan launched at the end of February 2019, the NCDHHS early childhood team has been hard at work within the department and with stakeholders statewide to support reaching the goals of the plan. From joint presentations across the state, to strategic planning meetings and discussions about how statewide early childhood priorities align with the work of divisions, NCDHHS is partnering to move toward a future where all children will grow up healthy in safe and nurturing families, schools, and communities, so they can thrive in school and in life. While it is impossible to capture all of the Early Childhood Action Plan's impact to-date, the areas outlined below highlight key ongoing efforts, both by NCDHHS and other partners across NC.

Endorsements and Adoption

The NC Early Childhood Action Plan has been formally endorsed by the North Carolina State Board of Education and the Governor's Education Cabinet. Many statewide and local early childhood organizations have adopted or aligned the goals of the Early Childhood Action Plan into their strategic plans.

Examples of Statewide and Local Efforts Aligned to NC Early Childhood Action Plan

- **Duke University, in partnership with UNC and NC Medicaid, applied to the Integrated Care for Kids (InCK) model in June 2019.** The InCK model is a federal funding opportunity from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation for up to \$16 million over seven years. The model aims to improve the quality of care for children under 21 years of age covered by Medicaid and CHIP and reduce expenditures through prevention, early identification, and treatment of behavioral and physical health needs. The application highlights the Early Childhood Action Plan, and proposes initiatives such as improving data systems to promote home visiting, care management, and parenting education, provide training and NCCARE360 licenses for early care and education providers, and implement a two-generation early childhood Medicaid payment bundle. This work aligns to multiple goals of the Early Childhood Action Plan.
- **The Healthy North Carolina 2030 project used the Early Childhood Action Plan as a basis to develop metrics for the state, including infant mortality, food security, housing, adverse childhood experiences, and third grade reading proficiency.** Healthy 2030 brings together the North Carolina Division of Public Health with other NCDHHS staff and stakeholders from across the state, convened by the North Carolina Institute of Medicine, to outline measures for health for North Carolina. With a focus on health equity and the overall drivers of health outcomes, these indicators and targets will help drive state and local-level activities, and provide a springboard for collaboration and innovation, to improve the health and well-being of all people of North Carolina. It is supported by the Duke Endowment, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation. This work aligns to multiple goals of the Early Childhood Action Plan.
- **North Carolina is participating in a state implementation workgroup called Pediatrics Supporting Parents, in which Manatt and the Center for the Study of Social Policy will provide technical assistance around how to leverage Medicaid and CHIP funds to transform pediatric primary care delivery.** The work group involves state level staff from NCDHHS, pediatricians from across the state, and advocates. This work aligns directly to the Early Childhood Action Plan goal Preventive Health Services.
- **NCDHHS Division of Child Development and Early Education received \$4.5 million in federal Preschool Development Grant funding from the Administration for Children and Families in 2019,**

supporting access to early childhood education across the state for vulnerable and underserved families. NCDHHS DCDEE has aligned work and reapplication for additional grant funding to the state's Early Childhood Action Plan, especially in support of goals around Social Emotional Health and Resilience, High Quality Early Learning, and On Track for School Success.

- **NCDHHS established a workgroup of Local DSS Directors and Local Health Directors facilitated by the state Divisions of Social Services and Public Health to identify opportunities for collaboration and cross-program enrollment to address food insecurity and increase participation in other social services.** This work aligns directly to the Early Childhood Action Plan Food Security goal.
- **NCDHHS received \$10 million in funding to expand Triple P (Positive Parenting Program), available for parents in all 100 counties.** Triple P is a system of parenting interventions with the main goals of increasing the knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents and reducing the prevalence of mental health, emotional, and behavioral problems in children and adolescents. This effort aligns to multiple goals in the Early Childhood Action Plan.
- **NCDHHS is coordinating with Prevent Child Abuse NC to implement a public awareness and norms change campaign, Connections Matter, and to support local communities in building out child abuse prevention plans aligned to the Early Childhood Action Plan.** This work aligns to multiple goals of the Early Childhood Action Plan.
- **NCDHHS is partnering with the Department of Public Safety as it develops a statewide school safety plan, including alignment with the Early Childhood Action Plan.** DPS presented the draft plan to the Safer Schools Task Force for discussion and feedback on October 10, 2019. The Task Force created a steering committee to finalize the high-level goals/objectives between late October 2019 and early January 2020. The final plan will be presented to the Task Force for adoption and implementation by April 2020. This work aligns to the Social Emotional Well-being and Resilience goal of the Early Childhood Action Plan.
- **The NC Early Childhood Foundation is convening a Children's Social Emotional Health data workgroup from September 2019 to March 2020, including staff from NCDHHS, and partners from across the state including researchers, advocates, pediatricians, educators, and parents.** This workgroup aims to review research and best practices to co-create consensus recommendations for what measure – or portfolio of proxy measures – would best track young children's social-emotional health at the population level. The workgroup will directly inform the Early Childhood Action Plan goal focused on Social Emotional Health and Resilience.
- **In October 2019, a statewide regular convening of early childhood professors from community colleges (NCACCESS) discussed the Early Childhood Action Plan and how their coursework delivered to aspiring early childhood educators aligns to the goals of the plan.** The group noted significant alignment of the topics of their coursework, and committed using the Early Childhood Action Plan as a tool for advocacy for their students. The work of this group aligns to all of the goals of the Early Childhood Action Plan.
- **NCDHHS invested \$1.4 million in funding to expand Buncombe County's Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Teams (START) program for parents and children affected by child maltreatment and parental substance use disorders.** This work aligns to the Safe and Nurturing Relationships goal of the Early Childhood Action Plan.
- **NCDHHS is partnering with the North Carolina Partnership for in up to 5 communities to implement the Building Community Resilience (BCR) model.** BCR aims to break multi-generational trauma, and is informed by research on child health care systems and on barriers to addressing the root causes of community and childhood adversity. This effort aligns to multiple goals in the Early Childhood Action Plan, including Social Emotional Health and Resilience.