

Investing in Prenatal to Age Three

Building a strong foundation for success in school and life.

A child's brain develops faster from birth to age three than at any later period in life, building the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. Parents play the lead role in their child's healthy development, but all parents are stretched in the earliest months and years of their child's life. Whether providing direct support or through a community-based network of organizations and programs, there is no doubt that government has a role to play in helping parents access needed services at this especially critical and stressful time. When we support them in their earliest years, infants grow into healthy kids who are confident, empathetic, and ready for school and life—and our communities, workforce, and economy become stronger and more productive.

PRENATAL TO AGE THREE IS CRITICAL FOR BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

A child's experiences in the first three years are the bricks and mortar of brain development, with more than 1 million new neural connections forming in an infant's brain every second. Responsive relationships and positive experiences early in life build a sturdy brain architecture that becomes the foundation for core social-emotional skills, early executive functioning and self-regulatory skills, and literacy skills—skills that are all critical for later health and success.

Research from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University shows the importance of brain development for infants and toddlers. Supportive relationships and positive learning experiences begin at home but can also be provided through a range of effective programs and policies.

EARLY INVESTMENT WORKS

It's not just infants, toddlers, and their families who benefit when we start early—it's the entire community. When we invest in the first three years of a child's life, the returns for communities are the highest, and we can reduce the need for more expensive interventions later. Research from Professor James Heckman at the University of Chicago found that investments in high quality programs that support young children starting at birth deliver a 13 percent annual return—significantly higher than the 7 to 10 percent return delivered by preschool alone.



To help children achieve healthy development by age three we must invest in national, state and local policies and programs that:

- Increase the number of families with children prenatal to age three who are connected to essential health, development and social emotional support services.
- Increase the number of low-income infants and toddlers receiving affordable, high-quality child care.



SUPPORTING HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT BY AGE THREE

The National Collaborative for Infants & Toddlers (NCIT), funded by the Pritzker Children’s Initiative, is a nationwide network of advocates working inside and outside state and local government to ensure children are on track for success in school and life by age three. We are measuring progress through a robust system of national, state, and local metrics. Visit www.theNCIT.org for more information.



Healthy Beginnings

A healthy beginning for a child starts before birth with a healthy mother. To improve chances for a strong start in life, all expectant mothers need access to comprehensive prenatal and postnatal care, screenings and services to ensure infants are born safely and continue to thrive.



Supported Families

For healthy development, infants and toddlers need quality health care, stimulating learning opportunities, and nurturing, responsive relationships. A system of supports for families should be in place to reach every parent and child at or before birth with needed information, assessments and referrals that offer each child a strong start.



High-Quality Child Care & Early Learning

High-Quality child care must be accessible and affordable for every family that needs it. Whether it’s in a child care center or with home-based providers, stimulating learning opportunities and nurturing, responsive relationships are crucial to support healthy brain development.

Funded through the Pritzker Children’s Initiative, the National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers brings together national partners, early childhood leaders, philanthropy, policymakers, and practitioners inside and outside state and local government to create and strengthen promising policies and programs and share what works, so that more states and communities can support the healthy development of our youngest children.

The Pritzker Children’s Initiative, a project of the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation, is committed to building a promising future for our country by investing in and supporting solutions in early childhood development for children prenatal to age three, with the goal of every child reaching kindergarten ready to learn.