

# Prenatal-to-Three Outcomes Framework



The National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT) is committed to advancing policies and programs to ensure all families have the support they need to give their infants and toddlers a strong foundation for success in school and life. The goal is to expand high-quality services nationally to at least one million low-income families with children prenatal to age three by 2023.

Anchoring the work of communities, states, and national partners is the **NCIT Prenatal-to-Three Outcomes Framework**. Drawing from research evidence, the framework identifies systems-level, policy/program-level, and child/family-level outcomes in the goal areas of: **Healthy Beginnings, Supported Families, and Quality Care and Learning**. Collectively, efforts in these goal areas can promote the environments that help children and families thrive and ensure children are making developmental progress toward school readiness.

## USING THE FRAMEWORK

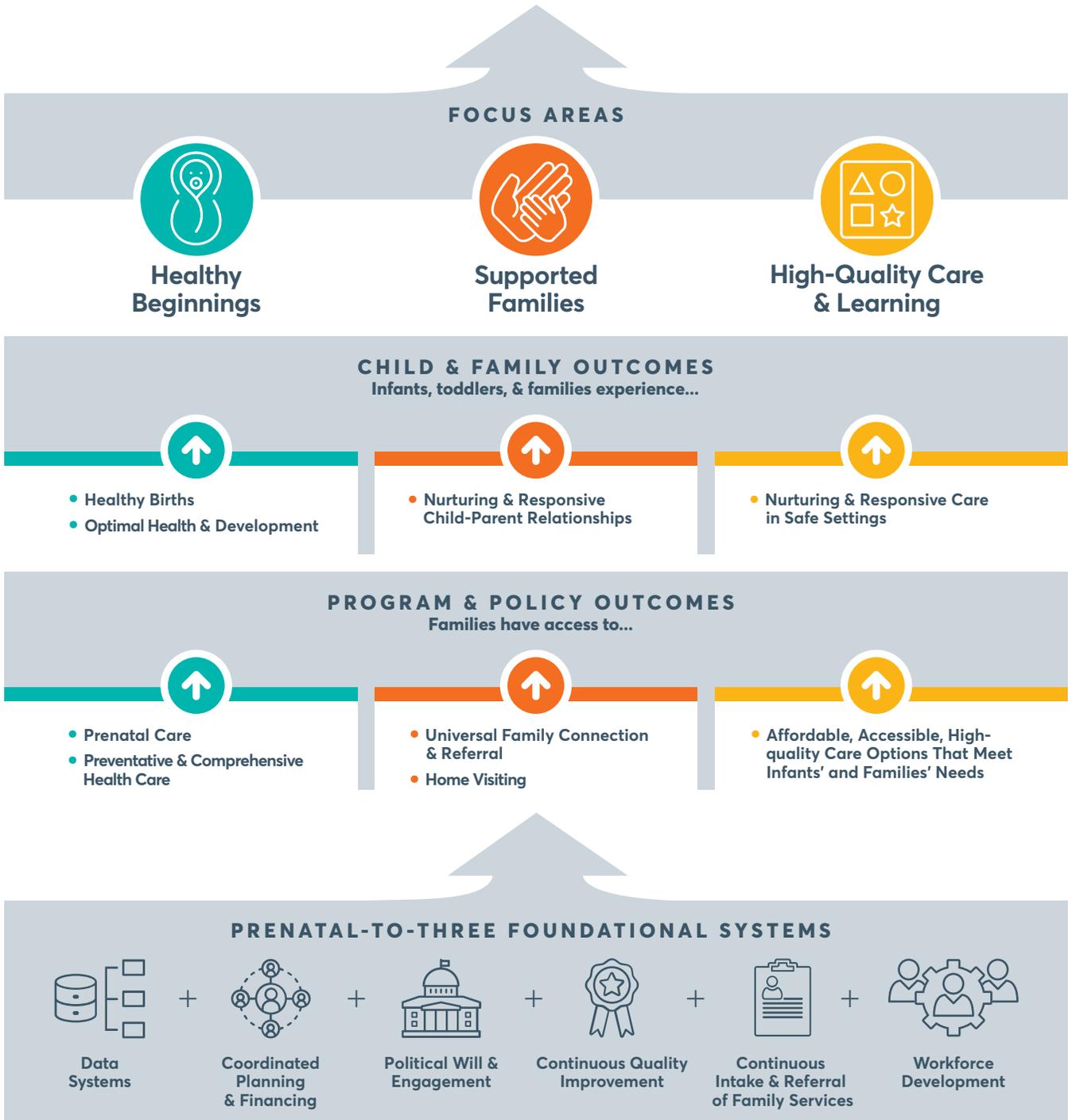
The framework can be used by state and community-level initiatives as a roadmap for supporting infants, toddlers, and their families.

- The framework can be used as an **organizing tool** to plan and implement **prenatal-to-three** initiatives. The framework can help states and communities chart areas of strength and areas of opportunity. It can help identify the work of new partners who can be included in planning and implementation as the initiative proceeds.
- The framework can be used to guide **continuous improvement**. The framework identifies high priority indicators for targeting and monitoring over time. As programs and services are launched, the framework can guide projections and calculations of the number of children reached by the initiative. It can help focus on challenges and areas in need of improvement.
- The framework can be used as a **communications tool** to demonstrate the goals and work underway to support prenatal-to-three efforts. It can be used to develop common language and vision across stakeholders.



## MEASURING SUCCESS: HEALTHY CHILD DEVELOPMENT BY AGE 3

With a focus on equity, states and communities can build and sustain locally responsive programs, policies, and systems that meet the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families. Policy outcomes support child and family outcomes, and prenatal-to-three systems create a sustainable infrastructure to ensure families get the right services at the right times.





This brief provides more detail about each element of the framework. The *NCIT Data Guidebook* contains detailed recommendations for the data sources and calculations needed for each indicator in the Framework.

## OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS OF A ROBUST PRENATAL TO AGE 3 EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

The NCIT has identified a set of research-based outcomes that contribute to the long-term goal of children being healthy and on track for kindergarten readiness by age three. These outcomes are identified in the teal row of the framework and are identified for each goal area. These outcomes are defined by a set of indicators that can be tracked over time, across communities and most importantly, are sensitive to policy and programmatic interventions. Policies and programs that may have a strong influence on these child and family outcomes are identified in the purple row of the outcomes framework.





## HEALTHY BEGINNINGS

A healthy beginning starts before birth. To improve chances for a strong start in life, access to prenatal care during pregnancy, and preventative and comprehensive health care early in a child's life are critical. Preventative and comprehensive health care includes not only regular well-child visits, but also screenings and referrals to any necessary services can ensure optimal development in a child's earliest months and years.

In the healthy beginnings goal area, the selected child and family outcomes include ensuring that infants, toddlers and families experience healthy births and optimal health and development. To support this outcome, all families need access to prenatal care, as well as preventative and comprehensive healthcare. Preventative and comprehensive health care is needed not only for the child, but for family members as well, for example maternal health and mental health supports.

## SUPPORTED FAMILIES

A child's brain develops faster from birth to age three than at any later period in life, forming the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. Stimulating learning opportunities and nurturing, responsive relationships fundamentally shape how a child's brain develops. Supports such as parent education, screening for maternal depression or preventive screenings for infants can help parents navigate the challenges of raising young children and nurturing their healthy development during the critical early years. Building a strong infrastructure of coordinated supports can help meet the range of needs that families may have. This infrastructure includes better coordinating home-visiting programs that already exist, expanding the capacity of new or existing home visiting programs, or utilizing universal screening and referral programs to help identify the needs of families and children at birth.

In the supported families goal area, the selected child and family outcome includes ensuring that all infants and toddlers experience nurturing and responsive child-parent relationships. These relationships may be best supported by providing access to universal family connection and referral services and/or access to home-visiting services.

## QUALITY CARE AND LEARNING

High-quality child care must be accessible and affordable to every family who needs it. Whether it is in a child care center or with friends, family, or neighbors, stimulating learning opportunities and nurturing, responsive relationships with caregivers are crucial to support healthy brain development in infants and toddlers. Young children who do not experience caring, responsive relationships early in life are more likely to experience adverse effects as they grow and develop.

In the quality care and learning goal area, the selected child and family outcomes includes ensuring that infants and toddlers experience nurturing and responsive care in safe settings. To support this outcome, families need access to high quality, affordable care options that meet infants, toddlers and families' needs.



## PN-3 SYSTEMS COMPONENTS



A critical step in working towards PN-3 goals is for states and communities to assess the strengths and opportunities for improvement in PN-3 systems. Data from a systems assessment can be used to set goals and target specific populations. During this process, communities and states should also collect and review data on high-priority contextual factors such as the percentage of infants, toddlers and their families living in poverty; with unstable housing; with food insecurity; or without access to a medical home. The foundation for successful policy and programmatic outcomes starts with a strong and coordinated prenatal-to-three system that can address the needs of at-risk infants, toddlers and families. The key components of a strong PN-3 system include:

- **Data systems** that coordinate with one another to help identify and meet the needs of young children and their families;
- **Coordinated planning and financing** that adequately supports child and family support services;
- **Political will and engagement** of community leaders ready to commit and sustain resources for prenatal-to-three priorities;
- A community-wide **continuous quality improvement** strategy for monitoring and addressing implementation challenges to ensure high quality PN-3 programs and services;
- A **coordinated intake and referral system** that can help ensure families receive the best services for their needs, minimize the duplication of services, and maximize the effective use of local resources;
- A strong PN-3 **workforce** that has the skills and competencies to deliver high-quality PN-3 programs and services.



## EQUITY

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With a focus on equity, states and communities can build and sustain locally responsive systems, programs, and policies that meet the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families.

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Equity provides the foundation for PN-3 initiatives. A focus on equity guides initiatives in setting goals and targeting the work to address the unique needs of all children. States and communities can collect and disaggregate data by characteristics such as race, income, and language to understand baseline disparities and progress that is made as the initiative proceeds toward improving outcomes for subgroups and for the overall population. This layer of the Framework reminds state and community planners that understanding the characteristics of the families and children they serve and addressing disparities are critical steps in developing responsive programs and policies.

Across each layer, the Framework provides a roadmap for states and communities to develop, monitor, assess progress, and improve their work for infants, toddlers, and their families.

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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.

The PN-3 Outcomes Framework was developed by Child Trends in collaboration with the national partners including: Joan Lombardi; Center for the Study of Social Policy; NICHQ; Strive Together; National League of Cities; National Association of Counties; Sorenson Impact Center; and the Pritzker Children's Initiative. For more information and support in using the Framework, please email [NCITSupport@childtrends.org](mailto:NCITSupport@childtrends.org).