



Raising Illinois

Fiscal Year 2022 Policy Priorities for Infants, Toddlers and Expecting Families

Background

The science is clear: the first three years of a child's life are the most critical for healthy development. During this time, the experiences that children have shape their brain development and the development of all other systems in the body. As a result, a child's experiences during the earliest years set them up for lifelong success or challenges.

By investing early, we can lay the foundation for all Illinois children to have a strong start in school and life. But, to get it right, we must also address the root causes of historic disparities and create an equitable and cohesive early childhood development system for Illinois' expecting families, infants and toddlers, and the communities in which they live.

Raising Illinois is committed to working toward expanding families' access to more affordable and equitable high-quality learning experiences, health services and economic supports as outlined in the [Illinois Prenatal to Three Agenda](#). Together, we can make a powerful commitment to our youngest generation, because infants and toddlers only get one chance at a strong start.

Our Fiscal Year 2022 Policy Priorities

This document outlines Raising Illinois' top policy priorities for Fiscal Year 2022 across the seven core areas of our Policy Agenda. The statewide coalition will advance policy change through federal and state legislative and budget advocacy, Illinois administrative and local implementation advocacy, and public awareness and engagement.

We encourage you to join us in advancing priorities, amplifying efforts and sharing information about our collective work. Visit www.raisingillinois.org/get-involved to join the Raising Illinois coalition and get involved in advocacy efforts.

About Raising Illinois

Raising Illinois is a collective effort to close the opportunity gap for our earliest learners. We are a partnership of diverse individuals and organizations across Illinois committed to supporting our youngest generation by ensuring families can access high-quality health care, engage in quality learning experiences, and establish economic security. Together, we must address the root causes of disparities and create an equitable and cohesive early childhood development support system for expecting families, infants and toddlers, and the communities in which they live. We believe race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or ability should not determine the opportunities and ultimately the success a child experiences in life. www.raisingillinois.org

FY 2022 Policy Priorities

POLICY PRIORITY #1

Alleviate Racial Disparities by Prioritizing Comprehensive Perinatal Supports

Illinois' perinatal support system does not address the full scope of supports and needs of pregnant people and families. Illinois maternal and infant mortality and morbidity outcomes lag behind the national data, disproportionately impacting women of color. Non-Hispanic Black women are six times more likely to die of a pregnancy-related condition than non-Hispanic white women, and babies born to non-Hispanic Black women in Illinois die at two to three times the rate of babies born to non-Hispanic white women.

The vast majority of these deaths are deemed preventable with the expansion and implementation of quality and accessible supports. We need to address structural racism in service systems that care for pregnant people and new families and promote a strong continuum of support during the first year postpartum. To help achieve these changes, we recommend the following policy priorities to expand and improve the continuum of quality perinatal supports for all families and expand postpartum care for 12 months after birth.



Illinois Administrative and Local Implementation Advocacy

- Expand access to Universal Newborn Support Services:
 - Support implementation of the federal Early Childhood Comprehensive Services Grant to scale the Universal Newborn Support Services model to more communities statewide with sustainable funding sources
 - Implement a \$25 million expansion of the Family Connects Chicago nurse visiting program to 12 additional sites in 3 new communities by FY 2023 to serve more than 5,500 families citywide
 - Work with the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services to establish Medicaid financing for Universal Newborn Support Services model
- Support administrative implementation of implicit bias training for health care provider licensure renewal, as mandated by the Health Care and Human Service Reform Act (HB 158)
- Support administrative implementation of licensure and expansion of freestanding birth centers, per the Birth Center Licensing Act (HB 3995) and Public Act 102-414 (HB 738)
- Support administrative implementation of a sustainable funding mechanism for 12-month postpartum Medicaid coverage to continuously serve nearly 36,000 people per year (including those previously ineligible due to immigration status and income)
- Support the design and implementation of Medicaid coverage for doula and home visiting services beginning in FY 2023
- Design a proposal for a perinatal rating component for the Illinois Hospital Report Card and Consumer Guide to Health Care



Public Awareness and Engagement

- Create public awareness campaigns in collaboration with state and community organizations including the Illinois Maternal Health Task Force to increase parent leadership on perinatal supports and COVID-19 vaccinations
- Engage pregnant and birthing individuals to participate in the Illinois Task Force on Infant and Maternal Mortality Among African Americans

POLICY PRIORITY #2

Strengthen Illinois' Evidence-Based Home Visiting System to Better Support Families and Their Children's Development

Evidence-based home visiting fosters seamless and equitable access to high-quality early childhood experiences and services from the prenatal-through-early-childhood-period. However, Illinois' home visiting program does not serve all families who say they want it. Out of the 25,044 Illinois children eligible for home visiting, only 15.42% are served.

We need to address structural racism in service systems and ensure Illinois families can connect to home visiting and doula services that support expecting parents and those caring for young children to establish healthy foundations, leverage opportunities for children's developmental and future successes, and achieve their full potential.

To help achieve this change, we recommend the following policy priorities to improve equitable access to high-quality home visiting services.



Federal and State Legislative and Budget Advocacy Priorities

- Advocate for the reauthorization of the federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program with an annual \$200 million funding increase over the next five years, as well as recommended improvements:
 - Equitable compensation adjustments
 - Expanded professional development opportunities
 - Additional family and provider consultation for program design, evaluation and policy decisions
 - A wider range of evidence-based criteria for program evaluation and funding eligibility of community-led models
 - Increased set-aside funding for the Tribal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program
- Increase by 10% the FY 2023 state budgets for Illinois State Board of Education Early Childhood Block Grant and for Illinois Department of Human Services Healthy Parents Too Soon home visiting programs, with a focus on improving home visiting workforce compensation



Illinois Administrative and Local Implementation Advocacy

- Leverage the state funder Notice of Funding Opportunity/Request for Proposal process to create an improved early childhood funding formula as recommended by the Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding
- Consolidate outcome data indicators across state funders to better coordinate and inform allocations based on disaggregated assessments of community risk and current use of programs and services
- Strengthen technical assistance to engage families who are underserved and high-risk in-home visiting programs

POLICY PRIORITY #3

Expand Access to Quality and Affordable Family and Center-based Early Learning and Care, and Better Support the Early Learning Workforce

Despite research that consistently demonstrates the effectiveness of early learning and care, the U.S. invests relatively little in our youngest learners, which impacts Illinois' infants and toddlers and their families. Moreover, reimbursement rates for providers do not consider the true cost of providing care, contributing to abysmally low wages for caregivers.

We need to strengthen current programs and services to support Illinois' infants and toddlers and the professionals who work with them.

To help achieve this change, we recommend the following policy priorities to increase investment in early learning programs and establish protocols for workforce support that better lay the foundation for infants' and toddlers future health and success.



Federal and State Legislative and Budget Advocacy Priorities

- Advocate for passage of the Build Back Better Act and inform its implementation to ensure new funding prioritizes the needs of infants and toddlers and their families
- Advocate for the needs of Illinois infants and toddlers and their families in advance of the federal Head Start Act reauthorization
- Increase Early Childhood Block Grant and Child Care Assistant Program budgets by 10% for FY 2023 to increase infant-toddler workforce compensation
- Advocate for use of COVID-19 relief funds to stabilize and expand infant-toddler care with predictable funding that can better cover workforce and other operational costs
- Increase investments to improve the quality in licensed infant-toddler child care program through the Illinois Child Care and Development Fund and ExceleRate pilot expansion



Illinois Administrative and Local Implementation Advocacy

- Support and inform the Illinois Governor's transformation team to prioritize infants and toddlers in state adequacy and funding mechanisms, as recommended by the Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding
- Continue to work with Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to embed Gateways credentials into child care licensing to better support workforce development
- Ensure infant-toddler providers receive technical assistance to support successful applications for Early Childhood Construction Grants and the IFF Quality Facilities for All initiative
- Complete the comprehensive Infant and Toddler Child Care Roadmap report and advocate for its implementation so Illinois can meet the demand for high-quality infant-toddler care with a focus on equitable access
- Begin to advocate for family-based care by prioritizing infrastructure development for quality improvement and cost modeling for workforce compensation



Public Awareness and Engagement

- Provide guidance on a statewide campaign to increase infant-toddler care enrollment, led by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development

POLICY PRIORITY #4

Expand Equitable Access High-quality Early Intervention Services

Early Intervention services are critical for children who have or are at significant risk for developmental delays and disabilities. Today, approximately only 4% of children under age 3 in Illinois receive Early Intervention services, although research indicates that 13% of children are eligible for Early Intervention services.

We need to invest in and implement equitable access to Early Intervention services so Illinois families can access the supports that can make a lifelong difference.

To help achieve this change, we recommend the following policy priorities to increase funding to reach more families and implement strategies to increase equitable access to Early Intervention services.



Federal and State Legislative and Budget Advocacy Priorities

- Increase budget for the federal Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities by at least \$250 million — equivalent to American Rescue Plan Act funding — with a focus on addressing disparities in service delivery
- Increase the FY 2023 state budget for Early Intervention by 10% and restore the budget cut of 7% from FY 2022, with focus on increasing provider reimbursement rates and implementation of practice based coaching and reflective supervision
- Amend the Early Intervention statute to include the timeline of no more than 30 days for families of eligible children to begin receiving Early Intervention services



Illinois Administrative and Local Implementation Advocacy

- Support implementation of Public Act 102-209 (SB 820), giving families the choice to extend Early Intervention services for children turning age 3 with summer birthdays, minimizing service gaps and ensuring continuity of care for 2,800 children
- Support the administration in developing procedures and guidance to implement permanent authorization of telehealth Early Intervention services for families, with attention to equity and family choice
- Advance changes identified by the General Assembly in the Education and Workforce Equity Act (HB 2170), including:
 - Mitigating racial disparities in Early Intervention service access by reducing waiting lists in certain zip codes
 - Coordinating specialized care for children from families with complex needs, such as substantiated cases of abuse and neglect, as well as homelessness
 - Increasing the number of children under age 1 served in Early Intervention by researching newborn intensive care interventions and enrolling infants who meet automatic eligibility criteria for medical conditions with substantial risk of delay



Public Awareness and Engagement

- Obtain funding to establish peer-to-peer ambassadors and disseminate training and resources to educate families about the Early Intervention system and their rights

POLICY PRIORITY #5

Improve the Economic Health of Families to Positively Impact Illinois' Infants and Toddlers

Research is clear that poverty is the single greatest threat to children's well-being. Unfortunately, poverty disproportionately impacts families with young children. Parents of infants and toddlers face countless barriers when accessing income supports, employment policies that are compatible with parenting, and affordable child care programs.

We need to simplify families' access to income supports and implement family-friendly work policies so Illinois families can improve their economic health, well-being and success.

To help achieve this change, we recommend the following policy priorities to create federal and state paid leave programs and increase access to available federal and state benefits.



Federal and State Legislative and Budget Advocacy

- Advocate for the passage of paid leave programs at both the federal and state levels



Illinois Administrative and Local Implementation Advocacy

- Implement strategies to increase awareness, enrollment and uptake of public benefits – Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Child Care Assistance Program – to reach new beneficiaries, including:
 - Adding Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children to the state's online application
 - Supporting secure document upload to the online application
 - Adopting text and email notices with beneficiaries
 - Facilitating online scheduling for applications and redeterminations
 - Developing local community partnerships for mobile enrollment
 - Conducting focus groups with families and staff across the state to address barriers to enrolling and participating in these programs and ensuring benefits meet the needs of Illinois families
- Advocate for increasing payments, transitioning to monthly payments, and expanding eligibility to unpaid caregivers under the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit programs, as well as expanded benefits under the periodic federal Child Nutrition Reauthorization
- Compile and disseminate resources on the use of Job Training and Economic Development Barrier Reduction funds to improve parents' ability to leverage tailored workforce development programs and child care utilization

POLICY PRIORITY #6

Create an Equitable and Cohesive Early Childhood System through Strong State and Community Structures

Illinois' current early learning and care system is difficult for families and providers to navigate, leading to inequitable access to the programs and services young children need to thrive.

We need to develop collaborative processes across state agencies so Illinois can serve families equitably and consistently.

To do so, we recommend the following policy priorities to increase collaborative processes across agencies serving families.



Illinois Administrative and Local Implementation Advocacy

- Advocate for investments in a statewide system of local collaborations that support and align with the state and regional infrastructure
- Advocate for and support the successful state launch of 39 regional and local councils to support community-level planning for equitable access to early childhood funding and services

POLICY PRIORITY #7

Invest in Cross-System Preparation, Professional Development and Support for the Early Childhood Workforce to Provide Our Youngest Children with High-Quality Early Care and Education

Illinois has an opportunity to address both workforce shortages and address longstanding inequities in the early childhood workforce, as well as make mental health services more available to families. By coordinating efforts and aligning professional competencies, Illinois can clear the pathways to professional development and supports and build a robust pipeline of professionals.

We need to invest in the infant-early childhood mental health and early care and education workforces to provide our youngest children with high-quality experiences.

To help achieve this change, we recommend the following policy priorities to help ensure employees are best prepared to support Illinois families.



Federal and State Legislative and Budget Advocacy

- Leverage the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund to:
 - Hire and train 25 additional consultants to deliver behavioral health services in early childhood programs
 - Train clinicians, early interventionists and other professionals in the use of the DC 0-5 diagnostic tool
 - Increase investment in the Facilitating Attuned INteractions Supervisor Reflective Training
 - Develop training curricula on the impacts of trauma on child development and social-emotional needs
 - Streamline content offerings for the infant/toddler workforce to reduce cost and geographic barriers



Illinois Administrative and Local Implementation Advocacy

- Increase the number of infant-toddler program providers earning the newly established bilingual credential by creating and disseminating professional development to higher education faculty on the credential's core competencies
- Support Administrative implementation of the DC 0-5 diagnostics for Medicaid-enrolled young children receiving behavioral health services, as called for in the Education and Workforce Equity Act (HB 2170)
- Align existing professional competencies for workforce preparation programs, as mandated by the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Act (HB 2878)
- Expand scholarship opportunities for the infant-toddler workforce to complete early childhood education bachelor's degrees, funded by the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Act (HB 2878)
- Improve data collection on educational pipelines for the infant-toddler workforce to better inform advocacy with the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity



Public Awareness and Engagement

- Complete a statewide survey of families' prenatal-to-three child rearing priorities and disseminate results to coalition partners to guide workforce pre-service, professional development and credentialing decision making