



POLICY PRIORITY: HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

Accessible Family- and Center-based Early Learning & Care



Local, State & Federal Budgets

- Advocate for a **\$75M increase in FY 2025 to the Illinois State Board of Education's Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG)**, with at least 25% of new funding allocated to Prevention Initiative
- Advocate for additional line item increases in FY 2025 to **sustain the Smart Start program and ongoing modernization needs of the Child Care Management System**
- Advocate for **Early Childhood Construction Grant eligibility to include community-based organizations** and provide flexibility for programs to use these funds to make quality improvements, not just expand capacity



Legislation

- Explore **mechanisms to expand the Child Care Assistance Program**, such as increased income thresholds or categorical eligibility



Administration & Implementation

- Ensure **Smart Start Child Care Workforce Compensation Contracts include an infant-toddler cost differential and accessible program structure**, so infant-toddler providers, as well as programs with limited support from other funding sources, are able to benefit
- Advocate for the **equitable distribution of Off-Hours Child Care Program resources** to serve infants and toddlers from families with non-traditional work hours
- Inform the development of the **ECBG Request for Proposals for FY 2025** by uplifting provider-led recommendations to **prioritize Prevention Initiative awards for the center-based model, implement planning grant opportunities, and improve pathways for family child care home providers to access awards**
- **Increase infant-toddler child care capacity at Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership programs** by connecting current and prospective grantees to technical assistance opportunities
- Submit **public comment in favor of the proposed revisions to the federal Child Care and Development Fund**, which would improve the predictability of program payments and enhance families' ability to enroll in subsidies funded by the Child Care and Development Block Grant



Public Awareness & Engagement

- Educate state lawmakers and the public on the **critical role that Early Head Start programs play in providing comprehensive services to infants and toddlers**





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Optimized Early Intervention



Local, State & Federal Budgets

- Advocate for a **significant (at least \$20M) increase in FY 2025 to the Early Intervention (EI) program** to continue increasing reimbursement rates for providers and service coordinators, accommodate growing caseloads, and address additional cost drivers for providers including transportation, missed visits, and insurance



Administration & Implementation

- Increase **number of children and families accessing EI services**, with a focus on children under age 1 and children who meet automatic eligibility criteria, by
 - Advancing statewide policy recommendations for systems change to improve the **timely connection of neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) families** to EI services
 - Implementing **automatic EI eligibility for children with substantiated cases of abuse and neglect**, as mandated by HB 4242 (Pub. Act 102-926)
 - Strengthening the **knowledge and understanding of automatic eligibility criteria among primary referral sources** by supporting professionals and systems that refer children who automatically qualify for services, including universal newborn nurse home visitors
- Reduce service delays by identifying tangible **strategies to recruit providers** and **modifying and expanding models of service delivery**, with a focus on addressing disparities in race and geography as well as for families with complex needs, by:
 - Implementing **modified approaches to EI service delivery** to better address the needs of families and support the workforce
 - Applying existing and new **cross-state research findings and recommendations** to cost modeling efforts and modified service delivery pilot to help inform workforce payment structure changes and service delivery best practices



Public Awareness & Engagement

- Increase engagement of **providers, families, IDHS Bureau of EI, and state legislators as advocates and partners** for system improvements to the EI program
- Improve **public awareness of established EI timelines** through the IDHS-led dissemination of educational materials to families, letting them know of their rights, and advocating for more peer-to-peer support opportunities for parents

