



# The Vital Need for Strong Policy and Funding Support During the Prenatal-to-Three Years

Babies are born with amazing capabilities. A strong start in life builds a solid foundation for the future. This is possible when parents and caregivers have access to what they need to raise healthy babies and toddlers: health, nutrition, social, economic, and learning supports that serve each family's unique strengths and needs.

## **Babies' brains and bodies develop rapidly, preparing for school and life.**

Prenatal to age 3 (PN-3) is a critical developmental time. Babies and toddlers are active learners, processing sounds, grammar, and words. Early brain growth affects lifelong learning, behavior, and health.

## **Parents and caregivers need support.**

Parents and caregivers want the very best for their babies and toddlers. But laws and practices too often limit their options and opportunities. In particular, policies over time have denied people of color and Indigenous peoples prenatal care, early childhood supports, education, mortgages, and health benefits. For generations—and continuing today—maternal and infant death has been higher for people of color and Indigenous people, regardless of economic factors.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, many families lack accessible resources. From education and health care to economy and justice, systems must be built to meet the unique needs of every family, with an emphasis on PN-3 supports.

1. [A March 2023 study by the National Bureau of Economic Research](#) found that Black infants born to families at the top income bracket is nearly 23 percent higher than that of white infants born to families at the bottom bracket. It also found the maternal death rate for Black mothers at top income levels is similar to that of white mothers at the lowest. The main cause is systemic racism in the medical system.

## We know what works to support babies and toddlers.

Creating stability and opportunity for all babies and toddlers builds strong and resilient communities for all of us. We can build systems of support, together with families and communities, that are accessible to all.

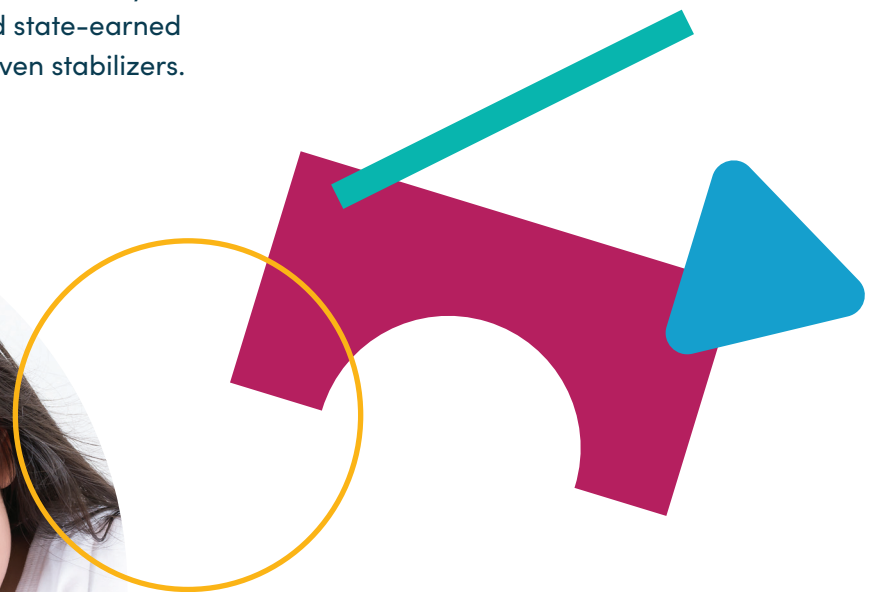
- **Nutrition and health care:** All families need access to nutritious, affordable food; culturally responsive pre- and postnatal care; and regular well-child visits, screenings, and mental health care.
- **Early learning:** When policymakers think about early learning, they often focus on pre-K programs. But learning must start earlier and be more comprehensive to ensure that children start school ready to learn and aren't left to catch up later.
- **Caregiving infrastructure:** Linking resources for families reduces the friction between work and care, and strengthens communities and the economy.
- **Economic stability:** Programs like Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Medicaid, and food benefits help families develop economic stability and meet basic needs. Paid family leave, state minimum wage, and state-earned income tax credits are other proven stabilizers.

## We live up to our country's promise when we commit to all of our youngest generation.

NCIT educates and advocates for policies that support all babies and toddlers to have what they need to grow into socially, emotionally, and physically healthy children—and then into engaged adults active in our communities and economies. Join us.

### What can be done:

- We urge policymakers and program designers to work with their local communities to identify what supports are missing and where, and write it into the policy. Decisions need to account for the ways in which laws and practices impact communities differently.
- Policies and programs are most effective when they prioritize action where it will create the greatest impact. Together with communities, we can define where that is, starting with communities where structural racism limits options and leads to worse health outcomes, and design solutions that work.



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