

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded programs that deliver comprehensive early learning, health, nutrition, and family support services to children birth through age five and pregnant women who are living in poverty. Early Head Start serves pregnant women and children birth through three while Head Start serves children ages three through five.

◆ Creation of Programs

Head Start was created in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Since its founding, the program has served over 35 million children and families. Recognizing the profound benefits of Head Start and the important role of prenatal experiences, as well as those in the first three years of life, Early Head Start was established during the 1994 reauthorization of Head Start to serve pregnant women and children during a critical development period when interventions are most effective.

👉 How the Program Works

Today, there are more than 1,600 local Head Start programs and 1,400 local Early Head Start programs operating across America, in every state and congressional district in the country. Head Start and Early Head Start have the flexibility to customize services and programs to meet the needs of every community, while providing a continuum of high-quality early learning and comprehensive support services that meet common quality criteria outlined in the Head Start Performance Standards. Local flexibility also allows many programs to combine federal, state, local, and even private funding for preschool, child care, or other early care and education services, to maximize the impact of available funds.

At a Glance

■ Created:

Head Start: 1965, Early Head Start: 1994

👉 Who this Program Serves:

Early Head Start: Prenatal to age 3,
Head Start: Ages 3 to 5

Children whose family income is below the federal poverty guidelines, (\$25,750 for a family of four) those receiving TANF or SSI, or who are homeless, or foster children.

◆ Number of Children Served in 2017¹:

Early Head Start: 154,352*,
Head Start: 732,711

* This number includes pregnant mothers as well as children served.

● Percent Served Based on Eligibility:

Early Head Start: 7% , Head Start: 31%

👉 Administration of Program:

The Department of Health and Human Services awards grants directly to public or private non-profits organizations; including community-based and faith-based organizations; or for-profit agencies within a community.

■ Delivery Method:

1,400 Early Head Start and 1,600 Head Start are designed to meet community needs and can be center-based, home-based, family child care, or an approved locally-designed variation.

👉 Current Federal Funding:

FY 20: \$10,613,095,000 total funding for Head Start and Early Head Start

¹ 2017 (https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/ehs_ccp_brochure.pdf)



■ Proven Track Record

Decades of research shows that participation in Head Start and Early Head Start has both short- and long-term positive effects for participating children and their families.

■ Children who attend Head Start demonstrate academic and social progress and are more likely to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

■ Adults who attend Head Start as children are more likely to graduate high school and are better prepared to be parents to their own children.

■ Parents whose children attend Head Start are more likely to advance their own education compared to parents of at-risk children who are not enrolled in Head Start.

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● Continued Improvement

Thanks to the longstanding bipartisan support for Head Start among lawmakers on Capitol Hill, legislative efforts to improve the quality of the Head Start Program have been successful in recent years. Congress' bipartisan Head Start Act of 2007 included policies designed to strengthen teaching in Head Start programs and improve coordination between Head Start, Early Head Start, and other early childhood programs such as IDEA and child protective services. Additionally, in 2016, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) revised the Head Start Performance Standards to further strengthen the program's high-quality early learning and comprehensive services by emphasizing child outcomes and ongoing program improvement, rather than compliance. Furthermore, the performance standards incorporate recent research on effective early learning, child development, and family engagement to improve overall program quality.

◆ Increasing Access for Eligible Families

Despite the well-documented benefits of Head Start and Early Head Start and the ever-growing bipartisan support for the program among lawmakers in Congress, current funding levels are insufficient to provide access to all eligible children. In fact, only 31% of eligible 3 and 4 year olds have access to Head Start and just 7% of children eligible for Early Head Start are served by the program.

In 2013, as a response to the desire for the benefits of Early Head Start to reach more children, Congress and HSS created the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CCP) program. EHS-CCP is a competitive federal grant program that allows Early Head Start grantees to partner with local child care providers who serve children receiving subsidies in order to improve quality of care and expand the capacity and benefits of Early Head Start. Despite these efforts, the need still far outweighs the supply, and many infants and toddlers from low-income families lack access to high-quality early childhood education.



In addition to the unmet needs of eligible children, Head Start and Early Head Start lack the resources to fully implement new quality and safety requirements established in the 2016 Head Start Program Performance Standards. Additional funding would allow Head Start and Early Head Start to implement these new requirements. FFYF supports increased funding to help this vital program reach all eligible families and is committed to identifying opportunities that leverage public support to ensure more children have access to high-quality early learning opportunities.