

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 to age 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 37 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 1,600 local Head Start programs and 1,700 local Early Head Start programs operating across America, in every state and territory 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 Program Performance Standards (HSPPS). 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 (\$27,750 for a family of 4,) those receiving TANF or SSI, or who are homeless or foster children.

◆ Number of Children Served:

Early Head Start¹: 209,558

Head Start²: 542,033

👉 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:

Early Head Start and Head Start are designed to meet community needs and can be center-based, home-based, or an approved locally-designed variation.

👉 FY 2023 Federal Funding:

\$11,996,820,000 total funding for Head Start and Early Head Start.

¹ Office of Head Start, "[2021-2022 Cumulative Enrollment](#)"

² Office of Head Start, "[2021-2022 Cumulative Enrollment](#)"

