

Lead poisoned kids in Flint will need more than apologies, declarations



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The following is a guest column for The Flint Journal.

By Matt Gillard

The children of Flint will need more than new [declarations of emergency](#), state-level resignations and public apologies to help reverse the damage that has been done to their young bodies and developing brains. And now is the time for the state to step in with a proven strategy to help the most vulnerable citizens among us.

The tragic crisis in which too many Flint children have been poisoned by lead from drinking toxic water after lax state regulatory oversight requires an immediate and significant investment in proven interventions that already exist. That is why Michigan's Children calls on the state to step in – without delay – to increase funding to *Early On* services, a proven and existing program that helps families with infants and toddlers birth to age three who have a developmental delay or a diagnosed health condition that could lead to such delay. Elevated lead is one of those health conditions that result in automatic eligibility for *Early On* due to its strong connection to cognitive impairment and developmental challenges.



Courtesy photo

Helping Flint's children today is most critical and what's been missing in the conversation to raise emergency relief to correct a corrosive infrastructure that contributed to higher lead levels in city drinking water. *Early On* has made a difference in the life trajectories of thousands of Michigan children over the years but sadly has been underfunded across the state. The Flint crisis points responsibility to our state to redouble efforts to intervene where harm has been done and to do a much better job of preventing lead poisoning in other Michigan communities.

“Elevated lead levels continue to plague young children across our state.

The events in Flint should awaken all Michigan residents to the devastating impact lead plays on children and their future health, well-being and prosperity. Because of young children's rapidly developing brains,

effects of lead poisoning can dreadfully result in developmental delays and cognitive impairment. Toxic levels of lead in young children can result in long-term consequences ranging from lower I.Q. scores to attention issues and other significant behavioral and developmental challenges that create barriers to learning and academic success.

While attention has certainly focused on Flint due to the uptick in cases of lead poisoned children after the City's water switch, elevated lead levels continue to plague young children across our state, particularly those who lack appropriate nutrition to counteract its absorption and whose families live in areas with older infrastructure, as highlighted in this recent [Bridge article](#).

As the state continues to figure out how to reduce lead levels in Flint's drinking water, we must step up to ensure that children who have been exposed to high levels of lead across the state are receiving the services they need for optimal development.

The facts are that Michigan continues to inadequately fund *Early On* with no line item in the state budget dedicated to those services, relying solely on a small pot of federal funds inadequate and never intended to fund direct intervention services. The vast majority of other states supplement this federal resource with state appropriations.

The need for action is clear. Not only do we need to support efforts to make Flint's water safe again, and better support lead abatement efforts around the state, but we also need to ensure that children who have been exposed to lead can receive the services they need for a bright future. State investment in *Early On* is essential to see the best potential outcomes for the young children we have already failed.

Matt Gillard is the President & CEO of Michigan's Children, an independent voice working to reform public policy and improve the odds of all children from cradle to career.