



Ensuring A Healthy Start in the Michigan State Budget – June UPDATE

Raising Michigan's children isn't rocket science—it's brain science. Research shows that healthy brain development and good mental health are critical for the growth and wellbeing of children and for the stability of families. Unfortunately, not every parent has the opportunity to develop skills and access services to promote their young children's healthy growth. Without them, kids enter kindergarten behind their peers, and stay behind.

Ensuring a child has a healthy start means ensuring that infants and toddlers are growing and developing physically, socially, and emotionally before they start Kindergarten. *Early On Michigan* provides screening and services to all Michigan families whose infants or toddlers have or are at risk of acquiring a developmental delay, equipping families in their homes with skills to help their children., *Early On* prevents the need for future costly K-12 special education services because many developmental delays, including speech and motor delays, are treatable, and relieves stress on parents by helping them better understand their child's development.

A healthy start also relies on preparing child care providers to appropriately respond to the mental health needs of children, including children who have experienced trauma and are in foster care. Michigan's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (IECMHC) program is proven to help child care providers support infant mental health, but is only available in some counties. IECMHC programs also help parents learn about their children's mental health and acquire parenting strategies to promote mental health. IECMHC has been found to reduce parent stress and increase parents' ability to work, to improve child care provider job retention as well as their skills, and to ultimately reduce instances of "challenging" child behavior.

Current Situation: The Governor, House, and Senate have finalized their budget recommendations in these areas. Both chambers will go to a Conference Committee to iron out differences. It is unclear how long into the summer negotiations between the Legislature and the Governor will last. Informing elected officials about how best to prioritize spending our tax dollars must be a year-round endeavor.

Recommendations:

1. **Support the Senate's increased appropriation for *Early On*.** Neither the Governor nor the House recommended any increase for *Early On*, but the Senate proposed increasing funding for this program by \$2.15 million. The House and Senate also included separate versions of language to fund autism treatment professional development. This is well below the \$20 million needed now for our five-year investment strategy to be able to provide recognized levels of services to all eligible infants and toddlers.
2. The Governor, House and Senate have all set aside funding to improve child care quality that can be used for expanding IECMHC. **Support these investments and commitment to expand the IECMHC program statewide**, which would cost \$6.6 million total.