

FUND INFANT & EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH



This is a pivotal moment for California’s mental health landscape and the future of our youngest children.

First 5 joins partner organizations to support a \$100 million budget General Fund appropriation for IECMH services to prevent and mitigate mental health concerns for California’s infants and toddlers, promote their healthy social emotional development, and train existing providers.

In order to meet the State’s goal of reducing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and toxic stress by half within one generation, and to advance the Governor’s commitment to improving the mental health of our state’s children and youth, the mental health of our youngest children must be a priority.

An additional one-time \$100 million General Fund appropriation would support infant and early childhood mental health services and provider training that will significantly improve the mental well-being of California’s infants and toddlers, especially those from communities of color that have been historically marginalized and hit hardest by the pandemic.

What are the mental health needs of infants and young children?

Our brains develop more rapidly during our first days and years of life than any other point. During this time, young children may suffer from mental and behavioral health challenges that affect their development. These challenges are harder to address as children get older. The need for intervention and services is often overlooked, and difficult for providers to identify and address, because young children handle emotional experiences and traumatic events differently from adults and older children. Intervening early prevents and mitigates future mental health concerns, and promotes healthy social emotional development.

What are Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) services for children zero to five?

IECMH services range from promotion to prevention, to developmentally appropriate assessment and diagnosis, treatment and maintenance. IECMH services use a two-generational approach, helping caregivers to provide a nurturing relationship that promotes children’s social-emotional growth. Services occur with families in the home or at the community level, and might include facilitated playgroups, parenting support classes, or IECMH consultation - an evidence-based and prevention focused process that pairs mental health consultants with families and adults where young children learn and grow.



California Can Do Better

As California continues to move forward in historically transforming and expanding children’s mental health services through the Children & Youth Behavioral Health Initiative and through the broader Master Plan for Children’s Mental Health, it is imperative we place California’s infants and toddlers at the forefront.

Conditions created and exacerbated by the pandemic, such as poor and declining health, inequitable health care access, isolation, economic stress, and community and racial/ethnic trauma, are all proven to negatively impact a child’s ability to thrive, especially in low-income and communities of color hit hardest by the pandemic.

The State must prioritize the social emotional health and resilience of children from birth to age 5 with an upstream, multi-systems, whole child / whole family approach to child, family, and community-wellbeing.

While we applaud and thank DHCS specifically for its prioritization of early childhood programming within its own workstreams, we believe that an additional \$100 million investment dedicated exclusively to infants and toddlers is necessary to ensure our mental health system of care is prepared to meet the needs of all children and youth in California.

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The First 5 Association of California supports the 58 First 5 county commissions that collectively serve one million California children, 500,000 parents and caregivers, and build the early childhood systems and supports needed to ensure California’s young children are safe, healthy, and ready to succeed in school and life. The First 5 Association’s vision is that, one day, California’s success will be measured by the well-being of its youngest children.

#F5AD #IECMH