



BIG VOICES for Little Kids



Increase Capacity to Care for Infants & Toddlers

The research is clear—the earliest years of a child’s life pave the way for lifelong health and well-being. The most rapid phase for brain development is the period from birth to age 3, making these critical years for learning and development. Despite more than 50 years of strong research in early childhood development, parents enrolling their infants and toddlers in programming is at an all-time low. This is in large part because many parents can’t find care. Increasing the capacity to serve infants and toddlers in publicly funded child care during a period of rapid growth is a critical need for our state.

What does the data tell us?

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ohio did not have an adequate supply of child care. The pandemic has only made this supply gap worse.

Less than 1 in 5 Ohio babies from families with low incomes have access to any early learning program.¹

Percent of income-eligible children, ages 0-2, who had access to Early Head Start

12% (FY 2018)



Percent of low- and moderate-income children, ages 0-2, who received child care subsidies

4.3% (FY 2019)



Child care programs do not exist in some areas:

Across Ohio, families in rural areas more frequently use home-based child care options that serve smaller numbers of children than child care centers.²

60% of rural Ohioans and **39%** of all Ohioans are living in a child care desert, defined as an area with three times as many children as licensed child care slots.³

Children are not getting the early intervention services they may need: Preterm birth can result in developmental delays and while 10.3% of babies in Ohio are born preterm, only 5.6% of children ages 0-3 are receiving Early Intervention Part C services.

Children receiving IDEA Part C Early Intervention services

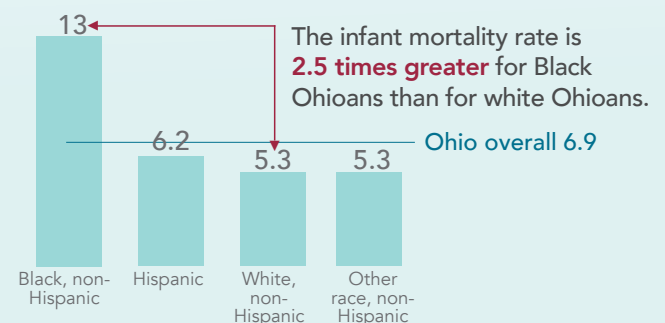
5.6%

Children born preterm

10.3%

Infant mortality rates continue to get worse:

There are almost twice as many cases of neonatal abstinence syndrome in Ohio than in the U.S. overall. Infant maltreatment increased by 20% from 2017 to 2020.





“It is nearly impossible to find a good place to send [my] kids because everywhere is full.”

– Mahoning County Father

To improve the capacity to care for infants and toddlers, policymakers should:



Create an **Infant & Toddler Child Care Infrastructure Grant** to allocate \$30 million of General Revenue Funds over the biennium to increase capacity of local communities, specifically Appalachian and communities with high infant mortality rates, to provide safe and developmentally appropriate child care for infants and toddlers.



Expand access to **Early Intervention Part C services** by changing policy to allow for standalone eligibility for babies born preterm.



Pilot the development of **comprehensive care in rural communities** by investing in **Early Head Start** in child care deserts, prioritizing Appalachian infants and toddlers engaged in the child welfare or foster care systems.

Sources

1. [Groundwork Ohio's Early Childhood Dashboard \(2023\)](#)
2. [5 Facts To Know About Child Care in Rural America](#)
3. [Early Childhood Programs' Scarcity Undermines Ohio's Rural Communities](#)
4. [Understanding Infant and Toddler Child Care Deserts](#)

