Four key takeaways

1. It is never too early to invest in Ohio’s youngest, but it can be too late.

The foundation needed to ensure our youngest children are healthy and ready to learn is cracked. Ohio ranks in the bottom half of all states and D.C. on important measures of child health and well-being, including infant maltreatment and poverty.

It is never too early to invest in Ohio’s youngest, but it can be too late. Building a strong foundation for Ohio’s babies, toddlers, and preschool-age children is critical to ensure that every child is able to live to their full potential.

Ohio ranks in the bottom half of all 50 states and D.C. on:

Infant maltreatment

- Best: 1
- Worst: 51


Children ages 0-5 living in poverty

- Best: 1
- Worst: 51

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2019)
Ohio must ensure that young children can grow, learn, and play in environments that support health and protect them from the harmful effects of stress, trauma, and adversity. Children who are in unsafe situations and children who lack nurturing relationships are more likely to be exposed to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Not every child exposed to ACEs suffers poor outcomes as a result. Positive and supportive environments can serve as a buffer against the harms of childhood adversity and trauma. For example, high-quality early learning can help children build resilience and overcome the long-lasting health and economic impacts of ACEs.

Nearly 1 in 5 children, ages 0-5, in Ohio have been exposed to two or more ACEs.

Long-term exposure to stressors related to ACEs can lead to disrupted development; adoption of behaviors that increase health risks; social problems like lower educational attainment; and disease, disability, and early death.
Prioritizing Ohio’s youngest children starts with measuring what matters.

Ensuring Ohio’s youngest children are healthy and ready to learn requires having data to evaluate progress. Unfortunately, there is limited data that tracks outcomes for children ages 0-5. Most urgently, more data broken out by social, economic, and demographic factors is needed to target and evaluate policies and strategies for babies and young children who face the highest risk of falling behind.

Areas with the largest early childhood data gaps include:
- Readiness for school
- Early childhood mental health
- Built environment (i.e., housing, transportation, neighborhood conditions)
- Exposure to environmental toxins
- Family well-being and resilience
- Early learning workforce, cost, and affordability
- Early childhood healthcare workforce