Why should we prioritize our youngest Ohioans?

Laying a strong foundation for every child is necessary for a healthier, more productive, and economically vibrant Ohio. By strategically investing in our youngest children, including those most at-risk for poor outcomes, we can ensure that Ohio is the best place to be a young child and that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Children who start behind are more likely to stay behind unless we take urgent action. The individual and societal costs of not prioritizing Ohio’s youngest children are far too great.

There are many opportunities to support our youngest children so that we ensure their success now and avoid burdening future generations with challenges that could have been prevented.

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

~ Frederick Douglass

Supporting our youngest children and their families

Ensuring that every young child in Ohio has the opportunity to reach their full potential requires supporting the adults—parents, grandparents, foster parents, and other caregivers—who care for them. Without access to resources such as safe and affordable housing, health care, and quality child care, challenges like toxic stress, illness, and poverty can undermine a family’s ability to provide a secure, healthy, and nurturing environment for their children. We must support our youngest children by advancing targeted policies, programs, and investments that set families up for success and enable young children to thrive.
What is so important about the first few years of life?

Healthy development in the first few years of life can either support or limit a child’s ability to thrive and contribute to society as an adult. In fact, a child’s health begins with their parents’ health even before pregnancy. Disruptions to a child’s development that happen in the earliest years of life are particularly harmful.

These disruptions can be caused by adverse prenatal and early childhood experiences and exposure to unstable, unsafe, and stressful environments that lack the supports needed for healthy growth. Developmental and biological disruptions experienced in early childhood can weaken a child’s immune system, alter brain architecture, and impact health, learning, and behavior outcomes later in life.

The good news is that, more often than not, these disruptions are preventable.

7% of Ohio’s population was 5 or younger in 2019.

That’s nearly one out of every 14 Ohioans.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2019)