Infant and Toddler Data Advocacy Agenda

Kids Count in Michigan | May 2022

The first three years of life are critical. Yet we know less about infants and toddlers than other age groups—and the early childhood workforce that supports them.

Accurate and reliable data equips the public, advocates and legislators to work to improve our most pressing problems. What we collect and report on says a lot about our priorities: what problems we investigate, what solutions we pursue, and who our policies and programs benefit. Data gaps and unreliable data systems lead to missed opportunities and, at worst, harm children and families.

Improving data in the early childhood system will help connect families to services, identify strategies for enhancing equity and lead to positive impacts long after the first three years. Below are six recommendations that will ensure Michigan has complete, asset-driven, and equitable data systems that improve outcomes for infants and toddlers.

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Our Data Advocacy Priorities

- ✓ Gather information on the early childhood workforce
- ✓ Continue to connect home visiting to the early childhood system
- ✓ Improve the coordination of developmental screenings
- ✓ Disaggregate data to inform equitable strategies
- ✓ Use data to support family, friend and neighbor caregivers
- ✓ Collect data on dads to build from their strengths

Think Babies Michigan is a collaborative of more than 2,000 members—leaders, experts, families, organizations and providers—working together to improve the lives of babies prenatally through age 3 in Michigan. Join at: www.ecic4kids.org/policy-thinkbabie-smi.

#1. Gather information on the early childhood workforce

Early childhood programs like child care, home visiting and Early On are possible because of highly skilled workers. However, we don't have enough information about the early childhood workforce.

To create an early childhood system that will help infants and toddlers to thrive, we must support our early childhood workforce. More publicly available data is needed to track, evaluate, and improve the compensation and working conditions of professionals in child care, home visiting, and Early On programs and services.

More consistent and coordinated data will give us a better understanding of Michigan's youngest residents and those who care for them.

#2. Improve the coordination of developmental screenings

Screenings are used to assess developmental delays and disabilities in infants and toddlers, and connect families to appropriate services such as Early On. A variety of developmental screening tools are used by child care providers, pediatricians, and other professionals, making it difficult to track which children have received them, where, and to what standard.

While it is recommended that 100% of infants and toddlers receive developmental screenings, a nationwide survey shows Michigan falls behind other states: only 29% of children are screened.[1]

A funded, coordinated effort to track and improve screenings across Michigan would ensure children and families are connected to supports before entering school, ultimately improving health and education outcomes.

#3. Use data to support family, friend and neighbor caregivers

License-exempt child care providers (also known as family, friend and neighbor care) are an important part of our larger child care system. They are some parents' preferred choice and fill gaps where licensed providers may be unavailable.

However, there is almost no data on license-exempt providers and the children they serve if they are not receiving a state child care subsidy. In 2021, about 10% of children ages 0-5 whose parents received subsidies were cared for by license-exempt providers, including over 1,900 infants and toddlers.[2] The share of subsidy payments to license-exempt providers has fallen dramatically over the past two decades.[3]

As we seek to improve child care affordability and access, Michigan should invest in consistent data collection on all family, friend and neighbor providers to better understand their needs and craft policy that supports these essential caregivers.

#4. Continue to connect home visiting to the early childhood system

Home visiting programs provide health and education services directly to families of young children, and research demonstrates their positive impacts on maternal and infant health outcomes.

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Michigan programs differ in what data they collect, and some have no publicly available data. For those programs reporting data, home visiting reached about 6% of infants (under age 1) statewide in 2020, and 5% of toddlers (ages 1-2).[4]

Enhanced coordination and data collection will help ensure home visiting is reaching more eligible families by identifying gaps and making connections to services.

#5. Disaggregate data further to inform equitable strategies

Disaggregating data—or breaking data down into smaller subgroups like age, race, ethnicity and gender—allows us to see disparities, or differences, between groups. Disparities show gaps in how resources are distributed and lead us to question how policies impact families. To advance equity in early childhood, data on infants, toddlers and their families should be broken down by characteristics like race and ethnicity.

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Early childhood programs should collect detailed race and ethnicity and income data, disaggregating to show subgroups within the Asian and Pacific Islander category, for example, and including groups that are underrepresented in many data sources, such as Middle Eastern and North African populations.

#6. Collect data on dads to build from their strengths

A national survey from Zero to Three shows that 90% of dads report parenting to be their greatest joy, and 86% work hard to be more effective. Fathers play an important role in their babies' lives, but there is a lack of local data on the positive contributions of dads and targeted programming to support them.

Policymakers should consider the recommendations of the Michigan Action Plan for Father Involvement to bring fathers into the fold and build upon their strengths. Other states have created fatherhood commissions using funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to collect data and create tailored programming that supports fathers. These programs in turn enhance child-parent relationships while supporting families holistically.

Sources

1 National Kids Count, 2018-2019

2 Kids Count in Michigan analysis of data received by the Michigan Department of Education for FY 2021.

3 Kids Count in Michigan analysis of data received by the Michigan Department of Education, and Betty Tableman, Rosalind Kirk & Esther Onaga. "Early Childhood Education and Child Care in Michigan." April 28, 2005. Accessed March 2022. https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/publications/michigan-family-impact-seminar-10-74/

4 Kids Count in Michigan analysis using Home Visiting Needs Assessment 2020 and Bridged-Race Population Estimates 1990-2020 Request.

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