



Early Childhood in Minnesota

Positive experiences in early childhood, when children's brains are developing at lightning speed, are linked to lifelong benefits such as higher earnings, improved health, lower participation in social service programs, and lower chances of involvement with the criminal justice system. **Minnesota's early care and education infrastructure does not meet families' needs and reinforces poverty level wages for caregivers.**

By investing in early childhood now, we save in the future.

To make Minnesota the best state in the country for children to grow up in – those of all races, ethnicities, religions, economic statuses, gender identities, sexual orientation, abilities, and zip codes – **the following problems must be addressed:**



Early Care & Education

The current demand for early childhood care and education programs far outweighs the supply, and the need for additional child care capacity has increased in nearly every region of the state over the last several years.¹ With inadequate access to child care – including lack of culturally and racially relevant child care, transportation and flexible hours – families are forced to piece together informal arrangements, stop working, or work fewer hours. Even when capacity is available, early care and education is simply unaffordable for many families, with the median rate for infant care being higher than college tuition at our public universities.



Housing

Over 500 children are born into homelessness each year in Minnesota. Children of color are disproportionately represented in families experiencing homelessness, and no known set of risk factors explain why these disparities are so extreme.² Many families are lacking support to maintain stability in their home environment, or to find affordable housing in the first place. **Lack of stability in children's earliest years can lead to poorer outcomes in the long term.**



Early Childhood Workforce

There are not enough early childhood educators to meet the current need, in large part due to low compensation. Though parents are paying high rates out of pocket, compensation for the field is, on average, below a living wage and without benefits. This contributes to shortages, including **shortages of qualified staff to work in programs, culturally competent care and competent care for those of all abilities.**



Family Development Resources

Birthing parents of color can be up to nine times more likely than white parents to receive late or no prenatal care. Lack of prenatal care often contributes to poor birth outcomes, such as low birth weight or premature birth, which can have **long-term health and developmental consequences for children**.



Family & Community Supports

Minnesota's families and communities do not all have access or opportunity to receive the early childhood supports they need. Systems of support are often not available in a community, are hard to navigate, and historically disenfranchised families are most affected by lack of support. This leads to **delays in receiving services and additional financial and time burdens on families**.



Mental Health & Wellbeing

Minnesota has approximately 50,000 children under the age 6 who may have a mental health condition.³ Research indicates that untreated mental health conditions and unaddressed early childhood stress can lead to **lifelong health issues**.⁴



Food Security

Nine percent of children in Minnesota lived in households that were food insecure at some point in the last year and about 1.4 million children were counted (non-unique) in food shelf visits in 2020.⁵ Food insecurity, especially in the younger years, **affects growth, development, health, social and academic outcomes**.



Economic Security

Twelve percent of Minnesota's children birth through age 5 live below 100% of the federal poverty level. In Minnesota, children of color are over four times more likely than white children to live in poverty or low-income conditions. Economic insecurity can contribute to poor health and **impede social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development**.

Children, families, the early care and education workforce, employers, and whole communities need our action today.

Policymakers, state leaders, organizations, and communities must act decisively and immediately to address the state's early childhood needs and set Minnesota on a stable and sustainable path where all families have access to supports that enrich, nurture, and support children and their families.

¹ "Minnesota Data Resources: Child Care Need Summary." First Children's Finance. 2020. <https://www.ruralchildcare.org/data>.

² "Calling All Sectors Project." Minnesota Department of Health. 2022. <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/equity/projects/callingallsectors/index.html#:~:text=Calling%20All%20Sectors%20Project%201%20Background%20Over%20500,...%203%20State%20Vision%20...%204%20Engagement%20>.

³ "Children whose families visited food shelves in Minnesota." Kids Count Data Center. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2023. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/1814-children-whose-families-visited-food-shelves?loc=25&loc=2#detailed/2/any/false/574,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867/any/3835>.

⁴ "Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>.

⁵ "Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study." The United States Department of Justice. 2022. <https://nrcic.gov/adverse-childhood-experiences-ace-study>.