

U.S. Early Care and Education System Should Promote the Health of All Children and Families

Findings from *Vibrant and Healthy Kids: Aligning Science, Practice, and Policy to Advance Health Equity*

Early life experiences have a profound impact on health outcomes across the life span and generations.

To ensure all children are healthy, the United States should incorporate the promotion of health and health equity through a comprehensive approach that aims to increase school readiness and success.

CRITICAL SETTING

The early care and education system includes home- and center-based child care, in-school and out-of-school interventions like nutrition programs and family support programs, home-visiting programs, and social and emotional learning programs. Research has found this system is a critical setting for providing young children with a strong foundation for health. But more needs to be done to make health promotion a core goal of the early care and education system and ensure all children benefit from it.

3 GOALS FOR THE NATION

- 1. Allocate adequate resources to support early care and education programs and educators that promote health.**
- 2. Train and provide adequate resources for the early care and education workforce to support practices that promote health and health equity.**
- 3. Ensure programs are accessible and affordable for families as early as possible and as long as possible.**

SCIENCE-DRIVEN POLICIES TO PROMOTE HEALTHY LIVES

Government agencies that have decision-making power over early care and education programs should establish and fund the implementation of program standards and accountability systems linked with better school readiness and health outcomes.

Those who train early care and education workers should develop or strengthen coursework or practicums that focus on competencies critical to children's health, school readiness, and life success. Examples include training on the link between biology and children's learning and development, how to implement culturally responsive practices, and how to address children's experiences of trauma.

Government policy makers at all levels should work together to expand access to high-quality and affordable programs to all eligible children by 2029, and to study the impacts of that expansion on children's development.

Recognizing these opportunities for early prevention and intervention during the sensitive and important life period of early childhood can help the United States achieve more positive and equitable lifelong health outcomes for children and their families.

Read about the science behind early childhood development and find more policy recommendations related to the early care and education system at nationalacademies.org/VibrantHealthyKids.

