

Earliest Supports for Equitable Economic Recovery

To reopen the economy effectively and equitably, chambers recognize the instrumental role of high-quality, affordable programs and services for infants and toddlers.

Such programs enable parents to secure and maintain jobs with family-sustaining wages, supporting economic mobility, while also improving outcomes for underserved children, setting them up for success and economic mobility in the future.

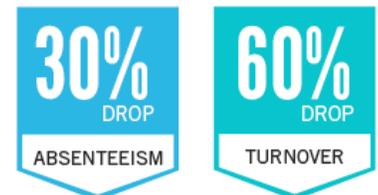
The challenge:

- Quality: only 11 percent of childcare nationwide is accredited.
- Affordability: the cost of infant care exceeds the cost of in-state public college tuition in 33 states.

The impact:

- Current workforce: Inadequate childcare results in increased employee absenteeism, a decrease in workforce productivity and a pause in economic growth. Due to the limited availability and high cost of childcare, parents often face difficult decisions in choosing between career and family. In 2016, an estimated 2 million parents made career sacrifices due to problems with childcare. While there are some nationally recognized high-quality early education programs that aim to aid low-income children and families bridge this equity gap, spots are very limited. For instance, Early Head Start programs for children ages 0-3 can only serve 7 percent of eligible children.
- Future workforce: healthy learning experiences from ages 0-3 help lay the groundwork of cognitive development into adulthood, planting the seeds for a competitive future workforce. Research from Professor James Heckman at the University of Chicago found that investments in high-quality programs that support young children starting at birth deliver a 13 percent annual return—significantly higher than the 7 to 10 percent return delivered by preschool alone.

What happens when businesses
provide child care support?



A child's brain doubles
in size in its first year.

Equity is Essential

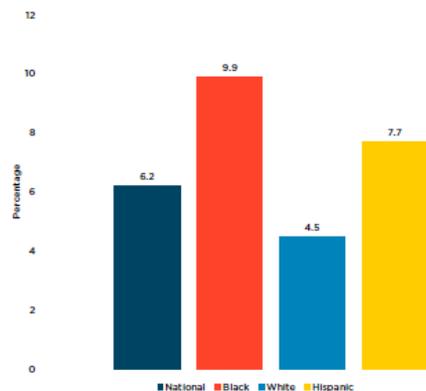
Even before the pandemic, nearly half of America's babies lived in or near poverty, which research shows diminishes brain growth. If half of our future workforce is in jeopardy of falling behind from the start, their futures—as well as America's global competitiveness—is at risk. COVID-19 has only amplified profound inequities in our system that disproportionately impact underrepresented communities from both a health and an economic perspective. If we do not focus explicitly on equity as part of recovery, we will grow disparities between privileged and underrepresented groups. Investing in greater access to prenatal care and resources for infants and toddlers is one of the best strategies to narrow that gap. Babies' critical needs during COVID-19 include sustained childcare, economic security, support for strong families, social-emotional health and basic needs.

What are Chambers Doing?

Chambers can serve as an important intermediary in their region to advance programs, policy and systems change. Promising practices include:

- **Santa Rosa Metro Chamber** (Calif.): Recognizing that high-quality, affordable and accessible child care has a significant impact on the economic growth and competitiveness of companies in the region, the Chamber worked with major employers and community partners to launch a new child care facility on-site at a local business to serve employees and the community. In addition to adding 100 high-quality slots for children—starting at age zero—this will play an important role in the business' talent retention and recruitment efforts.
- **TraverseCONNECT** (Mich.): As a member of the Great Start Collaborative, which highlights the link between a great start in life and becoming a productive and engaged member of society, the Chamber helped launch a five-county system of resources—including prenatal supports—with a goal of becoming the best place in the world to raise kids. Their research-based CARES Continuum offers guidance in four domains (social and emotional, physical skills, learning and early reading, math and reasoning) broken down for key age ranges (e.g., 0-1, 1-2, 2-3, etc.).

Figure 1. Women Receiving Late or No Prenatal Care by Race



Source: Maternal and Child Health Inequities Emerge <https://stateofbabies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Maternal-and-Child-Health-Inequities-Emerge-Even-Before-Birth.pdf>

Take Action:

Chambers are laser focused on economic recovery during these health and economic crises, and it's clear that supporting infants and toddlers is crucial for community resiliency. What next?

- Need help making the case for investing in infants and toddlers?
- Need help making the economic argument for investing in infants and toddlers?
- Need help with advocacy at the federal, state and/or local level?
- Need individualized support? Please contact Edgar Castillo at ecastillo@acce.org.