



The BUILD Initiative and ZERO TO THREE hosted the *Everything Matters for Babies* meeting September 22–24, 2014, to support states in developing and moving an infant–toddler policy agenda and to renew commitment to a national agenda for babies. Sixty-two participants, including representatives from the public and private sectors in six states (California, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Oregon, and Vermont) as well as resource people from several national organizations (the BUILD Initiative, ZERO TO THREE, the Center for Law and Social Policy, the National Governors Association, and the Ounce of Prevention) and funders (Alliance for Early Success and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation), came together in Chicago to discuss the pressing policy concerns for infants and toddlers.

The goals for the meeting were to:

- ◆ Renew commitment as a field to infants and toddlers.
- ◆ Delve into challenges and successful state strategies in developing and carrying forward an infant–toddler policy agenda.
 - Tackle tough questions openly about why it has been so hard to move the needle for babies.
 - Support each other in identifying possible paths forward as individual leaders, through cross-sector statewide impact, and as a field offering ways forward nationally.
- ◆ Promote relationships and continued collaborative work among participants.

Meeting participants engaged in a process designed to facilitate thinking together, sharing core values, identifying the present challenges for promoting an infant–toddler policy agenda, and articulating big ideas. The experience was a mix of large-group discussions, state team discussions, and presentations intended to spark new thinking and advance the field.

State Team Pre-Meeting Work

State teams engaged in some pre-meeting work to identify their accomplishments and challenges in supporting infants, toddlers, and their families. They also brainstormed provocative possibilities for improving their systems and identified data points they’d like to move the needle on. Some of the overarching themes are presented below:

Accomplishments Highlights

1. All six states reported inclusion of infants and toddlers in QRIS and/or another quality initiative.
2. IN, OH, and OR reported a focus on infant–toddler mental health.
3. IN and OH mentioned perinatal programs.

Challenges Highlights

1. CA, IL, and VT reported lack of funding and workforce issues.
2. IL and IN reported a need to better communicate the importance of supporting infants and toddlers.
3. IN and OH reported infant mortality.

Oregon is working on thinking upstream around prevention with attention on three key concepts: developing a system that focuses on outcomes versus outputs; using metrics and indicators to ensure that outcome-based focus; and supporting regional/self-defining entities to be empowered to change how services are delivered at the local level. View their PowerPoint™ presentation [here](#).

Following Oregon's presentation, state teams were asked to reflect on the questions below:

1. How do we advance the goal of having all infants and toddlers growing up in safe, stable, and nurturing communities? How can we address the social determinants of health related to communities?
2. What supports do communities need to increase their capacity to provide access to high-quality coordinated services? How do we build community ownership and responsibility for the health and well-being of infants and toddlers?

Building Capacity of States

Megan Waltz, Prenatal to Three Policy and Systems Advisor, Minnesota Department of Health presented on the efforts of Minnesota's Department of Health to develop a framework for their work within the context of increasing equity and balance of power when working with families of young children. The resulting framework is focused on: increasing public understanding of the significance of infant and toddler development on later health and social outcomes; promoting community innovation to ensure healthy, stable relationships for all infants and toddlers; and increasing opportunities for families with infants and toddlers to have economic stability. The final desired outcome of this framework is that Minnesota's children will thrive within their family and community regardless of ethnicity, neighborhood, or family income. View her PowerPoint™ presentation [here](#).

Following Megan's presentation, state teams were asked to consider the questions below when thinking about how they could increase their state's capacity to support infants' and toddlers' healthy development:

1. Who needs to be at the table when thinking about infants and toddlers? How can we support cross-sector collaboration so that infants, toddlers, and their families receive comprehensive services?
2. How can states leverage federal funding/programs (e.g., WIC, MIECHV, CCDBG) for infants and toddlers in innovative ways?
3. What system infrastructure is needed at the state level to support communities, professionals, parents, and children to thrive (e.g., shared accountability frameworks and data systems, program standards, quality improvement strategies, financing)?
4. What leadership opportunities are needed to build a skilled and committed group of practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and advocates to promote birth-to-3 system building within the larger context of birth-to-5 or birth-to-8 efforts?

Informing Policy: Core Values, Big Ideas, Challenges, and Opportunities

In the final meeting stage, the group identified core values that underlie best practices in supporting babies and their caregivers, offered up some big ideas for the development of a national policy platform, and identified the challenges and opportunities for improving policies to support the families of infants and toddlers.

Core Values

- Every baby needs stable relationships, access to a medical and dental home, and opportunities for quality early learning experiences.
- Every baby's family deserves support that ensures the capacity to provide safe, nurturing, and loving care.
- Families must be engaged in policy decisions as well as program design, planning, and implementation.

- Funding, programming, and services for infants and toddlers are more effective with a two-generational emphasis.
- Policies should incentivize cross-systems work from the federal level to the local community.

Big Ideas

- Provide paid parental leave for all families.
- Allow flexibility from federal and state funding sources to bundle, blend, or braid resources together to ensure systems and services are responsive to families and children at the community level.
- Provide universal screening for early intervention and maternal depression.
- Include healthy child development goals in the TANF block grant.
- Allow states greater flexibility in defining training for TANF, which could include learning how to better support their child's development.
- Require coverage of children's mental health services, including those that focus on improving the parent-child relationship, in Medicaid and all other insurance plans.
- Provide fully refundable Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) at the state level.

Present Challenges

- There is a communication challenge in helping legislators, agency administrators, and the public understand how policies can be designed to improve outcomes for the families of infants and toddlers.
- As a field, we need to more effectively and succinctly explain that policies and programs supporting families of infants and toddlers are not governmental intrusion, but rather smart long-term investments in the future workforce and our economy.

Current Opportunities to Improve Focus on Infants and Toddlers

- Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships
- Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grants
- Integration of WIC with community programs (e.g., health care centers, home visiting, Early Head Start)
- Increasing number of “champions” for early childhood, such as economists, business leaders, athletes, etc.
- Opportunities to emphasize cross-systems collaboration during federal reauthorizations

Establishing State and National Priorities

State Priorities

Each state team identified strategies for building capacity at the community and state levels to improve outcomes for infants and toddlers. All states identified a need to develop a culture focused on the needs of infants and toddlers within planning and governance activities and to develop a common set of infant-toddler outcomes and indicators to measure progress. Strategies for increasing access to home visiting, providing screenings and supports for maternal depression, and reducing infant mortality rates were also identified as high priorities for a majority of states.

States were asked what technical assistance they might need to move their strategies forward. The primary request was for the national resource organizations to provide examples of best practices from other states and to act as thought partners for state teams as they develop plans for implementing these strategies at

the community and state levels. State teams also reported that they would benefit from assistance in developing plans to maximize all public and private resources available to support infants and toddlers, such as Early Head Start, Medicaid, and private insurance, and in developing alternative financing mechanisms for infant-toddler services, such as set-asides within pre-K funding, tax credits, and endowments.

National Priorities

The national policy agenda for infants and toddlers needs to support efforts at the state level, as well as encompass broader issues that can impact families regardless of the state in which they reside. Using a list of possible policy strategies, meeting participants voted on the policy strategies that should be prioritized at the national level. The top five national strategies identified by participants were:

- Increase access to high-quality infant and toddler care for all families, regardless of income.
- Provide paid family leave.
- Increase the wages and benefits provided to infant-toddler teachers/caregivers to better reflect the significance of their work.
- Improve TANF policies to better reflect the child development needs of the children receiving those benefits.
- Provide incentives for states to use federal block grants in an integrated, comprehensive services approach.

ZERO TO THREE and BUILD thank the Alliance for Early Success, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the McCormick Foundation for their generous support of this meeting.