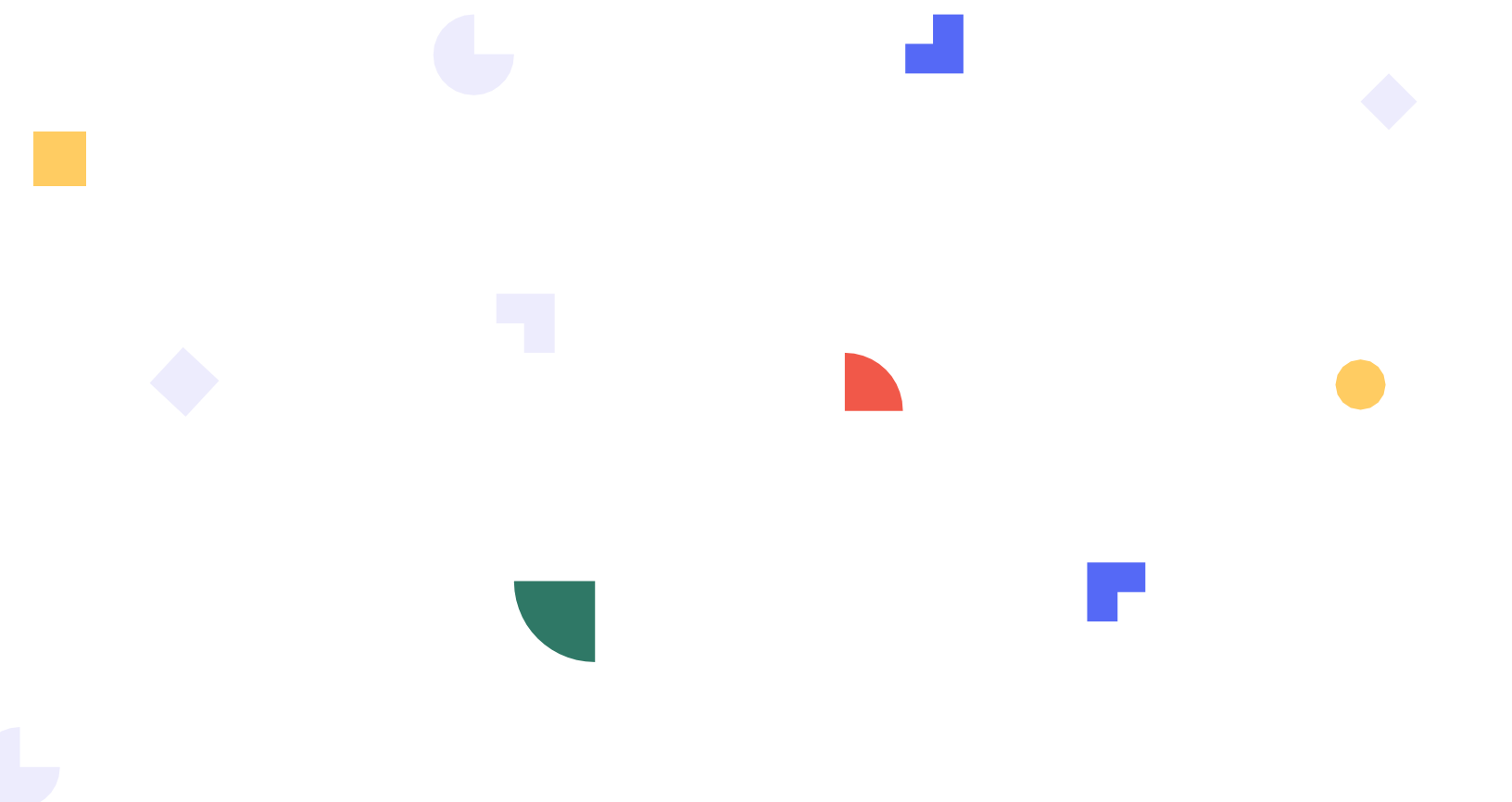




Illinois Policy Agenda

Fiscal Year 2021 – Fiscal Year 2023

START EARLY ILLINOIS POLICY TEAM



Introduction

The [Start Early Illinois Policy Team](#)'s vision is for Illinois' early childhood system to be designed, implemented and sustained to successfully achieve Illinois' goal of equitably providing a continuum of high-quality early childhood services to children before birth and through age 5. To best support all of our state's families, services must be culturally, linguistically and ability responsive.

The comprehensive work of Start Early, formerly the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and its Illinois Policy Team is grounded in the fact that the first five years of a child's life are the most critical for healthy development and long-term well-being. Yet, far too many children and families lack access to quality early education and care—particularly those living in communities left under-resourced by decades of historical and institutional racism. Our work is not only cemented in this commitment to advance racial equity, but also heavily informed by practice, experience and research.

Our policy agenda for Fiscal Year 2021 – Fiscal Year 2023 is representative of our work at the federal, state and local levels (including the City of Chicago) and is comprised of the following priorities:

- Increase investments in and strengthen the design and implementation of Illinois' core early care and learning programs
- Strengthen the infrastructure of Illinois' core early care and learning system
- Recruit and retain a representative, well-compensated and qualified workforce
- Improve the health, mental health and well-being of young children and their families
- Improve economic security for families with young children

As outlined in our policy agenda below, we will continue to work broadly across child- and family-serving systems to influence policy change and drive investments that help us reach our goals. We also commit to advance policy change through systems building; legislative, administrative and grassroots advocacy; and consultation and thought leadership.

*Items marked with an asterisk denote policy priorities that align with the Illinois Prenatal to Three (IL PN3) Coalition, which is a collective effort to advance the IL PN3 Agenda and expand high quality services to an additional 50% of low-income infants, toddlers and their families by 2025.

Increase investments in and strengthen the design and implementation of Illinois' core early care and learning programs

Priorities for Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) programs

- Advance increased and equitable distribution of resources across programs that serve infants and toddlers and those that serve preschool-age children, including increasing the percentage of dollars dedicated to infant-toddler programs.*
- Increase use of ISBE funds to deliver center-based infant and toddler services in communities with the least access to services.*
- Advance salary parity across staff in school- and community-based ISBE-funded early childhood programs.*

Priorities for home visiting services

- Diversify and increase funding for home visiting with a focus on federal funding opportunities.*
- Increase cohesion across funders and models of home visiting through: (1) streamlined funding and monitoring processes; (2) aligned collection and reporting of enrollment data across the major funders, including disaggregated data on both participants and workforce; and (3) collaborative use of data to inform resource allocation and overall system improvements.*
- Improve family participation rates through: (1) increased public awareness; and (2) innovation and/or implementation of new models or promising practices to better meet family and community needs.*
- Strengthen systems of Coordinated Intake, so that families and related providers can more easily access services in their community.*

Priorities for child care services

- Expand eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) for families from priority populations, job searchers and families earning minimum wage.
- Increase use of contracts with child care providers in order to improve stability of funding, increase compensation for teachers and assistants, and ensure dedicated access to child care for families from priority populations and for infants and toddlers.*
- Increase reimbursement rates according to cost of quality for CCAP providers, and target rate increases first to those age groups and regions furthest from that level.*
- Improve inclusion of children with disabilities in child care.*
- Support the expansion of center-based Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships in Illinois.*

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Priorities for services for children with disabilities and developmental delays

- Increase reimbursement rates and improve timeliness of payments for Early Intervention (EI) providers to ensure an adequate supply of providers to meet child and family needs.*
- Establish systems of professional supports (reflective supervision/practice-based coaching) to ensure retention of providers and the provision of quality services for families.*
- Improve family participation rates through: (1) increased public awareness among families and professionals likely to refer families; and (2) innovation and implementation of new models or promising practices to better meet family and community needs, including making teletherapy a permanent option in EI and specialized teams.*
- Strengthen bi-directional communication among families engaged in the EI system, EI providers, advocates and system leaders.
- Develop and champion models—and the policies and funding needed to implement them—to provide inclusive services for children in community-based early care and learning birth through age 5.*

Strengthen the infrastructure of Illinois' early care and learning system

- Build greater coherence in the state governance and finance structures for early care and learning.*
- Increase family, community and field voices in state decision-making.
- Establish a state-wide, sustainably-funded system of community-level structures that support local planning, coordination (e.g., funding, family enrollment) and provider supports across perinatal and early care and learning programs and services, including universal systems of prenatal and newborn support.*
- Implement a model of mental health consultation and trauma supports across early care and learning programs.*
- Establish a system to provide inclusion support to early care and learning programs.
- Strengthen the administration of the state's kindergarten readiness survey (i.e., KIDS) and utilize disaggregated data to inform developmentally appropriate practices in early elementary grades and to better understand the impact of birth to kindergarten early learning experiences on school readiness.

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Recruit and retain a representative, well-compensated and qualified early care and learning workforce, with a particular focus on those who work with infants and toddlers

- Increase compensation for early care and learning professionals by increasing and targeting investments to reduce the gap between current salaries and target salary levels identified in the early childhood cost model.*
- Increase the early care and learning workforce's ability to attain licenses, credentials and degrees, including removing barriers to higher education and identifying untapped funding sources to support credential and degree attainment.*
- Strengthen coordination between early care and learning workforce experts and advocates.
- Increase integration and alignment across early care and learning workforce preparation and professional development.*

Improve the health, mental health and well-being of young children and their families in Illinois

- Strengthen the alignment and integration of the health and early care and learning systems.
- Establish Medicaid financing for home visiting and doula services.*
- Reduce maternal mortality and morbidity by addressing social determinants of health, including housing stability and access to family and culturally-responsive, trauma-informed mental health and substance use recovery services.*
- Improve access to public and private health insurance and health care services, including immunizations.*
- Build capacity of mental health service providers to address infant/early childhood mental health.*
- Establish routine identification of and referrals for caregiver depression in the perinatal period, including supports for the caregiver and child.
- Increase access to mental health services for families with young children through increased funding for services, providing rates to providers that provide parity with physical health care, and improve access to mental health services provided through services like Early Intervention.

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Improve economic security for families with young children

- Advance family-friendly work policies, such as paid family and sick leave and more predictable work hours for parents.*
- Increase income supports for families, including improving access to public benefits programs, tax credit policies benefiting low-income families, and advancing family asset-building strategies like Children's Savings Accounts.*
- Mitigate the impact of Public Charge.

To learn more about Start Early's Illinois Policy Agenda, please email Advocacy@StartEarly.org. You can also follow the Illinois Policy Team's Twitter (@EarlyEdIL) [here](#).

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