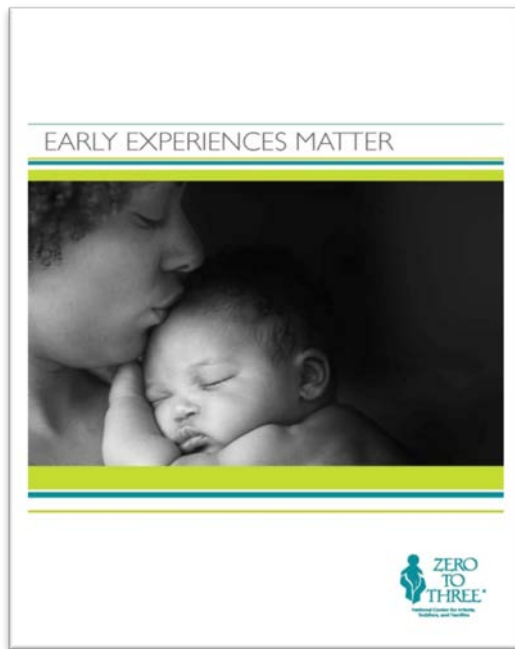


# Expanding Early Learning Opportunities

Christina Nigrelli, MA, EdS



# About ZERO TO THREE



- **Our mission is to ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life.**
- **We provide parents, professionals, and policymakers the knowledge and know-how to nurture early development.**
- **We envision a society with the knowledge and the will to support all infants and toddlers in reaching their full potential.**



# Begin at the Beginning

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## INFANT & TODDLER POLICY FRAMEWORK

### Health:

- Physical Health
- Social & Emotional Health
- Developmental Screening

### Family Strengthening:

- Basic Needs
- Family Support
- Home Visiting
- Child Welfare
- Paid Family Leave

### Early Learning:

- Child Care
- Early Head Start
- Early Intervention



**Good  
Health**

**Strong  
Families**

**Positive  
Early Learning  
Experiences**

# CA Babies and the Budget

## 2015 BABIES AND THE BUDGET CALIFORNIA



*Today's budget decisions will have long-term impacts on California's youngest and most vulnerable children and families. California infants and toddlers need **GOOD HEALTH, STRONG FAMILIES, and POSITIVE EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES**. This document presents an analysis of the Governor's 2015 proposed budget through the lens of infants, toddlers, and their families and includes recommendations for investing in and supporting the most vulnerable population.*

### GOOD HEALTH

Good health during the first 3 years of life promotes healthy development; prevents and treats any present or future impairment related to physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development, and sets the foundation for a strong health care routine.<sup>2</sup> A focus on good health also promotes brain development and skills building, both of which increase a child's learning capacity.<sup>3</sup>

#### Physical Health

- Affordable Care Act (ACA): Continues focus on implementation of the ACA and state-implemented expansions.
- Medi-Cal (Medicaid): Continues provision of health coverage to parents and caretakers through the expansion of (a) Medi-Cal eligibility to adults with income of up to 138% of the federal poverty level and (b) Medi-Cal mental health and substance use disorder benefits.
- Prenatal Health Coverage: Covers pregnant women whose income is up to 213% of the Federal poverty line.
- Limited Benefit Programs: Requires the beneficiaries of the non-comprehensive health coverage programs (e.g., California Children's Services, Every Woman Counts) to apply for comprehensive coverage offered through Covered California or Medi-Cal.
- Behavioral Health Treatment: Includes services for children with autism spectrum disorder at an estimated cost of \$320 million.
- Pediatric Palliative Care Program: Expands program to seven additional counties. The program's goal is to improve the quality of life of children with life-threatening illnesses and their families and is currently available in 11 counties.

#### Nutrition

- CalFresh: Increases monthly food payments by \$62 for monthly food payments to recipients who qualify for the State Utility Assistance Subsidy.

#### Recommendations to Promote Good Health

- Developmental Screenings: Expand reimbursement for developmental screening and care coordination under Medi-Cal to community-based agencies.<sup>11</sup> Despite the investment in behavioral health treatment for children with autism spectrum disorder, the proposed budget does not directly address funding for early identification and intervention services related to developmental delays or disabilities. Early screening of infants and toddlers can help indicate whether a child is at risk for a developmental delay. The earlier risks are identified, the earlier that intervention can begin.

- Dental Care: Invests in dental outreach activities that align with recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

### STRONG FAMILIES

Strong families support the positive development of infants and toddlers. The development of young children depends on the supportive, nurturing relationships that take place within the family system. Parents especially play a significant role in the healthy development of babies. Recent research identified the link between the well-being of parents and their children's social-emotional, physical, and economic well-being.<sup>12</sup> The environmental stressors present in the home, such as economic insecurity and toxic stress, also affect a child's behavior, development, and health throughout the life span. Addressing these stressors nurtures the development of strong families and supports positive developmental outcomes.<sup>13</sup>

#### Child Welfare

- Continuum of Care Reform: Includes recommendations that address the need to reduce the number of foster youth residing in congregate care for extended periods of time.

#### Recommendations That Help Strengthen Families

- CalWORKs: The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program provides temporary cash assistance and welfare-to-work services for low-income families and must be expanded. More than one quarter of the families in CalWORKs have at least one child younger than 2 years old.<sup>14</sup>
- Home Visiting: Increased investments are needed for evidence-based home visiting programs. A growing body of research demonstrates that home visiting can improve outcomes for maternal and child health, home and child safety, school readiness, family economic self-sufficiency, and linkages to community resources.

### POSITIVE EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Infants and toddlers learn through play, exploration, and interactions with the significant adults in their lives. These experiences stimulate the development of cognitive and language abilities, self-regulation, and social-emotional skills.<sup>15</sup> Science tells us that the earliest years of life are a time of tremendous opportunity, with the brain creating 700 neural connections per second,<sup>16</sup> laying the foundation for all that comes later in life.<sup>17</sup> When that foundation is a strong one, young children thrive and develop to their full potential. In addition to supporting brain development, positive early learning experiences increase a child's ability to thrive and become a healthy adult, thus making the first 3 years of life a crucial period for development.<sup>18</sup>

## Identifying opportunities for:

- Good Health
- Strong Families
- Positive Early Learning Experiences

# Positive Early Learning Experiences

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## Recommendations:

- Access
- Affordability
- Quality

# Positive Early Learning Experiences

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## Wins:

- **Access**
- **Affordability**
- **Quality**



# What are the Opportunities?







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