



**NC Early Childhood
FOUNDATION**
CONNECTING POLICY TO IMPACT

Early Childhood Mental Health is Essential for North Carolina

Strong early mental health supports build resilience, learning, and a stable future workforce.



The Problem

Early mental health needs are common but rarely identified. **9–14% of infants and toddlers experience emotional or behavioral challenges**, yet most are never screened.

The system is fragile in rural areas. **In over half of NC counties, there is not a single child and adolescent psychiatrist.**

Families face major access barriers. **Long wait times, limited providers, and stigma prevent early care.**

Why It Matters to the State: Early Mental Health Shapes Long-Term Outcomes and Public Costs

EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

First 2,000 Days

Brain architecture for learning, behavior, and resilience is built in a **baby's first 2,000 days.**

WORKFORCE IMPACT

More than 50%

50%+ of working parents report their child's mental health affects job attendance or productivity.

PUBLIC SYSTEMS COST

65-70% of Youth

65–70% of youth in juvenile detention have a diagnosable mental health disorder.

Early intervention reduces long-term costs across education, health care, and public safety.

The Solutions: What North Carolina Can Do Now



Screen Early and Often

Begin screening early in development.



Support Families

Equip parents with tools and access to services.



Build the Infant Mental Health Workforce

Recruit, train, and retain specialized mental health clinicians.



Integrate Mental Health Into Pediatric Care

Embed mental health providers in pediatrics.



Use Medicaid as a Prevention Tool

Leverage insurance coverage to fund screening, treatment, and support services.



Use Data to Guide Investment

Track needs and fill gaps to support communities.

Strong early mental health systems build resilient children, stable families, and a stronger North Carolina.

More at BuildTheFoundation.org