

North Carolina 2019 Policy Priorities for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

Developed by the Think Babies™ NC Leadership Team



When we support our youngest children in having the opportunity to fulfill their potential, we create the best outcomes in health, education, and economic well-being for everyone in North Carolina.

Brains are built, not born. During the first years of life, babies' experiences are built into their bodies — shaping brain development and building the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. Parents play the lead role in their child's healthy development, but all parents are stretched in the earliest months and years of their child's life. Our state and our communities all have a role to play in providing parents with support they may need at this especially critical time. Policies and programs should ensure healthy beginnings at birth, support families with young children, and make high-quality child care and learning environments more accessible and affordable to all parents who want them. When we support them in their earliest years, we prepare our babies to grow, learn and succeed—and our communities, workforce and economy become stronger and more productive.



All Young Children Need Healthy Beginnings

Children's development during the early years of life is strongly affected by their health. Healthy adults are more likely to conceive healthy babies, and women with health insurance are more likely to get timely and adequate prenatal care. When parents have health insurance coverage, children are more likely to have insurance, keep insurance, and access needed health care services. Parents with health insurance are healthier and can better support children's development. Supporting pregnant women at work reduces infant mortality, improves mom and baby's health, and reduces doctor and hospital visits. When children have good health in utero, good birth outcomes, and access to needed health services, they are more likely to have good physical health and on-track development during childhood and throughout life.

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- Make sure parents have access to health insurance by closing the coverage gap.
- Adopt reasonable workplace accommodations for pregnant employees.



All Young Children Need Supported Families and Supportive Communities

A stable, secure relationship with a nurturing, caring adult is a key factor in young children's development. Parents play the lead role in their children's healthy development, but all parents are stretched in the earliest months and years of their children's lives. Communities can provide parents with support they may need at this especially critical time.

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- Increase opportunities for home visiting and parenting education programs.
- Adopt paid family and medical leave for employees.



All Young Children Need Access to Quality Early Care and Learning Experiences

Children's development and learning in the first few years lay the foundation for all of the years that follow. Children who attend high-quality early education programs are better prepared for success in school—academically, socially and emotionally. Children in higher quality programs have more advanced language and math skills, more advanced social skills, and more supportive relationships with their teachers. Access to high-quality child care with well educated, well compensated teachers helps prepare children to grow, learn and succeed.

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- Increase child care subsidy funding and change waitlist policy to expand access to high-quality, affordable infant and toddler child care.
- Make sure families living in child care deserts have access to high-quality infant and toddler child care.
- Ensure infants and toddlers have well educated and well compensated teachers with the skills needed to support healthy development.



All Young Children Need To Be Counted

An estimated 73,000 children in North Carolina under age 5 live in hard-to-count census tracts. Adequate census counts determine the amount of federal support a state receives. If these children are missed, the state stands to lose more than \$5 billion in federal investments like Child Care Subsidies, Head Start, nutrition support (SNAP) and health care (Medicaid) that primarily benefit the most vulnerable children.

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- Make sure North Carolina's infants and toddlers benefit from their fair share of federal investments in programs that support healthy development by ensuring an accurate 2020 Census count.



About Think Babies™ NC:

Think Babies™ NC seeks to advance policies that support the healthy development of North Carolina's babies and toddlers. It is aligned with the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading initiative and the NC Early Childhood Action Plan. Think Babies™ NC is led by the NC Early Education Coalition with support from the NC Early Childhood Foundation and a Leadership Team of state and local organizations focused on advancing public awareness and policy solutions for infants, toddlers, and their families.

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