

ACTIONS 4.1 & 4.4

Recruit and retain more clinicians for infant and toddler mental health, including clinicians of color.

CREATE A Mental Health Professional Development **SYSTEM** to **RECRUIT** and **RETAIN** Infant and Toddler **MENTAL HEALTH CLINICIANS**

The first three years of a child's life lay the foundation for future learning, health, and development. The North Carolina Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Association states that mental health for young children includes the capacity for infants and toddlers to: Form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions; and explore the environment and learn.

Evidence-based services provided by qualified infant and early childhood mental health professionals are effective at improving young children's mental health, especially for those who have experienced trauma. Like all other states, North Carolina lacks enough mental health providers to meet the needs of the number of infants and toddlers who need support. Recruiting and keeping qualified providers is especially difficult in rural areas. Reducing shortages and turnover is essential to eliminating gaps in service availability and providing high quality care.

The North Carolina Child Health Report Card shows that **MORE THAN ONE IN 10 CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 17 HAD A DIAGNOSIS OF DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY IN 2020.**

This is a **49% INCREASE** since 2016.

WHAT WE KNOW

Leading early childhood health organizations including the American Academy of Pediatrics declared a [National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health](#). The worsening crisis in child and adolescent mental health is inextricably tied to the stress brought on by COVID-19, rising inflation, increasing housing instability, and the ongoing struggle for racial justice.

The earliest experiences of young children have an impact on their brain formation and soaring rates of mental health challenges among children and adolescents highlight the importance of investing in mental health for infants and young children to provide them a strong start to life. Equitable access to high-quality mental health services for children birth-to-age-eight is critical for families and the future of our state.

Dive Into the Data

Children's experiences with stress can begin before birth, in their mother's womb, and continue during their earliest months and years of life and has implications for every sphere of life outcomes, from education to health. One measure of the level of stress that families and children are experiencing is based on the level of social support they have to buffer against life's hardships. The Pathways Data Dashboard includes data on the [percent of new mothers reporting access to sufficient social supports](#) across the state.

Systemic change is needed because mental health systems were not built to meet children's developmental needs; therefore, most don't currently consider the needs of infants and children.

WHAT WE NEED

Establishing a strong and accessible mental health workforce is a crucial step towards ensuring that all North Carolina children can thrive despite stressors their families may be experiencing. The state needs more clinicians who are trained to provide evidence-based mental health treatment to young children and families. The [NC Child Treatment Program](#) based at the Center for Child and Family Health in Durham, specializes in this type of training. Expanding The NC Child Treatment Program is a key area to support young children's mental health in the state.

HOW TO SUPPORT

North Carolina needs comprehensive policies that promote the training and retention of a range of mental health staff who can provide care along the full [continuum of mental health care and services for children](#). This includes those who focus on the promotion of healthy development, to prevention of illness, and treatment for children and families in crisis. Building a well-trained workforce of infant and early childhood mental health providers, with a focus on increasing the number of providers of color, is a key strategy for ensuring this is possible for all North Carolina children.

INITIATIVES WORKING IN THIS AREA



The [ARCh Project](#) partners with agencies around the state to improve infant and early childhood mental health outcomes of North Carolina children ages birth to five by increasing access to services and advancing workforce capacity to effectively meet their needs. Undergirding all activities is a goal of reducing disparities in access to IECMH practices across the state that are developmentally sensitive, culturally-responsive, trauma-informed, and evidence-based.



[Child First](#) is an evidenced based mental health program which helps struggling families build strong, nurturing relationships that heal and protect young children from the impact of trauma and chronic stress. Using a two-generation approach, they provide psychotherapy to parents and children together in their homes, and connect them with the services to make healthy child development possible.



The [NCTSN Resource Parent Curriculum](#) is part of a larger collaborative project between the Center for Child and Family Health (CCFH) and the NC Division of Social Services (NCDSS). Funds from NCDSS are used to train and support child welfare/mental health professionals to deliver workshops to foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers to educate about the impact of trauma on development for children with experience in foster care or out-of-home placement.

[Visit the Pathways Action Map](#) to learn more about these and other initiatives leading efforts in this area.

