

An Open Letter to the Nation on Behalf of Infants and Toddlers - Priorities for 2022 and Beyond

February 2022

Our country is at a tipping point, and our children's futures hang in the balance.

As the National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers, comprised of more than 2500 local, state and national organizations representing business leaders, pediatricians, child care providers, parents, state and local officials, advocates and researchers, we know our nation needs bold leadership to secure the futures of our youngest children. We are united and committed to educating the public and raising awareness about the urgent priorities that support pregnant people and families with children under three. Progress made in these areas will yield meaningful dividends into the future for our economy, our communities, and our families.

- **Economic Security for All.** To set children up for success, we must ensure families are able to meet their basic needs. Every family should have access to affordable health care, housing, transportation, and healthy food to help young children reach their full potential. Communities are stronger when all babies and toddlers have access to resources and services they need regardless of where they live, their family's income or education, their gender, or the color of their skin.
- **High-quality, Affordable Child Care.** A strong child care system not only provides a safe and nurturing environment for young children, but it is also essential for economic stability and growth. For every dollar we spend on comprehensive, high quality early learning programs that support young children from birth, we see a 13% annual return in economic benefits due to reduced incarceration, improved educational outcomes, better overall mental and physical health and a stronger workforce. The lack of affordable quality child care for infants and toddlers also costs our nation's economy \$57 billion annually.
- **Comprehensive Family Supports.** Scientific data shows us that additional systems of care, such as paid family and medical leave, paid sick days and other solutions such as maternal health and access to healthy food, can have lifelong positive effects for children and lead to a happier, stronger workforce, more productivity and stronger, more sustainable economic growth. Of special concern are babies and toddlers facing multiple adverse early experiences who can benefit from supports designed to strengthen families.
- **Maternal and Child Health.** Healthy babies start with healthy moms. And, yet, in the United States, more women die in childbirth than in any other developed country, and Black women are more than twice as likely to die than white women. All mothers should have access to equitable care during and after pregnancy. This includes regular well-child visits, screenings, and mental health care to give their babies the best start in life.
- **Equitable Policy Implementation.** As unprecedented and critically needed resources are being provided to states, counties, cities, and communities, we must ensure broad and equitable distribution of these investments and equitable application of these policies into the communities where the need is greatest.

The converging crises of COVID-19, ongoing racial injustice, and an uneven economic recovery threaten the success of our children and our future. For many families, lack of equitable access to basic needs like food, health care, child care, and housing has always been a challenge — made worse by COVID-19 and felt more acutely in families of color and those with lower incomes. Race, place and income should no longer be predictors of a child's future. We are at a pivotal moment, and we have a choice: we can help our babies and toddlers thrive or continue to set them up for failure. Our country is at its best when we recognize that children and their families, particularly our youngest, are our greatest resource. They must be our highest priority.

This is our chance to get it right. Our nation's leaders at every level must continue to act together with urgency and focus to support families and children in their earliest years.