

Primary Care Child Development Initiative

Recommendations for Implementing the Biden-Harris Early Childhood and Health Agenda



BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION PRIORITY: PROMOTING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN PRIMARY CARE

President Biden has called for a major expansion of access to early childhood experts within community health centers and other primary care settings, as detailed on the Biden campaign's [education policy page](#), and copied below (emphasis added):

“Provide early childhood development support to families where they are most likely to access it – the pediatrician’s office. For many families with young children, the pediatrician’s office is the one place where they interact with service providers before their child enters school. President Biden will provide funds to ensure that there is an early childhood development expert in every community health center. He will also provide grants to help cities place early childhood development experts in other pediatrician offices with a high percentage of Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program patients. These experts, as part of the primary care team, will help identify whether children are reaching development milestones, help connect families to additional services like home visiting when needed, and answer parents’ questions regarding child development so every child in the U.S. is placed on the path to succeed once they start kindergarten.”¹

PRESIDENT BIDEN’S FY2022 DISCRETIONARY BUDGET REQUEST: FUNDING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENTAL EXPERTS

Within [President Biden’s Discretionary Budget Request for FY2022](#), he has articulated a commitment to advancing equity. Within this section of the budget, the Biden-Harris Administration requests funding to ***“help cities place early childhood development experts in pediatrician offices with a high percentage of Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program patients.”***²

The budget request released in April was the first of two phases of expected release of the President’s FY2022 Budget, with a more detailed proposal on this and other priorities expected by the early summer.

RECOMMENDATION

To deliver on this campaign promise and build on the Discretionary Budget Request we recommend and support the **creation of a new Primary Care Child Development Initiative (PCCDI)** as a signature proposal to be rolled out by the Biden-Harris Administration.

¹ <http://www.joebiden.com/education/>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FY2022-Discretionary-Request.pdf> (page 12)

- Location within government:** Based on President Biden’s dual vision of expanding access to early childhood development specialists through community health centers and throughout private practices, we believe the **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is in the best position to oversee and administer this new initiative.** Within HRSA, we envision a partnership between the Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC), which oversees the Health Center program and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), which has a long-standing commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of young children and their families. With appropriate funding, BPHC could create a service expansion grant opportunity to allow community health centers across the country to embed child development specialists into the primary care team. This practice transformation would be supported by training and technical assistance as well as sufficient infrastructure to support data collection and high program quality. MCHB could be responsible for granting funds to cities and other pediatric care settings, as outlined in President Biden’s FY22 Discretionary Budget Request, and play a role more broadly in the PCCDI by supporting training and technical assistance to all grantees.
- Cost estimate:** Using data from the HealthySteps National Office and HRSA, we have created an initial estimate of the resources necessary to expand these services to all community health centers, as called for in the Biden campaign proposal. **We believe an annual investment by HRSA of \$167 million would enable HealthySteps and similar programs to reach the more than 2 million children birth to three, and their families, who currently receive care in community health centers. The approximate cost to provide the remaining children birth to three in the country with access to a developmental specialist is \$238 million.** In the accompanying materials we have detailed our cost assumptions and data sources for the community health center investment; the additional analyses are currently underway.
- Return on investment:** Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman’s most recent work has demonstrated an internal rate of return for early childhood programs ranging from 8-18.3%.³ Through analyses conducted by the HealthySteps National Office in conjunction with Manatt Health, **HealthySteps has demonstrated an average annual savings to Medicaid of 204%**, largely attributable to the two-generation focus at the core of HealthySteps.

ABOUT HEALTHYSTEPS

HealthySteps, a program of ZERO TO THREE, is an evidence-based, interdisciplinary pediatric primary care program that promotes positive parenting and healthy development for babies and toddlers, particularly in areas where there have been persistent inequities for families with low-incomes and families of color. Early childhood development specialists, called HealthySteps Specialists, are integrated into the pediatric

³ Garca J. L., Walker J. E., Heckman J. J., Leaf D. E., Schaeffer L. D., Prados M. J. (2020). Quantifying the life-cycle benefits of an influential early-childhood program. *The Journal of Political Economy*, 128(7), 2502–2541. doi:10.1086/705718.

team to provide short-term behavior and development consultation and referrals, as well as intensive services when needed, and to support practice-wide screening efforts for children and caregivers, covering topics from autism to caregiver depression.

Founded in 1995, today HealthySteps is the largest program of its kind to integrate early childhood development specialists into pediatric primary care with a focus on children enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP. In 2020, the program reached over 300,000 children and their families, in 186 sites, including over 50 Federally Qualified Health Centers across 24 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

We firmly believe that our nation will reap the rewards of a new Biden-Harris Administration Primary Care Childhood Development Initiative. The HealthySteps National Office at ZERO TO THREE and the early childhood pediatric community are uniquely positioned to support President Biden's PCCDI and stand ready to serve as a resource as we continue our work to improve the health and wellbeing of families across the country.

ZERO TO THREE FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES

In addition to the PCCDI, ZERO TO THREE's policy priorities are well-aligned with President Biden's pledge to support young children and families including family and medical leave, comprehensive child care, and expanding Early Head Start as well as policies to address infant and early childhood mental health and transform child welfare to promote infant-toddler wellbeing. These policies are detailed in ZERO TO THREE's Transition Plan linked below.

POINT OF CONTACT

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Embracing Growth – HealthySteps 2019 Annual Report](#)
- [What is HealthySteps](#)
- [HealthySteps Evidence Summary](#)
- [HealthySteps Return on Investment](#)
- [Building Back Better for Babies and Toddlers: ZERO TO THREE's Transition Plan](#)