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2022 MAINE CHILDREN'S CABINET REPORT



GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF
Policy Innovation and the Future

2022 CHILDREN'S CABINET REPORT

Governor Mills' Children's Cabinet

Soon after taking office in January 2019, Governor Mills reinstated the Children's Cabinet following an eight-year hiatus. Maine Children's Cabinet members include the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Labor, Public Safety, and Corrections. DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew serves as chair of the Children's Cabinet. In collaboration with key staff from each of these agencies, the work of Governor Mills' Children's Cabinet is coordinated by staff in the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future.

The Children's Cabinet plays a vital role in convening and facilitating coordination across State agencies on initiatives and policies that will improve and promote the healthy development of children and youth in

Maine. Staff from the Departments comprising the Children's Cabinet meet regularly to maintain open communication about changes and developments in programming and policies across state agencies for children and youth, coordinate the implementation of specific strategies, and identify new opportunities to collaborate across programs to advance the Children's Cabinet's strategies and goals.

The Children's Cabinet strategic plans lay out two overarching goals:

- All Maine children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.
- All Maine youth enter adulthood healthy, connected to the workforce and/or education.



Children’s Cabinet Achievements in 2022

In 2022, state agencies involved in the work of the Children’s Cabinet continued to make significant progress in implementing strategies laid out in the Children’s Cabinet Plan for Young Children (see Appendix A) and the Children’s Cabinet Plan for Youth (see Appendix B). The Children’s Cabinet Plan for Young Children was updated in January 2023 to reflect new initiatives that will be initiated in 2023. The Children’s Cabinet plans to update their plan for youth in early 2023.

This report outlines the initiatives for young children and youth that moved forward in 2022 and highlights plans for continued implementation of the Children’s Cabinet strategies in 2023.

A few key highlights of the 2022 achievements of the state agencies participating in the work of the Children’s Cabinet include:

- The distribution by the Office of Child and Family Services at the Department of Health and Human Services of more than \$73 million in monthly grants from October 2021 through the end of September 2022 to stabilize and support child care programs facing financial challenges and increased costs as a result of the pandemic. The monthly Child Care Stabilization grants were funded through the American Rescue Plan and included \$200 monthly stipends for staff working directly with children. These grants represent significant, historic investments to stabilize and support the child care industry.
- The implementation by the Office of Child and Family Services of Help Me Grow, a care coordination model to connect pregnant people and parents/caregivers with young children through age 8 with the services and resources to support young children to grow up healthy and thriving. HMG is a care coordination model currently used in 28 states that utilizes and builds on existing resources to develop and enhance a comprehensive approach to early childhood system-building.
- The implementation of the Maine Career Exploration Program which will support over 6000 students to connect with work-based learning opportunities over the next two years. This initiative is a strong cross agency collaboration between the Departments of Education, Economic and Community Development, and Labor. The initiative includes funding to Jobs for Maine’s Graduates to develop a new Career Exploration Badge Program for students in 93 high schools, grants to 23 high schools to support the expansion of Extended Learning Programming and grants to community-based organizations to provide job readiness training and meaningful work experiences for historically disadvantaged young people.

More detail about these initiatives and the other initiatives supported by the Children’s Cabinet and staff from state agencies participating in the Children’s Cabinet are provided in this report.

STRATEGIES TO PREPARE CHILDREN FOR KINDERGARTEN

The Children’s Cabinet Plan for Young Children has provided a roadmap for much of the state’s work to improve programs and services for young children and their families. Staff and members of the Children’s Cabinet originally developed its plan for young children in the fall of 2019, pulling from the learnings of the comprehensive needs assessment conducted by the Department of Education (DOE) and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) as part of the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Birth through Five planning grant from the federal government.¹ Through conversations with parents, child care providers, social service agency representatives, and others, the assessment identified a series of priority needs. The Children’s Cabinet used the results of the needs assessment to help guide the development of its plan for young children.

The review of the needs assessment and discussions across State agencies throughout the fall of 2019 led the Children’s Cabinet to focus its strategies in three main areas:

1. Increasing access to affordable early care and education, preventive, and early intervention services
2. Raising the quality of our early care and education programs
3. Recruiting, preparing, and retaining a diverse early childhood workforce. In 2023, the state will update its needs assessment with funding from a new, three-year Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five renewal grant.

Staff from the DHHS and DOE are collaborating and coordinating on efforts to strengthen and link programs within Maine’s early childhood system. Multiple state offices are involved in this effort including staff from DHHS’s Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) and Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention

(Maine CDC) and DOE’s Early Learning (EL) Team and Child Development Services (CDS). Maine’s early childhood system includes critical early intervention services, health care programming for young children, and early care and education programs such as licensed child care programs, Head Start and public Pre-K. Staff are focused on both expanding programming as well as streamlining and aligning services to ensure that families with young children can access needed programming and services in a timely manner.

Strengthening Maine’s Early Childhood Education System

Through the work of the Children’s Cabinet, staff from the DHHS and DOE are coordinating efforts to increase access to quality and affordable early childhood education programs through a mixed delivery birth through five system.

The OCFS at the DHHS plays the key role in providing services to support families and their children in accessing quality early childhood education. OCFS oversees the administration of Maine’s Child Care Development Block Grant. This work includes managing the Maine’s Child Care Subsidy Program, Child Care Licensing and Investigation Services, Quality Rating





and Improvement System, and the state's contract with the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN). The Child Care Subsidy Program provides subsidies to help families with incomes up to 85% of the state median income to pay for child care, including afterschool care. The MRTQ PDN works to promote and support professionalism in the field of early childhood education and to improve quality through the provision of a statewide system of professional development.

Maine DOE's Early Learning (EL) Team promotes children's learning by offering information and resources to support public early elementary, preschool and Head Start teachers and administrators involved in educating Maine's young learners. The EL staff provide guidance and tools to increase access to high-quality public preschool and Head Start; strengthen and align instruction, assessment, and curriculum to established standards; support the professional development of early childhood (Pre-K to Grade 3) professionals in public preschools and Head Start; assist families in supporting their child's learning; and inform policy, planning, and research-based practice. Since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, the

state has invested more than \$100 million in direct grants to child care programs (both center and home-based facilities) with COVID relief funding from the federal government. While child care programs began to recover in 2022 from the negative impacts of the pandemic, many programs continued to struggle with on-going challenges, such as staffing shortages. The continuation of federally funded monthly grants to child care programs from OCFS helped to stabilize and support the field in 2022.

Between October 2021 and the end of September 2022, OCFS provided over \$73 million in stabilization grants from funding in the American Rescue Plan. Maine was one of the first states to make this stabilization funding available to all licensed child care programs. These monthly grants provided each program with \$100 per licensed child care slot, \$200 stipends for each staff working directly with children and payments based upon a program's quality rating and acceptance of the Child Care Subsidy Program. By the end of September 2022, 785 center-based child care providers received \$60,692,390 in stabilization grants and 705 family (home-based) child care providers received \$12,210,974 in stabilization grants.

Following the expiration of the ARPA child care stabilization funds, OCFS used increased federal funds from the Child Care Development Fund to offer Provider Transition Grants to ramp down the monthly grants over an 8 month period. Licensed child care programs will continue to receive reduced monthly grants through May 2023. These transition grants will provide an additional \$13.6 million in child care programs between October 2022 and May 2023.

Investing in Maine's Early Childhood Education Workforce

In 2022, Governor Mills and Speaker Ryan Fecteau ensured that more than \$12 million was included in the final bipartisan supplemental budget for a new state funded salary supplement program for early childhood educators working in licensed child care programs. This salary supplement is an important tool to reach the Children's Cabinet's goal of recruiting and retaining a diverse, qualified early childhood education workforce.

The 2019 Preschool Development Grant Needs Assessment identified low pay as a primary barrier to recruiting and retaining staff. The pandemic and the increased labor shortages following the pandemic exacerbated this challenge for child care programs in Maine. Data from the May 2021 Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that the mean wage for a child care worker in Maine is \$14.90 per hour or \$31,000 a year. This is 40 percent less than the state's average wage for all occupations. Over the last few years, child care directors

and owners reported significant challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified educators and spoke about their challenges with competing with employers who raised wages to recruit new staff in the tight labor market. Many child care programs were apprehensive to raise their costs because they ultimately have to pass these costs on to parents who may already be struggling to pay their weekly fees for child care.

To address concerns about recruiting and retaining staff, the Office of Child and Family Services included \$200 per month stipends as part of the Child Care Stabilization Grants funded through the federal American Rescue Plan. The Governor's budget initiative allowed the state to continue these stipends following the expiration of the stabilization funds. By July 1, 2023, OCFS will establish a program of tiered supplements based on the experience and education of the individual early care educators with the amount of the supplement increasing as the educator's qualifications increase.

The decision to move to a system of tiered salary supplements was informed by feedback from the child care listening sessions in the fall of 2021. A significant majority of participants from all of the listening sessions advocated for a tiered approach based upon education and experience. There was a clear preference for monthly payments and wage supplements over tax credits. The supplemental budget included funding for positions for OCFS to administer the ongoing salary supplement system and work is currently underway to engage with stakeholders and develop the policy and procedures that will underly the forthcoming tiered system.

Strengthening Maine's Child Care Subsidy Program

In 2022, the Office of Child and Family Services continued to use funding from the temporary increase in the Child Care Development Block Grant through the American Rescue Plan to increase access to the Child Care Subsidy Program. The Child Care Subsidy Program provides subsidies to help families with incomes up to 85 percent of the median income (\$64,379 for a family of 3) pay for child care and after-school care.



These initiatives include:

- **Waiving of co-payments for most families eligible for the Child Care Subsidy Program:** With federal funding, OCFS waived all co-payments for families participating in the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP) until the fall of 2022. Due to federal rules, OCFS was required to make changes to their co-payment waiver policy. The co-payment waiver will remain in place for families with incomes below 60% of the median income until September 30, 2023. OCFS has solicited feedback from parents regarding these initiatives and found, based on two parent surveys, that parents overwhelmingly reported that receiving this support was a stress reliever and allowed them to use the savings to meet their basic needs, especially in light of rising costs for housing, utilities, and other essentials. Parents reported being able to reengage in the workforce or enroll in higher education to better their career prospects as a result of this support and that these programs and increased earnings helped them to improve the circumstances of their family.
- **Providing 35% increase in reimbursement for child care programs participating in CCSP and serving children with special needs.** OCFS is committed to encouraging inclusive policies that support child care programs to serve children with special needs.
- **Reimbursing based on enrollment instead of attendance.** CCSP typically reimburses child care programs for the days that a child attends a program. With greater absences from child care, because of illness and unexpected quarantines from the pandemic, reimbursing based on enrollment provides child care programs accepting CCSP greater stability and prevents greater strain from the current pandemic. CCSP will reimburse based on enrollment until September 30, 2023.



Expanding Maine's Child Care Infrastructure

When developing her 10-year state economic plan, the Governor traveled the state speaking to employers about their needs. Access to child care for their employees was often towards the top of their lists. Recognizing the need to increase access to quality child care, Governor Mills' Jobs and Recovery Plan included \$15 million for grants to renovate, expand, or construct child care facilities to increase the number of licensed child care slots.

Prior to the pandemic, analysis by the Bipartisan Policy Center, in partnership with Maine's Office of Child and Family Policy, confirmed that Maine has a gap in formal licensed child care for working parents. While Maine's overall gap in child care was less than most other states, the analysis estimated that the number of Maine children under six with all available parents working exceeded the number of licensed child care slots by 4,920 (9.2%), and the gap was higher in rural areas.

The pandemic exacerbated this problem for families in Maine. While most programs remained or re-opened during the pandemic, Maine experienced a decline in the number of licensed slots. The stabilization grants and other key investments supported a rebound in the number of licensed slots in Maine, leaving the state with more licensed slots than prior to the start of the



pandemic. A new analysis from the Bipartisan Policy Center shows that the overall gap has decreased from 4,921 slots to 3,079 slots, a 34 percent improvement. However, this gap in child care slots remains a concern for OCFS staff and the Children's Cabinet. More slots are needed to meet the needs of working parents in our state.

These start up and expansion grants will help to address the on-going child care gap in the state by providing grant funding to programs, both center and home-based programs, to cover "bricks and mortar" costs to expand the number of child care slots throughout the state. The grants prioritize the expansion of slots for infants and toddlers and in underserved areas.

Grants for the start-up and expansion of new family child care programs and small grants needed to expand existing facilities are being awarded on a rolling basis. Since March 2023, the state has made 54 awards, totaling \$3.9 million. These awards will create 1420 new child care slots in 14 counties. OCFS is partnering with Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI) to administer these grants and the team continues to review applications as they are completed.

Expanding the Early Childhood Mental Health Program

Stakeholders participating in the 2019 PDG needs assessment also identified the increased stress of working with children with high needs as a factor in staff retention. In 2021, OCFS implemented and expanded the Maine Early Childhood Consultation Program (ECCP[®]) to provide tools to early childhood educators to address the social emotional needs of children in their programs. In 2021 and 2022, a combination of federal and state funds allowed OCFS to expand programming to a total of eight counties (Androscoggin, Aroostook, Cumberland, Hancock, Kennebec, Penobscot, Washington, and York counties). Thanks to the passage of legislation spearheaded by Senator Cathy Breen in 2022, ECCP[®] will expand statewide in early 2023.



The Early Childhood Consultation Partnership is an evidence-based, time-limited, and intensive consultation service that helps child care providers, educators, and caregivers of young children build both an understanding of the social-emotional needs of children and the skills to meet those needs. All services are provided at no cost to providers and families. Mental health consultants trained in the ECCP® model work directly with child care staff, educators, and the child's caregiver(s) to identify and implement strategies to support children's emotional wellbeing and effectively manage challenging behavior that may otherwise jeopardize a child's ability to participate in an early childhood education setting.

In addition to offering consultation services to Head Start and licensed child care programs, OCFS worked closely with the Department of Education to expand programming to public schools for children in Pre-K to 2nd grade and licensed afterschool programs. A state-wide cross-agency workgroup, which includes staff from OCFS, Child Development Services, Maine

Roads to Quality, and the Center for Community Inclusion & Disability, meets regular to support the integration of ECCP® into the continuum of supports for early care and intervention.

Since initial implementation in January 2021 through September 2022, Maine ECCP® served 1,081 children and 197 teachers/providers with Core Classroom Services and 102 individual children with Child-Specific Services. In early data, 99% of children receiving Child-Specific Services through Maine ECCP® were not suspended or expelled from their child care programs.

OCFS has contracted with SRI International to conduct a process evaluation of the implementation of the Maine ECCP® pilot. Data will be collected in late 2022 through early 2023 with an evaluation report delivered to OCFS in 2023. OCFS and Maine ECCP consultants continued to receive training and technical assistance from the service developers and national experts in 2022.

Supporting Transitions into Public School for Young Children

The Children’s Cabinet Coordinator and staff from the Early Learning Team and Child Development Services at DOE and the Office of Child and Family Services at DHHS have been working together over the last several years to identify opportunities to improve transitions for young children into public schools, particularly from preschool into kindergarten. Starting public school can be a significant transition for children and families that can be filled with mixed emotions, worries, and many questions. Smoothing this transition for children can help them to adjust to their new setting and better prepare them to learn and succeed in school.

Staff have conducted focus groups with parents and early childhood educators to gather their input and ideas about how our public schools could better support young children and their families during the transition into either public Pre-K or kindergarten. The feedback from the parents and early childhood educators was incorporated into materials on the DOE’s transitions website for families and educators.

The work of this group and the focus groups also informed the development of a detailed professional development learning modules to support teachers to implement policies and programming to better support transitions. The learning modules were launched in the spring of 2022 by the Early Learning Team through



a series of live, on-line training sessions which were recorded and are now available via DOE's transitions website. Plans are underway for a training series targeted to facilitators who can utilize the modules for local level training.

The learnings from this group will continue to inform the development of materials, training, and technical assistance within the field as well as other initiatives to support elementary schools and community partners to better coordinate and collaborate to align educational systems and streamline these transitions for children and families.

Expanding Public Pre-K

The Children's Cabinet is committed to expanding public Pre-K for 4-year old children in Maine. Public Pre-K for 4-year old children is an important component of a mixed delivery system for early childhood care and education for children from birth through age five. In 2022, efforts by the state led to an all-time high in the number of 4-year-old children enrolled in public Pre-K.

The Governor included \$10 million in her Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan to support the expansion of public Pre-K. This funding provides grants to School Administrative Units (SAUs) for start-up costs to help overcome barriers to expanding or starting up new programs in their schools. In addition, the funding supports SAUs to expand from part-time programming to full day, full week programming. Research shows that full-day/full-week programming has greater benefits for children including higher scores in school readiness, greater school attendance and reduced chronic absences. Full-day/full-week programming results in children having fewer transitions throughout the day and better meets the needs of working parents who are juggling work and care for their children.

Over the last decade, the state greatly expanded the number of schools providing public Pre-K to 4-year-old children. Not surprisingly, enrollment numbers dropped dramatically during the 2020-2021 school year when many schools were operating on a hybrid

schedule with a mix of in-person and virtual school days. In 2021-2022 school year, enrollment in public Pre-K rebounded but remained lower than in previous school years. With the support of the Pre-K expansion grants and other federal funding, the number of Pre-K classrooms expanded in the fall of 2022 with eight SAUs starting new public Pre-K programs and another 13 SAUs expanding their public Pre-K programs to reach more students. Public Pre-K enrollment numbers for Fall 2022 are at an all-time high at 6,238 enrolled students – more than 50% of all 4-year-old children.

In December 2022 and January 2023, DOE announced another 22 SAUs had been awarded grants to build out new programming for the fall of 2023. As contracts are finalized with these SAUs, DOE will have a better sense of how many new 4-year-old children will have access to public Pre-K programs and, in particular, full day, full week programming. Staff hope to see an even greater numbers of 4-year-old children enrolled in public Pre-K in the fall of 2023.

Training School Administrators on Early Childhood Development

In response to the significant growth in the number of Maine elementary schools operating public Pre-K programs over the last decade, Maine's PDG Needs Assessment pointed to the need for more training for elementary administrators on quality care and education for young children. Between 2020-2022, Maine researched, designed, and piloted the Leading Early





Learning series, which is grounded in the National Association for Elementary School Principals six research-based competencies for effective instructional leadership among Pre-K to grade 3 principals. The competencies focus on aligned learning continua, environments, developmentally appropriate teaching, assessment, professional development, and engaging families and communities. The initial pilot in the 2021-2022 school year supported 20 principals from across Maine who engaged in a series of five online, facilitated modules, each of which were coupled with a professional learning community experience. The findings from the pilot evaluation conducted by researchers at the University of Southern Maine documented significant increases in participant:

- knowledge of early childhood development standards and best practices;
- ability to identify resources and key components of high-quality early childhood programming; and
- confidence to employ early childhood leadership practices and actions.

The series is currently running again during the 2022-23 school year with 26 administrators. Additionally, administrators who have completed the series will be invited to participate in an ongoing community of practice (COP) that will enable them to remain connected with each other, share successes, and collaboratively address problems of practice. Promising practices identified through the Leading Early Learning series and subsequent COPs will be shared with institutions of higher education and Maine's State Board of Education to inform requirements for administrators working in early elementary settings.

Aligning Services For Pregnant People And Young Children

Coordinating Across Agencies through Early Intervention Workgroup

The Children's Cabinet Early Intervention Workgroup is comprised of DHHS and DOE staff who provide early intervention services for children birth through five years old. Members of workgroup include staff from the Maternal and Child Health Division at the Maine CDC, the divisions of Children's Behavioral Health and Early Care and Education at the Office of Child and Family Services, the Office of Family Independence, the Early Learning Team at DOE, Child Development Services, Office of MaineCare Services and the DHHS Commissioner's Office.

The Early Intervention Workgroup provides an opportunity for staff managing early intervention policies and programs for young children to coordinate and collaborate efforts to better serve families with young children and ensure that young children receive the necessary screenings, evaluations, and services to support their healthy development. The Early Intervention Workgroup is focused on the implementation of three key initiatives that support its goal of integrating and aligning maternal and early childhood programs and services. The team supports the expansion of developmental screenings through the implementation of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) online as well as the implementation of the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant and Help Me Grow (HMG).

Implementing Help Me Grow

In November 2022, the Office of Child and Family Services officially launched Help Me Grow. HMG is a care coordination model currently used in 28 states that utilizes and builds on existing resources to develop and enhance a comprehensive approach for early childhood programs and services. Help Me Grow promotes the healthy development of children by connecting Maine families to services and resources that help young children grow up healthy and thriving. Help



Me Grow supports families, providers, and communities by implementing four key components:

1. Centralized telephone access point for connection of children and their families to services and care coordination;
2. Community and family outreach to promote the use of HMG and to provide networking opportunities among families and service providers (child care providers, social service and other community providers);
3. Child health provider (medical providers) outreach to support early detection and early intervention; and
4. Data collection and analysis to understand all aspects of the HMG system, including the identification of gaps and barriers (HMG has been collecting evaluation data across states).

The Help Me Grow team includes a program manager, an outreach specialist and three family resource specialists. Throughout the fall of 2022, the Outreach Specialist worked with the HMG Program Manager to raise awareness about the launch of HMG with community programs and providers. Between July and December 2022, HMG staff reached over 1,000 child health, early childhood educators, and community providers through presentations, webinars, and conferences.

The family resource specialists work directly with parents to answer questions about their child’s development and provide referrals to early intervention and health care services, early care and education and nutrition programs and other resources. Between its launch and December 31, 2022, this staff served 70 unique individual children and provided 143 referrals to services and programs. When families contact Help Me Grow, the resource specialists directly connect them to the right services and supports and follow up with the family after the referral to ensure that their child has received the needed services and that the child’s needs are being met. Families can reach out for assistance through the Help Me Grow website or by calling 211 or the Help Me Grow phone number. To avoid duplication of services or confusion for families, OCFS partnered with 211 to serve as an access point for Help Me Grow.

Over the long term, Help Me Grow Maine will also improve the system for child development services by assessing and identifying current gaps, strengthening ongoing collaboration with stakeholders across the state, and conducting data collection and evaluation.

Increasing Developmental Screening Rates

A team from Maine DHHS in partnership with the Cabinet’s Early Intervention Workgroup, has begun implementing the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) online system to improve access to developmental screening for organizations working with children under the age of 5. The system allows programs and families to do developmental (ASQ-3) and social emotional screening (ASQ-SE) using validated tools either online or by paper and then entering the information online so that screening data can be tracked.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends developmental screenings to occur at 9 months, 18 months, and 24 or 30 months. The ASQ toolkit has screenings available from 2 months up to age 5 years old. The ASQ-SE social-emotional screener is the second tool through the online system and has screening tools from 1 month up to age 6 years old.

The purpose of implementing the ASQ on-line system is to improve coordination among professionals, allow for greater access to developmental screenings and support the goal of the Children’s Cabinet to increase rates of developmental screenings. By monitoring developmental milestones and using regular screenings to assess development, parents and health providers can identify any issues early.

Programs participating in the initial pilot of the on-line developmental screenings through ASQ have been provided the tools and training to work with families to complete the screenings. Staff, including all of the staff at Help Me Grow, have been trained on how to use the ASQ on-line and provide appropriate referrals to health care providers and services. The Help Me Grow Maine team serves as a resource for community program staff who may need assistance connecting families to early intervention professionals for further assessments if issues are identified through the screening.

In 2023, efforts to expand ASQ on-line will be further expanded and incorporated into the on-going work of Help Me Grow to ensure improved coordination among professionals and greater access to screenings for families across the state.



Integrating Services through Systems Building

In August 2021, the Maine CDC was awarded a five-year Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant from the US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Maine's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Health Integration P-3 Program will increase statewide access to integrated, effective, culturally-appropriate, evidence-based early intervention practices and services during the prenatal and early childhood period.

As an initial step in the grant award, the team at CDC developed a Systems Assessment and Gap Analysis (SAGA) to inform the expected Strategic Plan for this initiative. The Plan will build off and add to existing plans, in particular the Children's Cabinet Plan.

Through the SAGA, the CDC team identified three key areas of focus that were missing and should be part of the ECCS strategic plan and added to an existing state plan:

1. **Equity:** Address inequities in Maine P-3 system and improving access to and coordination of P-3 services and programs for underserved populations.
2. **Parent Engagement:** Enhance family leadership and parental engagement.
3. **Perinatal Systems of Care:** Build on and strengthen linkages between the state's early childhood system and the health sector, particularly in the areas of perinatal systems of care and early intervention services for children 0-3.

In addition, the CDC team established a new advisory group of stakeholders (the Collaborating Partners Advisory Group) that meets quarterly to provide input on efforts to reach the goals of the ECCS Health Integration P-3 program. This group includes advocates, community partners and providers, parents, and state agency staff. During the regular meetings, this group provides feedback on the integration and coordination of early childhood programs as well as the implementation of Help Me Grow.



The ECCS team is also focused on expanding parent engagement and leadership. In partnership with the Office of Child and Family Services, the team provided funding to Educare Maine to expand its nationally recognized Parent Ambassador program to reach more parents throughout the state. The Parent Ambassador program, which had originally worked with parents whose children were participating in Head Start, expanded its cohorts in the fall of 2022 to include parents who have children enrolled in licensed child care programs and/or Child Development Services.

The ECCS team and other staff involved in the Children’s Cabinet work will continue to identify ways to support parent leadership as well as identify ways for these parent leaders to offer direct feedback on their efforts to strengthen and align Maine’s prenatal through age five system.

Building an Early Childhood Integrated Data System

An Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) collects, integrates, maintains, stores, and reports information from early childhood programs across multiple agencies within a state that serve children and families from birth to age eight.

Maine’s ECIDS will provide state leaders with information to make informed decisions about programs and policies that promote access, quality, and a strong workforce to support all Maine children ages 0-5. The ECIDS will serve as a tool to promote alignment and coordination of the early childhood system through better information sharing and a clearer picture of needs, gaps, and strengths of the system and it will be a resource that provides data-driven insights that can improve short- and long-term outcomes for children and families in Maine.

Maine has made progress in advancing the development of an ECIDS over the last two years. Maine worked with a national technical assistance team to draft and publish an ECIDS Road Map for Maine in October 2021. This road map has guided the work to plan for the implementation of an ECIDS, starting



with the hire of a Project Lead in December 2021 with ARPA Child Care Development Fund discretionary funds.

In 2022, the Project Lead conducted a readiness assessment to map the data landscape for young children in Maine, supported the state to develop a clear purpose and vision for an ECIDS, informed the development of the State Longitudinal Data System at the MDOE in order to identify connections to a future ECIDS, and developed a plan for conducting data matches across early childhood programs to answer key policy questions and inform the development of an integrated data system. Funding from the Preschool Development Grant (Birth through Five) Renewal Grant will support building the infrastructure and capacity needed to implement an ECIDS over the next several years.

Strengthening Maine’s Perinatal Systems of Care

Since 2020, DHHS has led the Perinatal System of Care Working Partners group to work on strengthening the system with partners in health systems, social services, and state agencies. The perinatal system of care is being defined as preconception (3 months prior to pregnancy) to one-year post-partum, after delivering a child, and includes the care of the child from birth to first birthday. Staff from the DHHS Commissioner’s Office and the Maine CDC are working on a strategic

planning process to update the 2020-2022 Perinatal System of Care Working Partners Goals and Strategies as part of the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant (ECCS) Strategic Plan for 2023-26. This effort will include aligning strategies with both the new perinatal funding opportunities and the Children’s Cabinet Plan for Young Children.

Under the leadership of the Perinatal System of Care Working Partners, the state of Maine and several partner organizations have successfully applied for and received a series of competitive grants funds to enhance its work in this area. Maine recently received over \$10 million in federal grants for the next five years to support the expansion of work to strengthen the system of care for pregnant people, new parents and infants.

Maine’s Maternal and Child Health Program at the Maine CDC received a \$5 million grant for five years to work with partners to address risk factors facing birthing people before and during pregnancy and after birth that can cause pregnancy loss and death in pregnant people. In partnership with the Perinatal Quality Collaborative for Maine (PQC4ME), the Maine CDC will:

1. support Maine’s 24 birthing hospitals in implementing the Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health (AIM) Safety Bundles, a maternal quality improvement safety program designed to address high risk issues in pregnant patients and provide a standardized approach for providers to offer integrated patient-centered screenings, education, and monitoring to improve care for pregnant people;
2. provide resources to enhance the collection, analysis, and review of data related to deaths and serious health issues associated with pregnancy and birth to improve health outcomes for pregnant people and infants across the state; and
3. deliver funding to upgrade fetal death records submission, and upgrades to maternal and infant death record collection.

The Maine Medical Association also received more than \$1.6 million in funding, from two separate federal grants, to work with partners to increase capacity to make improvements in care statewide through the Perinatal Quality Collaborative for ME (PQC4ME), including expanding the implementation of the AIM Severe Hypertension in Pregnancy Safety Bundle to all Maine’s birthing hospitals. This work will advance health equity in the diagnosis and management of hypertension during pregnancy, and expand Maine’s capacity to review maternal deaths, as part of the existing Maternal Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Panel (MFIMR) at the Maine CDC.

MaineHealth received a \$4 million grant from HRSA over the next four years to improve access to and continuity of care for pregnant people and new parents in rural Maine with a focus on strengthening the state telehealth infrastructure for rural hospitals who need to access obstetrics consultation through the Rural Maternity and Obstetrics Management Strategies Program (RMOMS).

Staff involved in the Children’s Cabinet and the ECCS grant will work to align the perinatal systems of care initiatives with other early childhood initiatives to ensure that services and supports for parents and children are seamless and streamlined to the greatest extent possible.



Looking forward to 2023: Maine awarded a Three-year Preschool Development Grant

In December 2022, the Office of Child and Family Services, in partnership with the Early Learning Team and Child Development Services at DOE, was awarded a Preschool Development (B-5) Renewal Grant. The grant award is \$8 million per year for three years. The grant will support Maine's ability to build needed infrastructure and capacity to create a more coordinated, efficient, and high-quality mixed delivery system for children ages birth to five and their families, targeting key needs surfaced in the initial PDG needs assessment. The plan for the grant builds upon the successful cross agency work of the Children's Cabinet to ensure that all children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.

In the first year of the grant, the state plans to implement several initiatives to strengthen programming within Maine's early childhood system including:

- Enhancing the Help Me Grow System to increase access to critical resources for underserved children, including New Mainer families with young children;
- Studying opportunities for public pre-K expansion through pilot projects to test new designs that will increase access to public Pre-K through community partnership models;
- Supporting improvements and aligning quality in all of Maine's child care assistance programs;
- Piloting and field testing a kindergarten inventory to support kindergarten teachers to understand the needs of incoming kindergarten students and measure kindergarten readiness;
- Piloting First 10 Schools and Communities in six School Administrative Units to increase collaboration and coordination between local early childhood education systems and public elementary schools to strengthen instruction, learning and transitions across these systems for children and families and to improve connection to resources and supports for families with young children; and
- Funding to support the infrastructure and capacity for the full implementation of an Early Childhood Integrated Data System.

The PDG grant will support the state agencies involved in the Children's Cabinet to build upon their efforts over the last several years and expand capacity to implement new initiatives to reach its goals. Staff will continue to work to ensure coordination across the entire early childhood system with an added focus on improving coordination and transitions into the early elementary years at public schools.



STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS INTO ADULTHOOD

Staff from several state agencies support the Children’s Cabinet to reach its goal of ensuring that all Maine youth enter adulthood healthy, connected to the workforce and/or education. This team includes: DHHS staff from the Office of Child and Family Services, the Maine CDC, MaineCare Services, and the Commissioner’s Office; DOE staff from the Office of Student and School Supports, Workforce Development and Innovative Pathways, the Commissioner’s Office and the Maine School Safety Center; Department of Corrections staff from the Office of Juvenile Services; Department of Labor staff from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Bureau of Employment Services; staff from the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future.

This team has focused its efforts on expanding access to resources and services, including mental and behavioral health services and prevention programs that provide opportunities for youth to build positive relationships, leadership skills and make other connections that support their positive growth and development.



Increasing Access to Evidence-based Behavioral Health Services

The Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services, Children’s Behavioral Health Services division, in partnership with MaineCare Services, focuses on behavioral health treatment and services children from birth up to their 21st birthday. It has led the state’s efforts to reach the goal of expanding evidence-based behavioral health services for youth, including substance use disorder services and treatment, at the community level.

Expanding Evidence-based Treatment for Youth

OCFS has focused significant resources on providing training and certification opportunities for clinicians to become nationally certified in evidence-based treatment models. Expanding the capacity of clinicians in the field to provide evidence-based services to children and families supports the state’s goal of providing effective mental health and behavioral health services in the community to avoid the need for a higher level of care.

In 2021 and 2022, OCFS provided no-cost training with materials for eligible clinicians to become certified in several evidence-based treatment models, including Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), Triple P- Positive Parenting Program (including all four versions of Triple P), Research Units in Behavioral Intervention (RUBI), MATCH-ADTC (Modular Approach to Therapy for Children with Anxiety and Depression, Trauma, or Conduct Problems), and A-CRA (Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach). OCFS also provided clinicians with payment for the time spent in training in order to maximize participation and minimize the overall impact of engaging in the training. At the end of 2022, hundreds of clinicians statewide had participated in these training opportunities and new cohorts are planned for 2023.

In addition to efforts to support providers in becoming accredited/nationally certified, OCFS has partnered with MaineCare to provide reimbursement for several evidence-based services and treatment modalities in order to improve outcomes for children and families. In some cases, MaineCare is also providing an enhanced MaineCare rate for services delivered by a clinician who is certified in the evidence-based models.

No Cost Trainings to Certify Eligible Clinicians in Evidence-Based Models

- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
- Triple P - Positive Parenting Program (including all four versions of Triple P)
- Research Units in Behavioral Intervention (RUBI)
- MATCH-ADTC (Modular Approach to Therapy for Children with Anxiety and Depression, Trauma, or Conduct Problems)
- A-CRA (Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach)

Evidence-Based Models Added to the MaineCare Benefits Manual

- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
- Multisystemic Therapy (MST)
- Multisystemic Therapy for Problem Sexual Behavior (MST-PSB)
- Functional Family Therapy (FFT)
- Positive Parenting Program (Triple P)
- Incredible Years Parenting Program (IY)
- Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)

Implementing Crisis After Care Services

OCFS has been operating a pilot program of Crisis After Care services for youth and their families to assist in the transition home from the emergency department, psychiatric hospitalization, crisis stabilization, and residential treatment. The goal of the pilot was to decrease the number and length of youth's stays in these out-of-home settings. This pilot was initially launched in Aroostook County in 2020. With the support of federal funds, OCFS was able to expand Crisis After Care services for youth and their families statewide beginning on July 1, 2021. The program provides aftercare and stabilization services for both youth and their family members following a crisis, including after discharge from emergency departments, psychiatric hospitals, crisis stabilization, and/or residential treatment. The aftercare services provided to families includes clinical treatment, teaching coping skills, helping with family conflict resolution, offering crisis response services, and teaching de-escalation techniques to the entire family.

The program was expanded through the end of State Fiscal Year 2023 to align with implementation of strategies identified in a year long crisis planning grant that the state received from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which ran from September 30, 2021 through September 29, 2022. The grant provided support to organize efforts to develop a comprehensive community-based mobile crisis intervention service for Mainers experiencing a mental health or substance use disorder crisis. The policy recommendations that resulted from this work will bring Maine's crisis system in line with federal best practices and allow Maine to receive a higher Medicaid match for its crisis services, including the rate study currently in process. The rate will include the model of aftercare services implemented under the pilot.

This service has been integral in keeping youth stabilized in their homes, enrolled in community-based services and out of in-patient and residential care. State-

wide data indicates that 246 families were served by Crisis After Care services for an average of 25 days. Of the families served, 79% of the youth did not go to the ER for crisis once the provider's After Care team became involved; and 73% of youth served by the pilot were able to be safely maintained at home, rather than in an Emergency Department setting, until they were placed in either crisis stabilization units, inpatient psychiatric hospitals, or residential care. This data indicates that with the support of this service, families were able to leave the Emergency Department with a clear treatment plan in place.

Strengthening Substance Use Treatment and Services

Over the last several years, Children's Behavioral Health Services has coordinated with staff across state agencies and from key organizations such as the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics to expand treatment and services for youth with substance use disorders. For example, OCFS staff is partnering with the Maine AAP to maintain a list of treatment providers and supportive services, as well as seeking to expand knowledge among primary care physicians regarding the screening, assessment, and treatment of youth substance use disorder.

In 2022, OCFS supported the expansion of services and resources across the state to meet the needs of youth with substance use disorder through the following ways:

- Developing Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach (A-CRA) training, an evidence-based developmentally appropriate treatment for youth with substance use disorder and co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders, for Children's Residential Care Facility clinicians and supervisors;
- Offering trainings to health care providers through webinars and Project ECHO, which includes bolstering the skills to appropriately identify and treat SUD within adolescent populations, including specialty populations of adolescent girls and LGBTQ+ populations; building competencies in delivering Medications for Opioid Use Disorder

care to adolescents; and expanding the understanding of harm reduction practices in the adolescent population;

- Offering ongoing education to primary care providers across the State through Treatment Recovery Education Advocacy for Teens with Substance Use Disorder in Maine (TreatME) to increase the network of access to treatment for youth seeking help for their substance use;
- Partnering with MaineCDC on the Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral for Treatment (SBIRT) project; and
- Leading several internal and external workgroups to build relationships to further strengthen the effort to support youth with SUD in access to treatment and expanding the availability of evidence-based treatment modalities.

In addition to the above activities, OCFS hired a second Youth SUD specialist to manage SUD related contracts and to continue involvement in integrating evidence-based treatments and best practices into MaineCare policy, including focusing on improvements to the crisis system (given the intersection between crisis services for youth and youth SUD).



Increasing Prevention Services And Programming In Schools And Communities

Implementing Free and Accessible Social Emotional Learning

Education and Prevention Research over the past two decades has consistently demonstrated the important and significant positive impacts of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as a primary prevention in schools and communities. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines Social Emotional Learning as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.”²² SEL interventions support and improve a student’s academic success, classroom behavior, ability to manage emotions and stress and, importantly, attitudes about themselves and others.

In 2019, the DOE-led state SEL team (consisting of experts, stakeholders from the field, DOE and DHHS members), with funding from both the Fund for Healthy Maine and the Federal CARES Act, purchased a comprehensive Pre-K through grade 12 SEL curriculum. The SEL4ME curriculum is CASEL aligned and



trauma informed and has been customized by Maine experts to meet the diverse needs of our student population across the state. SEL4ME is classroom based with free online access to any educator or school staff with modules designed to be easily embedded into everyday academics and adapted to supplement remote learning. Additionally, SEL4ME may be accessed by families, caregivers, home-schooled entities, community-based organizations, and others who work directly with youth in Maine. SEL4ME provides school district and community programs across the state with equal access to resources to support the development of social-emotional competences and the creation of safe and supportive schools, where all students know with certainty that they are safe, respected, valued and represented regardless of race, sexual orientation, or gender.

With over 500 on-line modules, SEL4ME provides districts with the most recent and up-to-date SEL materials available and can supplement other SEL resources, including school counseling or Second Step programs. SEL4ME also supports social emotional learning standards in Health/Wellness, physical education (PE), and Pre-K.

Since the launch of SEL4ME, more than 14,600 individuals from 77 schools have used SEL4ME, logging in almost 115,000 times. In 2022, the DOE team added new mental health modules to SEL4ME and expanded their efforts to support educators to incorporate SEL into everyday curriculums and extra-curricular activities. New staff at DOE has allowed for the establishment of a new community of practice forum for educators to learn/share best SEL implementation practices. Working collaboratively with state departments and community partners, DOE staff initiated a series of professional trainings and presented on SEL in over 25 educational conferences and summits.

Expanding School Based Health Centers

The Department of Education allocated American Rescue Plan ESSER grant funding to middle and high schools to expand the number and scope of Maine’s School Based Health Centers. A team of staff from



the Commissioner's Office at DOE, the Maine CDC's Adolescent Health and Injury Prevention Program at DHHS and the Children's Cabinet conducted a series of informational sessions about the new funding opportunity in the spring of 2022.

The funding allowed for the start-up of new School Based Health Centers at four high schools. In addition, existing School Based Health Center sites at seven high schools and two middle schools received enhanced funding to improve operations, expand outreach and coordination of services to increase enrollment of students, and strengthen and expand their oral health services.

As of the fall of 2022, Maine now has 10 sponsor organizations and 20 School Based Health Center sites across the state. These School Based Health Centers share a commitment and collaboration between a school, community, and health care organization(s). SBHCs support students' health, well-being, and academic success by providing integrated medical, behavioral health and prevention services aimed at improving health equity. Services are student focused

and offered to all eligible students regardless of insurance status or ability to pay.

In 2023, the SBHC team will continue to work with middle schools and high schools and health care providers across the state to identify opportunities to expand the number of SBHCs in the state.

Expanding Community Schools

In 2022, the Office of School and Student Supports at DOE provided grant funding and technical assistance to four School Administrative Units to support them to become community schools. The purpose of community schools is to meet the needs of students and families by leveraging local and state resources and creating partnerships with community-based organizations to coordinate and integrate education, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services. These four SAUs implemented programming to connect students and families to comprehensive services within the school and community. These services included increased mental health supports, access to legal services, after school academic and enrichment support, increased support to address food



insecurity and expanded dental services. Two schools hired new Community School Coordinators who are responsible for making connections for the school and families to community-based organizations and linking families to needed services and resources.

In 2023, the team at the Office of School and Student Supports will work with staff across state agencies and with external stakeholders to continue to identify opportunities for expanding community schools, including applying for federal grants to support programming in more rural parts of the state.

Expanding Work-Based Learning

The Governor's Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan (MJRP) includes \$25 million in funding for building out career exploration programming for Maine youth. Over the next two years, the Maine Career Exploration Program is expected to serve approximately 6000 young people through programming in over 100 high schools and several community-based organizations. Staff from across a variety of state agencies, including the Departments of Economic and Community Development, Education, Labor and the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future are working closely together to coordinate this expansion of programming to support young people to gain a better understanding of career opportunities, build foundational skills and make connections to employers through work-based learning.

With MJRP funding, Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG), a statewide non-profit working in 93 Maine high schools, has implemented the Maine Career Exploration Badge Program for high school juniors and seniors. The program connects students to a 40-hour paid work experience to receive hands on employer engagement experiences. This experience is coupled with on-line modules and direct support from JMG specialists to help students to learn about career opportunities, set goals, document and reflect upon their employment experiences, and develop plans for their futures.

The Department of Education awarded grants to 23 high schools/CTEs and three community-based organizations in 13 counties to implement or expand Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) programming for youth. ELOs are hands-on, credit-bearing experiences outside of the traditional classroom with an emphasis on community-based career exploration. These grants are focused specifically on connecting juniors and seniors to meaningful paid work experiences through ELO programming. Other components of these ELO programs also include the development of work skills and exposure to careers and career opportunities through job shadowing, career fairs, informational interviews, mentorships and other similar programming. This funding has dramatically expanded the network of ELO professionals across the state and is supporting the creation of hundreds of new workforce partnerships. In the end, it will help thousands of students build meaningful connections with employers.

The Children's Cabinet awarded grants to five community-based organizations to provide career exploration programming to historically disadvantaged youth aged 16 to 24 years old, including youth with disabilities, connected to the juvenile justice system, experiencing homelessness, transitioning in or out of the foster care system, with low-income, of color and from indigenous communities. All of these programs are recruiting youth in their communities to participate in job readiness programming, connecting youth to mean-

ingful paid work experiences and ensuring youth have services and supports needed to overcome barriers to employment.

The MJRP also includes funding for the Department of Labor to expand pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programming. Over the next two years, DOL expects to connect 2,000 young people aged 16 to 24 to pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. High-quality pre-apprenticeship programs provide foundational job and soft-skill training necessary to bridge trainees to successful employment as apprentices. Pre-apprenticeship programs are delivered by a variety of partners, including high schools, adult education providers, community colleges, labor organizations or a community-based organizations. Apprenticeship is a workforce training model that combines on-the-job learning and formal classroom or online instruction to help a worker or young person gain the knowledge, skills and competencies needed for career success.

The pre-apprenticeship program is specifically targeting youth between the ages of 16 to 24 at Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools, high schools, and out-of-school youth in need of a connection to gainful employment leading to financial stability and professional success. For example, the program is funding a new pre-apprenticeship program at Lewiston and Portland Adult Education, which includes a partnership with Northern Light to train up to 120 pre-apprentices in medical office staff and medical assisting. It is also assisting high schools and CTE programs to expand and create new pre-apprenticeship programs. Funding has supported the Foster CTE, Somerset CTE and Gorham Schools to expand existing and establish new EMT and CNA pre-apprenticeship programs for young people.





CONCLUSION

The Children's Cabinet will continue to focus on ways to strengthen programs and policies for children and youth by continuing and increasing collaboration and coordination across agencies and the engagement of parents, youth, and key stakeholders. The Children's Cabinet plans and initiatives in 2023 will build off the learnings and the successes of their work in previous years.

CHILDREN'S CABINET PLAN FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Goal: All Maine Children Enter Kindergarten Prepared to Succeed

The Children's Cabinet will implement key strategies to promote the healthy development of all young children in Maine and ensure that all children grow up in healthy, safe and supportive environments. The Cabinet will strive to engage the voice of parents and caregivers in a culturally and linguistically accessible way as we further develop and implement our strategies.

Areas of Focus

The Children's Cabinet will implement strategies that will:

1. Increase access to affordable early care & education, preventive and early intervention services for young children and their families.
2. Raise the quality of our early care and education system and support families to access quality programming.
3. Recruit, prepare and retain a diverse early childhood workforce.

Short term strategies: 2023

- Provide infrastructure grants to existing or new child care programs to create new slots, particularly in underserved areas.
- Continue to offer weekly stipends of \$100 to infant caregivers receiving CCSP to recognize the high cost of providing infant care and increase the quality bump to child care programs on the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) serving infants and toddlers.
- Provide scholarships to help students with low and moderate income attain associate and bachelor's degrees in early childhood education.



- Implement the early childhood mental health consultation statewide to help parents and educators support the social and emotional development of young children, particularly children with special needs. (updated)
- Implement a tiered child care salary supplement program to increase wages for early childhood educators and recognize experience. (updated)
- Continue strengthening the Perinatal System of Care infrastructure (preconception to 1 year post-partum) including family leadership, parental engagement, and diverse representation. (new)

Intermediate strategies: 2023 – 2025

- Provide grants to child care programs to improve quality and rating on the QRIS. (updated)
- Expand professional learning opportunities that support inclusive and trauma informed practices in early care and education settings.
- Offer a professional learning series on early childhood education to school administrators, particularly for those with ECE programs.
- Fund start-up infrastructure grants to expand the number public pre-K slots for 4 year olds.
- Provide grant funding to support new public pre-K partnerships between schools and community partners to overcome barriers to expanding public pre-K in certain communities.
- Align quality programming across state child care assistance programs. (new)
- Implement key models such as First 10 Schools and Communities and First4ME to provide professional development, tools and supports to improve and strengthen coordination and alignment across the birth through early elementary years in communities to ensure smooth transitions into kindergarten for children and families, quality care and education for young children, and greater access to needed resources for families. (new)
- Build a robust Help Me Grow program to provide a comprehensive, statewide, coordinated system of early identification, referral, and follow-up for children from prenatal care up to 8 years and their families. (updated and consolidated)

- Develop and conduct a field test of a valid and reliable Kindergarten Entry Inventory to help educators and policymakers assess children’s progress along developmental progressions to inform instruction in the kindergarten year and policy-making. (new)

Long-term strategies: 2023 – 2027

- Maintain access to high quality perinatal care in Maine by expanding post-partum coverage to 12 months for pregnant people, building linkages between early intervention and medical systems to better serve diverse and underserved populations, and improving the connection to perinatal consultation by expanding the obstetric telehealth network to all birthing hospitals. (new)
- Support perinatal health by assessing the current capacity of the perinatal workforce in Maine, improving perinatal training and education opportunities for students and current providers, and exploring the use of community healthcare workers to support maternal and child health. (new)
- Ensure access to high-quality perinatal care, including behavioral health, for all pregnant women, pregnant people, and infants in Maine at the appropriate Level of Care (LOC) by improving data collection and case reviews to inform quality improvement and policy and encouraging all birth hospitals to participate in the Perinatal Quality Collaborative for Maine and implement perinatal patient safety bundles. (new)
- Increase access to, expand and strengthen early childhood programming at Career and Technical schools.
- Develop clear opportunities and pathways for individuals interested in entering the field of early care and education to support them to access ECE training and education. (new)
- Increase professional development and coaching opportunities for early childhood educators in center-based, family child care programs and the early elementary years in public schools. (updated)
- Establish an Early Childhood Integrated Data System to track progress on early childhood goals and to analyze impact of policy decisions.

CHILDREN'S CABINET PLAN FOR YOUTH

Goal: All Maine Youth Enter Adulthood Healthy, Connected to the Workforce and/or Education

The Children's Cabinet's strategies will promote inclusion and equity and consider the cultural, social, economic and linguistic needs of Maine's diverse population of youth aged 14 to 24 and their families.

Areas of Focus:

The Children's Cabinet will implement strategies that will:

1. Ensure basic needs of youth and their families are met.
2. Increase prevention services and programming in schools and at the community level.
3. Increase access to needed behavioral health, including substance use disorder, screenings and treatment.

Strategies:

Short term strategies: 2023

- Strengthen children's crisis services to keep youth with their families.
- Increase trainings in evidence based practices to behavioral health providers.
- Disseminate a universally accessible and free Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum for all schools & after school programs.
- Support school-based health centers to provide additional hours for mental and behavioral health services to students.
- Fund Maine Youth Action Network to provide restorative practices support, education & technical assistance in schools.
- Increase training and technical assistance for behavioral health organizations on effective screening and identification of suicide prevention for youth living with a substance use disorder.
- Improve and align behavioral health screenings across state agencies to ensure early identification and referral to services.





Intermediate strategies: 2023 - 2025

- Increase access for youth to evidence-based behavioral health services, including prevention and early intervention.
- Increase access to youth substance use disorder treatment in primary care practices and school-based health centers.
- Establish a training program for school support staff members to recognize and mitigate the impact of trauma.
- Align and increase the incorporation of restorative practices and restorative justice across state programs for youth.
- Increase programming to support pregnant and parenting teens.
- Provide more opportunities for youth to participate in meaningful paid work experience.
- Increase awareness of careers, career pathways and access points to post-secondary education and training programs.

Long-term strategies: 2023 - 2027

- Expand housing options across the continuum of care and entire state.
- Ensure eligible youth and young adults are participating in public programs to increase food security and health coverage.
- Strengthen continuum of children's crisis services.
- Ensure successful and smooth transitions for youth moving from children to adult service systems.
- Ensure systems involved youth can access the services that they need in their communities.



Endnotes

- 1 The State of Maine Needs Assessment: Vulnerable Children Birth to Age 5 and Their Families, RMC Research, October 2020, <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/earlychildhood/prekexpansiongrant>
- 2 <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>



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