

THE ABCs OF PRENATAL-TO-THREE FOR COUNTY OFFICIALS

The daily decisions that counties make not only shape community conditions but often set a trajectory for success for their youngest residents. When infants are born healthy into safe and nurturing environments with parents who are well-supported, a whole community can benefit from improved social, economic and health outcomes.

County officials play a key role in helping young children to grow, learn and thrive - often advocating on their behalf to prioritize and promote the programs and policies necessary to support healthy development. Whether your county is just starting out or looking to expand upon existing efforts, this resource, *"The ABC's of Prenatal-to-Three,"* offers policymakers a range of ideas for prioritizing investments that set young children on a path to success.

While there is no set process for advancing a prenatal-to three agenda, the National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACoRF) has learned from counties across the nation about some helpful ways to get started. No matter where you are in your journey, NACoRF can support you by providing relevant early childhood resources and connecting you to best practices and local leaders who have made meaningful strides in their community.

QUESTIONS FOR COUNTY LEADERS TO CONSIDER

- **Is there strong leadership for infants and toddlers in your county?** One way county boards can demonstrate bi-partisan community support for their youngest residents is through a public statement of support.
- **Does your county have an active early childhood stakeholder group?** Connecting to or convening a diverse stakeholder team can build broad-based community support and cultivate champions for young children. Counties may establish a new or identify an existing group that is committed to shared vision and developing a strategic plan of action for children from prenatal to age three. To further support their cross-sector stakeholder group, counties may explore opportunities for establishing a dedicated early childhood system coordinator to strategically drive initiatives in the community.

- **Does your county have a shared vision for improving school readiness that includes infants and toddlers?** Oftentimes, planning for kindergarten readiness begins at preschool, rather than prenatally or at birth. County leaders can work with their early childhood stakeholder group to develop a shared vision and help to support the full continuum of a child's development by facilitating the integration of prenatal to three stakeholders and priorities within broader conversations around school readiness.



To share your successes and challenges and connect with peer counties across the United States in quarterly rural, suburban and urban Peer Learning Network webinars, or for access to supplemental resources, please visit www.countiesforkids.org or email info@countiesforkids.org.

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Local leaders should collaborate with parents to identify the core services needed within their communities. The following questions can serve as a guide for counties who are looking to identify areas in which they can take action.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

- **Are early childhood services well-coordinated (such as developmental screenings and referrals across providers)?** Counties can support streamlined processes that help parents navigate complex service delivery systems, promote community collaboration, reduce service duplication and prioritize the needs and preferences of families. If there is no existing system already in place, counties can explore universal models, such as Help Me Grow and Family Connects.
- **Are parents economically stable and self-sufficient?** Counties can support families in achieving self-sufficiency and economic and social mobility by advocating for targeted investments like affordable housing, vocational training, child care subsidies, paid leave and on-site child care to help to keep parents in the workforce and out of poverty.

PROVIDING ACCESS TO QUALITY CARE & LEARNING

- **Does your county have enough affordable, quality child care?** By creating an inventory of your local supply and demand and developing plans to bridge gaps, counties can help grow the availability of options for affordable, quality child care and learning environments to meet the needs of all families residing in the community.

ENSURING A HEALTHY BEGINNING

- **Does your county provide or promote services for healthy births?** A healthy start begins before birth and counties can engage families in early, comprehensive prenatal and postnatal care to help to reduce maternal depression, domestic violence, exposure to substances, low birth weight and infant mortality. County leaders can build a relationship with county hospitals, managed care organizations and health care providers to increase access to high-quality pre- and post-natal care.
- **Does every mother and infant have access to screenings, referrals, and follow up services?** Counties can help to improve health outcomes and ensure milestones are being met by expanding access to timely, routine screenings and preventative care.

SYSTEM BUILDING

- **Does your county have access to early childhood data?** County officials can support policies and practices that improve coordination and regular collection and use of data across government, schools and non-profit organizations.
- **Does your county maximize early childhood funding and opportunities to support families with young children through other funding streams?** County elected officials can play a key role by leveraging local funding streams and exercising their influence to educate state and local decision makers about the need for state and federal funding promoting early childhood development.

While the pace of any community change is typically slow and may involve some setbacks, counties should remain diligent and focused on their bold vision for infants, toddlers and families. By working collectively with parents and community leaders, counties can build the necessary public will to create sustainable investments leading to healthier children and families and thriving communities.

To share and learn best practices and connect with peer counties across the United States, join NACoRF's quarterly rural, suburban and urban Peer Learning Network webinars and/or access NACoRF's free resources at www.countiesforkids.org or email info@countiesforkids.org.

About the National Association of Counties Research Foundation:

The National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACoRF) is a non-profit organization recognized by the U.S. Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service as a 501c3 public charity providing education, technical assistance and research to counties. NACoRF's mission is to ascertain, develop and distribute knowledge about county governments and training of public officials, prospective public officials, and other interested parties.