



## Children and Families



Health, human service, and early care & education programs form a critical safety net for Ohioans: supporting a healthy workforce and making it possible for working families to stay on their feet in tough times.

This fact sheet focuses on services for **children**, the impact these services are having, and how they will continue saving Ohio taxpayers money while providing high-quality services to our state's most vulnerable. **Reliable, affordable child care is a must for families, reducing tardiness and absenteeism. Advances in brain science tell us that investing in a child during the first five years of life – the period when 85% of a child's brain development takes place – delivers long-term results.**

### Child Protective Services

**What works:** Ohio's child welfare system has much to be proud of, with a 42% safe reduction in the number of children in foster care since 2002 – the greatest percentage reduction of any state in the country. Besides letting more children grow up in stable families, this reduction has allowed for the reinvestment of millions of federal, state, and local tax dollars in strengthening birth and kin families.

**Improving on what works:** To continue being a national leader, the child protective services system needs flexible child welfare funding; expansion of differential response, which saves children from increased trauma and conserves precious public dollars; improved family and youth engagement with community-based services; support of kinship and foster families for children in need of alternative placement; and improved permanency outcomes for lingering foster youth.

### Substitute Services

**What works:** Approximately 200 community agencies provide care and support services to Ohio's children in foster care. These services include varying levels of foster care, group home care, residential treatment, independent living, adoption services, special education, and behavioral health care. Many agencies are nationally accredited, use evidence-based practices, and raise private funds for these crucial programs amidst shrinking governmental financial support and near record-level low interest earnings from private endowments. These endowments, for the agencies that have them, have been built over many years – some for more than a hundred years.

**Improving on what works:** Increasingly, agencies use outcome measurement tools to assess their programs' performance and to provide them with an objective basis for clinical and financial decision making. Ohio agencies are national leaders in employing new evidence-based practices to serve children with mental health or behavioral challenges. This strengthens public confidence in the benefit of social services and the investment made in them, and improves the overall quality of services for children and families.

## Early Care & Education

**What works:** 271,000 children received care, education, and developmental support through subsidized child care, public preschool, Help Me Grow, or early childhood special education and mental health services. The quality of Ohio's child care programs continues to improve through Step Up to Quality, a rating system that supports 1,053 child care providers through technical assistance and grants, and informs parents as they make child care decisions. In 2010, the Ohio Department of Health launched a revised Help Me Grow program for at-risk families to ensure that Ohio's home-visiting program design utilizes research-based practices, maximizes child and family outcomes, and is standardized across all counties. As a result of early childhood mental health consultations, 88% of children at risk of removal from their parents' choice of child care settings were able to remain – benefiting not only the child, in terms of stability, but also the family and provider, as they are able to maintain work schedules and avoid enrollment turnover.

**Improving on what works:** The return on investment for high-quality early childhood education can be as high as \$7 to \$17 for every \$1 invested. Ohio has laid the groundwork to move away from a fragmented system of early education programs with different standards, regulations, and outcomes to a unified delivery system. Recommendations are in place to build on Ohio's market-driven system by applying research-based standards across public, private, and home-based early education settings. Such standards would advance early childhood goals while creating a more seamless delivery system for parents and providers. Additionally, Ohio's Race to the Top grant includes funding for the creation of an Early Childhood Data System that would provide the opportunity for increased accountability, outcome measurement, and continuous improvement. Finally, Ohio should position its home-visiting program to leverage new federal funding available to states.

During these lean economic times, Ohio faces the challenge of serving the dramatically rising number of people in need at the same time that the state's resources are decreasing. To meet this challenge, human service advocates have implemented more streamlined, efficient, and cost-effective methods of service delivery — but more remains to be done in some areas.

Advocates for Ohio's Future believes that communities are stronger and more economically viable when people's basic needs are met. As Ohioans move from vulnerability to self-sufficiency, they are ready and able to make a contribution in return.

If we fail to invest in children and other supportive services for Ohio's workforce, our state will be poorly positioned for when prosperity returns. Advocates for Ohio's Future supports vital public services that advance the long-term health of our families and communities. A budget solution should maintain these critical services at a level that meets people's needs. **To learn more and to help build strong communities and better lives through vital public services, visit:**

[www.advocatesforohio.org](http://www.advocatesforohio.org)

*Advocates for Ohio's Future is a statewide coalition that works to maintain vital public services – health, human services, and early care & education – at a level that meets people's basic needs and protects our state's most vulnerable populations.*

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Look for other fact sheets on:

- Seniors and People with Disabilities
- The Safety Net: Food and Shelter
- Health Care

