



## Ensuring the Best Start for Connecticut's Children: Policy Opportunities\*

Ensuring a strong beginning in the early years for all of Connecticut's children must be a priority if our state is to realize every child's full potential to contribute to our shared economic and social vitality.

The most significant early experience is an infant's secure attachment to his or her parent or caregiver, which has implications for every phase of a child's development. Opportunities exist for policymakers to promote strategies, enact policies and support investments that maximize the possibility that children have this essential early foundation in life through their bond with a consistent, nurturing caregiver.

These policy opportunities emerged from a summit of early childhood experts and leaders and by an exploration of examples from other states and communities.

In November 2015, the CT Early Childhood Funders Collaborative (ECFC) sponsored the *Starting Early/Starting Now* Summit in partnership with CHDI and The Connecticut Mirror. ECFC comprises 14 funders seeking to build and sustain a comprehensive early childhood system. These policy opportunities represent the work of CHDI and do not necessarily reflect the views of the members of ECFC.

**1 Paid family leave for all Connecticut workers will support healthy brain development.**  
Parental leave results in better prenatal and postnatal care and strengthens parental bonds with their children.

**2 Universal home visiting for all families of newborns in Connecticut matched to the needs of each family will help build strong families.**

Quality home visiting during pregnancy and in the first years of life improves maternal and child health, promotes child development and positive parenting, increases school readiness, and prevents child abuse.

**3 Supports for breastfeeding promote positive mother-child bonds.**

Breastfeeding contributes to children's healthy brain development through its role in the formation of nurturing relationships between a mother and infant.

**4 Quality infant care helps young children weave together strong cognitive, social and physical development skills.**

As more infants and young children spend significant time being cared for by individuals other than their parents, child care providers play a key role in providing the nurturing, trusting relationship children need to develop and learn.

**5 An early childhood workforce trained in infant mental health and attachment theory can promote social-emotional development and address problems early.**

A highly skilled early childhood workforce trained in infant mental health competencies ensures understanding of early childhood development and best practices for establishing nurturing, secure relationships and supports the mental health and positive development of children.

**6 Financial policies that dedicate early childhood funding for prevention have long term collective benefits.**

Investments in effective prevention and early intervention programs, especially those focused on parenting, are cost effective, mitigating future health, mental health, and child welfare expenditures.

**7 Enhancing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to support families with infants will mitigate the stressors that disrupt healthy child development.**

TANF policies can strongly support the poorest families with young children by enhancing certain benefits and services that would allow parents time and the financial flexibility to bond with their newborns and build healthy brain development.

**8 Aligning child welfare and mental health policies with the science of child development will promote appropriate interventions and support family well-being.**

Parents in high-risk situations need support to enable them to help their child's successful development. When not possible, policies must be in place to have the child removed to a stable, nurturing environment. Appropriate mental health services need to be readily available for parents and infants to assure early identification and treatment to help mitigate negative effects and promote healthy development.