



2025

Early Childhood Iowa Annual Report

January 2026



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The Evolution of Data-Informed Decision-Making to Strengthen Coordinated Services

Early Childhood Iowa was legislated to prioritize strengthening a coordinated service delivery system that promotes the vision that “every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.” Guided by results-based accountability, investments in early childhood continue to grow with evidence-based services, such as family support home visitation and improving access to quality early learning environments. The ECI initiative was informed by decades of research about the foundational importance of early brain development and multiple influences surrounding a child that impact positive outcomes. The work of ECI promotes positive early childhood experiences aligned with five result areas: healthy children, safe and supportive communities, secure and nurturing families, secure and nurturing early learning environments and children ready to succeed in school.



To strengthen ECI’s ability to inform a coordinated, evidence-based service delivery system, ECI has been building a data infrastructure since 2016. This infrastructure supports integrated, cross-systems analysis and monitoring of our efforts. Iowa’s Integrated Data System for Decision-Making (I2D2) brought together data from relevant state agencies. Integrated data securely links information help decision makers understand strengths and gaps in our service system. This system provides the opportunity to identify needs across Iowa, monitor key developmental outcomes and evaluate the impact of our investments in service coordination and quality improvement. Through routine statewide needs assessments and strategic planning efforts using I2D2, ECI regularly identifies targeted priority areas to strengthen our systems approach.



In 2019, these data-driven priorities were translated into five strategic planning goals that drive decision-making toward program quality improvement, building sustainable infrastructure supports to benefit the whole system and providing tools for local areas to invest in specific services that best address families’ needs in their areas.

Strategic Plan Goals

Early Childhood Iowa's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan – We Are ECI – focuses on strengthening and integrating the early childhood system so young children and their families receive high-quality, well-coordinated support. Overall, the ECI Strategic Plan emphasizes system-building, ensuring that all parts of the early childhood system interact to increase comprehensive services for families with a statewide approach. Continuous quality improvements across early care, education, health and family support are key system components. Funding and partnerships are aligned with these five strategic plan goals and the legislated results areas to strengthen the early childhood system and improve outcomes for children and families.



Goal 1: Safe and Supportive Communities

Promote a coordinated infrastructure to advance the early childhood system.



Goal 2: Secure and Nurturing Families

Build public will for investing in young children and families.



Goal 3: Secure and Nurturing Early Learning Environments

Transform the early childhood workforce through formal education, improved professionalization, increased skills and competence, and new approaches to implementing best practices.



Goal 4: Ready to Succeed in School

Ensure young children and families receive the services they need when they need them.



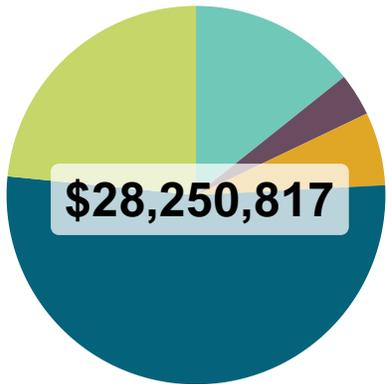
Goal 5: Healthy Children

Improve the quality of early childhood services for young children and their families across early care and education; health, mental health, and nutrition; and family support services.

ECI Funding

ECI local investments per strategic plan goals

Overall FY25 investments (inclusive of FY25 allocations and FY24 carry-forward amounts)



Strategic Plan Goal 1

Local Administrative Expenses	\$3,443,636
Coordinated Intake	\$263,738
Preschool Scholarship Coordination	\$323,589
Total Investments	\$4,030,963

Strategic Plan Goal 2

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	\$497,394
Public Awareness/Child Fair Family Events/Resource Community Events	\$158,759
Mental Health Supports: EC-PBIS (training, coaching, consultation)	\$371,642
Total Investments	\$1,027,795

Strategic Plan Goal 3

Professional Development (local conferences for child care providers)	\$13,060
Professional Development (training for child care providers)	\$318,865
Technical Assistance: Consult, Mentor, Coach for Child Care Providers	\$1,434,034
Total Investments	\$1,765,959

Strategic Plan Goal 4

Concrete Goods (car seats)	\$38,655
Crisis Emergency Child Care	\$14,186
Preventative Dental Care	\$485,038
Early Care and Education Scholarships	\$1,613,733
Essential Needs (Concrete Goods)	\$80,887
Family Support Home Visitation Services	\$11,994,848
Health Prevention (nurse partnerships, hearing screening, ASQ screening, referral assistance)	\$76,925
Prenatal/Postnatal (Nest programs- incentive-based group-based programs, nurse partnerships)	\$274,801
Transportation (access to Head Start and preschool programming)	\$232,843
Total Investments	\$14,811,916

Strategic Plan Goal 5

Child Care Business Investment Program	\$446,166
Child Care Nurse Consultants	\$1,918,546
Early Care and Education Supportive Services	\$2,524,890
Literacy	\$161,597
Quality Improvement	\$827,301
Wage Enhancements	\$735,685
Total Investments	\$6,614,185



Timeline

As a priority focus within Goal 1, the work of ECI has strategically involved continued investment in our data infrastructure to continuously re-evaluate needs, monitor the impacts of investments, share best practices and replicate what is working. State and local collaboration across the early childhood system has evolved over time.

1998

Community Empowerment Legislation Enacted, First 3 Areas Receive Empowerment Designation (7 Counties)

1999

48 Areas receive Empowerment Designation, 97 of 99 Counties Now Covered

2000

2 Areas receive Empowerment Designation, all 99 Counties now covered

2002-2010

School Ready & Early Childhood Grants Distributed to all 58 Empowerment Areas and Designations are earned in increments

2010

Community Empowerment becomes Early Childhood Iowa

2012

Counties merge, resulting in 45 total ECI areas covering 99 counties

2013

The source of the Early Childhood funds changed from federal to state within the Child Care Development Fund



2015

Alliance task force to address local & state accountability; assessing investments in evidence-based models

2016

Legislation passed with adjustments to the designation process with expectations of a community plan that outlines needs and provides evidence of successful collaboration within communities

2018

ECI State Board approves a new funding distribution formula

2019

Preschool Development Grant award, \$2.1 Million. Iowa's Integrated Data System for Decision-Making (I2D2) Launch – Comprehensive Needs Assessment & Strategic Plan “We are ECI” dedicated to infrastructure building to support local and state needs

2020

Prioritizing essential needs to keep child care open. Adjusted family support home visitation to virtual visits and issued Phones for Families to maintain resource and service connection for families during the shutdown.

2021-2022

The I2D2 IA Data Drive was built to provide public access to aggregated data, including the ECI Board approved indicators, that track child and family outcomes across health and well-being dimensions

2024

ECI State Board approves a new funding distribution formula

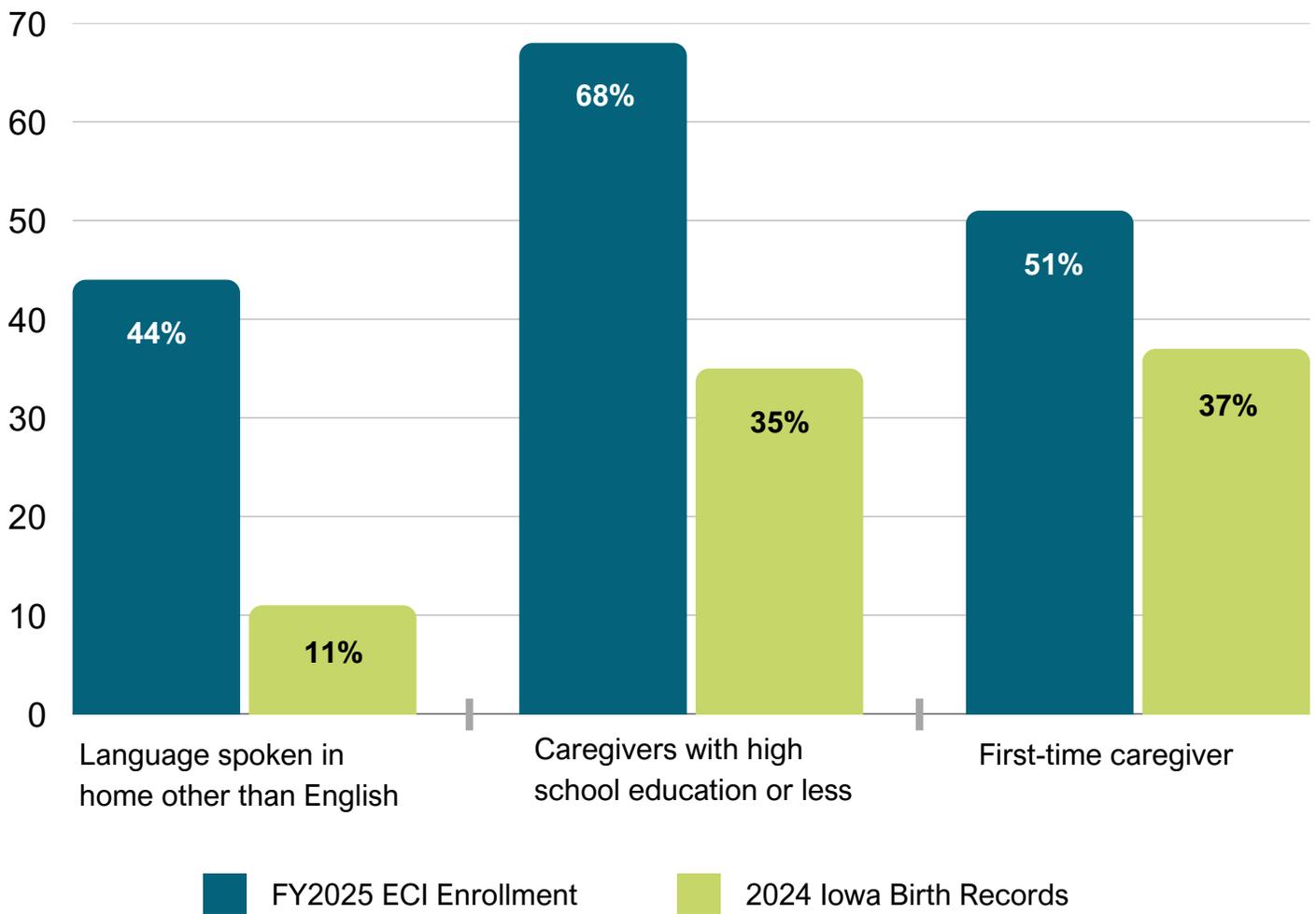
2025

- Service navigation pilot (helping families connect to essential needs and services)
- A new data collection effort was built by I2D2 that included local ECI area investments to provide a more efficient way to track our activities and outcomes

Family Support Home Visitation

One of the core services ECI funds at a statewide capacity is family support home visitation services. Home visitation services are in-home services with a minimum of two visits per month to strengthen parent and child interactions and improve their well-being and stability. These services form the foundation of Iowa’s primary prevention system by providing early, proactive support that reduces stressors, promotes positive parenting, and creates safe, nurturing home environments. By investing in preventive support and evidence-based models, ECI strengthens protective factors, increases access to critical services, and contributes to a more resilient early childhood system that supports children’s healthy development from birth through age five.

ECI Family Support Enrollment Compared to all 2024 Iowa Births



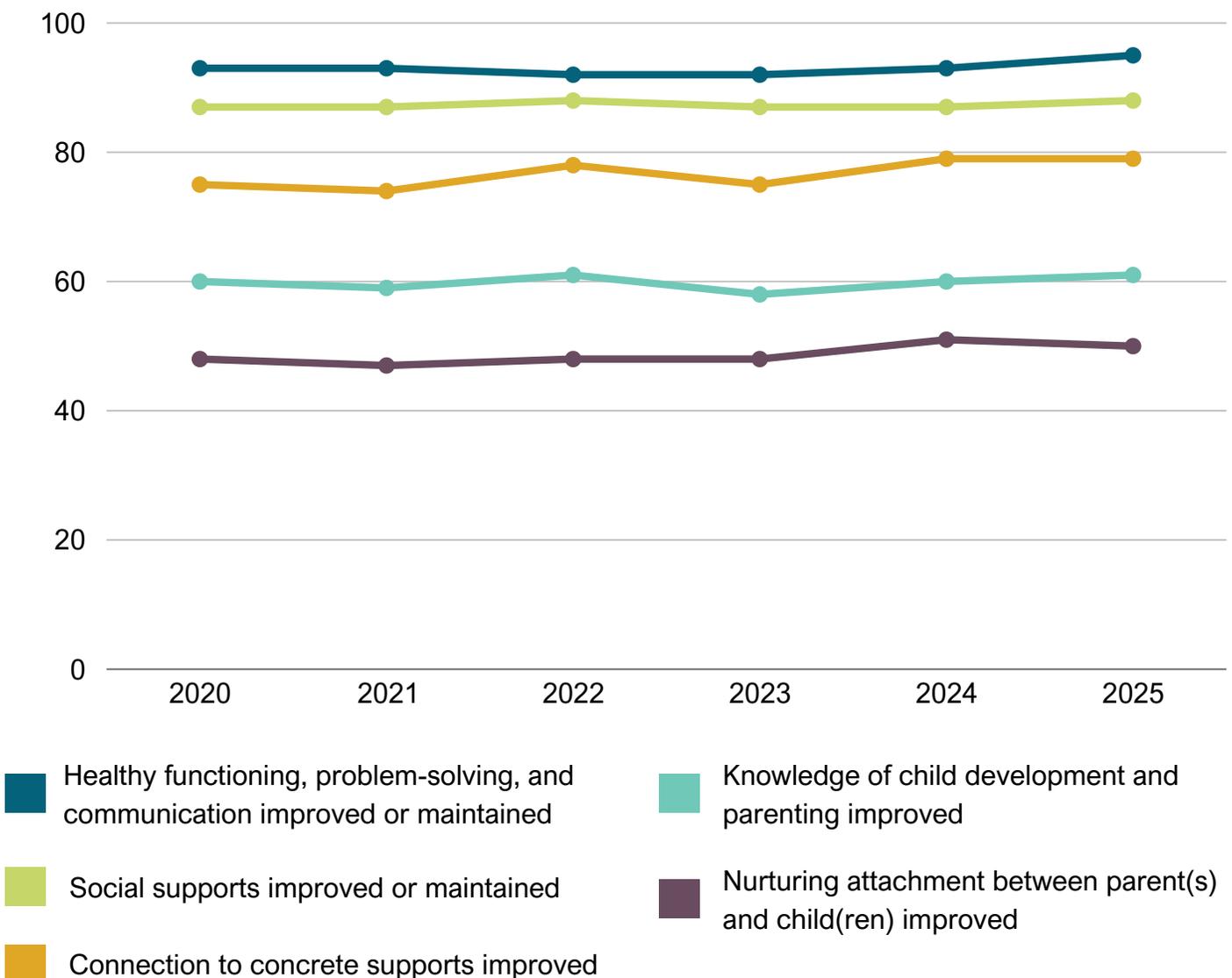
Note: The 2024 Iowa Birth Records data was retrieved from HHS’s 2024 Vital Statistics Birth Records data. Demographic data from Iowa Birth Records is based on Parent A, which is most often the mother of the child.

Life Skills Progression (LSP)

In FY25, Life Skills Progression (LSP) assessments showed consistently strong outcomes across key domains of family functioning and parenting. The LSP assessment is completed within 30 days of enrollment, every six months beginning six months after the enrollment date, and in the last month of service before completing the program.

This figure (below) highlights strong and consistent progress across all protective-factor domains. Communication and problem-solving remain the highest-performing areas, staying above 90% each year and reaching **95% in 2025**. Social support networks are also stable and strong, with **87-89%** of families maintaining or improving their support from 2020 through 2025. Concrete support shows steady improvement, with notable gains in 2022 and 2024 and overall levels remaining between 75% and 79%. Parents' knowledge continues to rise, increasing from **58% in 2023 to 62% in 2025**. Finally, nurturing attachment shows meaningful growth, reaching **51% in both 2024 and 2025**, the highest levels in the six-year period displayed in the figure.

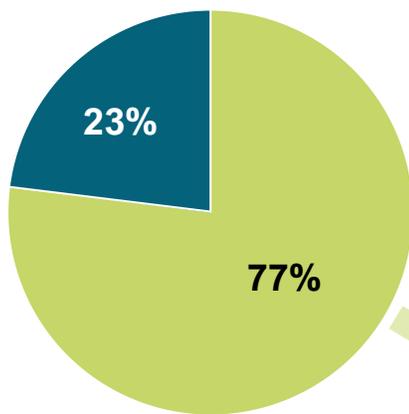
Life Skills Progression (LSP) Screening Over Time (FY20-F25)



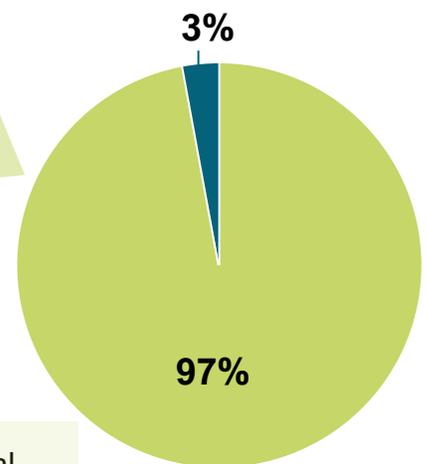
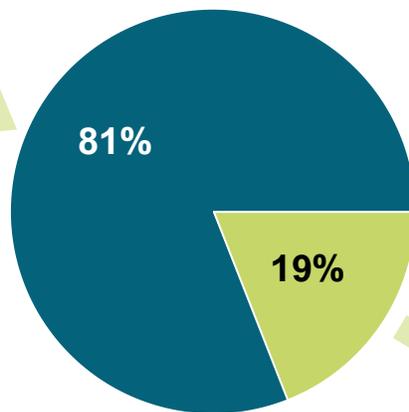
Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) Screening (FY25)

During FY25, ECI programs maintained strong performance in developmental screening using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) for children of families enrolled in a home visitation service. Between FY20 and FY25, the rate of developmental screenings increased from 58% to 78% and families maintained high rates of participation in services.

Statewide, 77% of the 4,227 eligible children were screened.



19% of screened children were identified as having potential developmental concerns.



97% of children identified as having potential developmental concerns were referred for further evaluation or services.

These results demonstrate the system's effectiveness in early identification and timely referral, ensuring children receive needed support as early as possible. High screening and referral rates across program types, particularly within evidence-based models such as Parents as Teachers (PAT) and Healthy Families America (HFA), underscore ECI's ongoing commitment to promoting healthy child development throughout Iowa.

Highlights

The following highlights emphasize the work and directly related outcomes of ECI during FY25. Local area boards have flexibility in how they allocate resources so they can align their investments with local needs. This process is driven by a community needs assessment that is required by each area board to inform their proposals for funding.

Supports for Families

- 3,282 families served in home visiting, prioritizing children under age 1 (80%) and over 51% raised by first-time parents.
- Over 50% of home visiting programs use an evidence-based model (e.g., Parents as Teachers, Healthy Families America).
- Over **41,000 home visits** were provided to families statewide, serving nearly 3,300 families across all 99 counties.
- Between FY20 and FY25, the rate of developmental screenings in home visiting increased from **58% to 78%**, with over 97% of children screening positive receiving referrals for appropriate service interventions.
- Referral rates were strongest in our evidence-based programs, with **100% of children in HFA and 98%** in PAT receiving referrals.
- Maternal depression screening rates improved from **71% to 78% compared to FY24**, with over 45% of positive screens referred for services (**up from 36% in FY24**).
- Consistently high rates of families in home visiting improve or maintain key life skills indicators including knowledge of child development and parenting, nurturing attachment, and problem-solving and communication.
- 80% of families receiving literacy support services reported an increase in reading to their child daily.
- Essential needs assistance was provided 8,968 times to 2,862 families.
- 80% of children and 46% of mothers who were referred for follow-up services received them.
- 717 families were served through coordinated intake in 5 ECI areas, with 30% of referred families enrolling in long-term family support programs.
- 88% of children screened with the ASQ-3 demonstrated age-appropriate skills. 96% of children screened with the ASQ-SE demonstrated age-appropriate social/emotional skills.

Supports for Early Care and Education

- \$1,600,000 invested in preschool scholarships for over 1,200 children who otherwise could not afford or have access to quality early care and education.
- 371 children received transportation to their ECE program.



Workforce Support

- 7 Professional development conferences were hosted across 5 ECI areas, including nearly 200 participants.
- **363 professional training opportunities** were delivered in 17 areas statewide.
- Wage enhancements were funded by 8 ECI areas, providing 44 programs in 13 counties (595 providers) support to address child care shortages.
- 52% of wage enhancement programs were IQ4K rated and **73% of programs report increased or maintained staffing levels** because of wage enhancements, with 83% of remaining employed in their program at least 6 months.
- 73 of programs reported increased or maintained child enrollment due to staffing stability provided through wage enhancements.

Supports for the Early Care and Education Workforce and Mental Health

- **13 areas invested in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH)**, providing 1,225 staff from 182 program with supports for children's behavioral health.
- 10 of 13 of these areas had consultants endorsed in Iowa's Relationship-focused Practice.
- Nearly 95% of services included individual or group consultation, with the remaining services including staff and community training.
- Recipients were overwhelmingly positive about their consultants – with 95% stating they were knowledgeable, made time and worked as a partner to support them.
- 92% of staff reported consultation increased their feelings of competence and self-confidence, with **75% reporting increased job satisfaction**.