

First 5 California—Why We Do It



First 5 California seeks to develop and enhance quality programs that focus on the health and early learning of children ages 0 to 5. First 5 California's Parent, Teacher and Child Signature Programs support families and their ability to raise healthy children ready to thrive once they enter school. Our programs are supported by the 58 county commissions who develop their own strategic plans based on the individual needs of each county.

- **Early Education:** Research has shown investments in high-quality early education and care programs improves school readiness and leads to higher academic achievement throughout school. These investments generate substantial social and economic payoffs by reducing unemployment, crime, and drug or alcohol abuse. Additional studies have shown that children in low-income families typically enter kindergarten 12 to 14 months behind the national average, which is particularly alarming since 23 percent of California's children are living at or below the poverty line. The cornerstone of our mission is to invest in high-quality preschool programs so children enter school ready to learn and on par with their peers. Our Child Signature Program works to close the achievement gaps amongst our most at-risk children through research-based instructional strategies such as: social-emotional development; parental involvement and support; and, high quality teachers. Our programs were central to California's successful Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application in which California was one of 14 states awarded a Race to the Top Early Learning Grant.
- **Teacher Training:** Research has long shown that teachers and early care providers with higher levels of education and specialized training have more positive effects on children's learning. With this in mind, we work with early childhood educators through our Teacher Signature Program to improve the quality of education through professional development and retention. Preschool attendance is correlated with improved kindergarten readiness which is associated with long term achievement. The most important factor in a high quality early education and care program is a well qualified teacher/care provider. Through First 5 California's CARES PLUS program, we are committed to enhancing the quality of California's early learning and care workforce.
- **Smoking Cessation:** Because of the health risks of prenatal smoking and smoking around children, First 5 California funds smoking cessation programs to help smokers quit. As part of this effort, First 5 California supports the California Smokers' Helpline. 1-800-No-Butts provides one-on-one counseling to help parents and caregivers quit.
- **Parent Education:** Parents are a child's first teacher, and by improving the ways that families function, children are more likely to be self-assured and ready to learn when they enter kindergarten. Our award-winning *Kit for New Parents* is filled with resources on child development, health, nutrition, childcare and early language development. We also promote our traveling Hand-On Health Express van which travels to all 58 counties and engages parents and children in activities that encourage physical activity and nutrition to help combat childhood obesity. Our parent outreach information is provided in eight different languages.
- **Health:** First 5 California invests in a comprehensive system of care to improve the myriad of services that children and families need to succeed and thrive. First 5 California and the 58 county commissions provide information and services for vaccinations, oral health, nutrition, mental health, and behavioral and substance abuse counseling for parents and/or caregivers of California's most vulnerable families.
- **Budget Solutions:** Over the past four years, First 5 California was asked to contribute more than \$300 million to fill the gaps where budget cuts have taken a toll in the continuity of care for families and providers. For example, last year First 5 California contributed \$15 million to the Department of Developmental Services to fund developmental screenings and intervention services for infant and toddlers.



First 5 California's Commission is made up of seven members appointed by the Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly and the Senate Rules Committee. The Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency appoints an ex-officio member to the Commission. Local county commissions are appointed by individual County Boards of Supervisors.