



May 20, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman
Chair, Senate Budget
Sub-Committee No. 1
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget
Sub-Committee No. 3
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Prioritizing *Prevention* in the Children & Youth Behavioral Health Initiative and Ensuring Supports for Children Ages 0-5

Dear Senator Skinner, Senator Eggman, Assemblymember Ting, and Assemblymember Arambula:

The May Revise proposes bold action to not just grow, but re-envision, child and youth behavioral health services. This new vision promises to emphasize the importance of prevention and early intervention models that aim to ameliorate mental health conditions or crises later in life. However, it neglects to articulate specific strategies for children under the age of 5, and therefore misses the opportunity to truly invest in *preventive* mental health services. **We, the undersigned organizations, strongly recommend a complementary investment to immediately address early childhood mental health by dedicating \$112 million to prevention-based approaches in non-clinical settings to support the social-emotional health of young children and families impacted by the pandemic.**

Over the course of the next several months, as vaccinations are rolled out and parents and children increasingly return to work and school, experts predict that children and families may begin to realize the full extent of the trauma and toxic stress they have experienced related to the pandemic. Child development experts anticipate increased acting out behaviors, separation

anxiety, undetected developmental delays, and inconsolable sadness as children once again have their routines upended, and experience shifts in their relationships and time spent with adults. For children whose families have experienced trauma, including food insecurity, housing instability, and other family hardships -- which disproportionately affect families of color -- we anticipate these transitions to be even more difficult. Such reactions are normal responses to change for young children, but will be difficult for adults to respond at the level needed to prevent a tidal wave of toxic stress. In other words, while we may be in a crisis of family mental health conditions now, one should expect that crisis to continue to build over the next year, not recede. The time to act is now.

To reduce the impacts of adverse childhood experiences and build resilience, we recommend a multi-layered, whole-child, whole-family approach to support young children's social-emotional development and build the capacity of the adults in their lives to respond to distressed children effectively. **Specifically, we request that \$112 million over three years of the Youth Behavioral Health Initiative flow through the Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission to issue 3-year grants to counties to support early childhood mental health through:**

- **Child Care Settings:** The loving, nurturing care provided by child care providers has always been essential to supporting the social-emotional development of young children. This will only be more important as children increasingly return to care settings, and we must support and equip providers in identifying and addressing mental health needs and behavior concerns in children as early as possible to avoid expulsions, suspensions and other long-lasting negative outcomes. Strategies like **Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation** and the expansion of **Trauma-Informed Training and Coaching** (currently only available through the Foster Care Bridge program) will be critical to providing buffering supports and can [reduce the need for costly crisis intervention](#) later and throughout a child's life.
- **Home & Community Based Settings:** Additional strategies are needed throughout communities and in home settings to adequately reach children and families. Multi-generational strategies like **home visiting** can help [alleviate the intergenerational transmission of trauma](#) by building positive and healthy attachments between parents and their children and connect families to concrete resources that address social determinants of health. Community-based **developmental playgroups** can help build community connection, break down social isolation, and support the healthy development of young children, and **evidence-based parent education programs** support families throughout their parenthood journey and support them to be their child's first teacher. Such examples are critical to meeting parents where they are most comfortable and supporting their children at every developmental stage.

These strategies are complementary to other investments proposed in the May Revision, including the dyadic care and doula Medi-Cal benefits, and \$10.6 million included in the child care package for early childhood mental health consultation. Together, they will ensure supports reach the youngest and often the most vulnerable children where they are most often -- at home

and in early care settings. Additionally, the proposed workforce development programs under the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative should also support the early childhood mental health workforce and include expanding the knowledge and skills of professionals to provide dyadic care, family therapy, early childhood mental health consultation, home visiting, and other practices related to the social-emotional development of young children.

Further, failing to adequately address the needs of young children and families through the Children & Youth Behavioral Health Initiative will undermine the state's overall behavioral health and preventive mental health goals. Early childhood is the time to reduce and ameliorate toxic stress and reduce the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences, which is more important than ever.

Now is the time to invest and scale proven early childhood mental health strategies to support the healthy development of young children, provide the buffering supports needed throughout communities, and build resilience among families and child serving professionals.

Thank you for leadership in supporting the wellbeing of children and families.

Sincerely,

Child Care Resource Center

First 5 Association of California

First 5 California

Kidango

The Children's Partnership