



2023 Policy Recommendations **of the Vermont Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network** *Endorsed on October 24, 2022*

The State Advisory Council (SAC) is Vermont's Governor-appointed, primary advisory body on the well-being of children from the prenatal period through age eight and their families. In partnership with Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) Committees and the Regional Councils, the SAC sets priorities and strategic direction for statewide initiatives using the VECAP and up-to-date data. The annual recommendations are developed with input across all BBF Network gatherings and seek to identify the current gaps and needs in policy, promote action in strategic areas for the coming year, ensure recommendations are measurable, and move Vermont toward a more equitable Early Childhood System.

Goal 1: All children have a healthy start

- **Promote and invest in care coordination. Invest in proven care coordination models across sectors to better serve young children and families.** Better support access to services for children with special health care needs, children with disabilities, and other marginalized groups by promoting and investing in valuable models of care coordination. Explore creative ways to fund and integrate services across sectors to reduce disparities in access to services.
- **Invest in safe, permanent housing for children as a critical basic need. Invest in housing programs and resources that expand availability and promote affordability and equity** in Vermont's rental and real estate markets by means such as:
 - **expanding the Family Supportive Housing Program**
 - **protecting manufactured home communities** by investing in infrastructure repair and maintenance
- **Support families who are unhoused or experiencing housing transitions by investing in trauma-responsive shelters, transitional housing, transportation resources, and related staffing.** Ensure children are able to attend school in their home districts if preferred.

Goal 2: Families and communities play a leading role in children's well-being

- Representation matters. **Develop and implement a formal guidance/protocol when creating new legislatively mandated bodies** (study sections, councils, task forces). A list of potential members should include representatives with lived experience in those groups.
- **Utilize the findings of the BBF Families and Communities Committee's Family Needs Assessment**, which has been designed and implemented by primary caregivers to inform policy and decision-making related to young children and their families
- **Provide commensurate compensation for families** participating in engagement, leadership, or feedback opportunities in order to recognize and honor the time and expertise that parents and caregivers contribute. **Make other logistical and cultural decisions that welcome and promote the inclusion of primary caregivers**, such as offering alternative or evening meeting opportunities, paying for any associated child care or transportation costs, and providing interpretation services.

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of the Vermont Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network**

Goal 3: All children and families have access to high-quality opportunities to meet their needs

- **Prioritize and invest in the current early childhood education workforce** to ensure the field is justly compensated, well-resourced, and valued as leaders and partners in the Early Childhood System by:
 - **Making strategic and substantial investments to bolster the compensation** of the early childhood workforce
 - **Investing in proven professional development programs and ensuring that all early childhood educators have access to resources and supports that make the field a more sustainable and attractive one**, such as practice-based coaching, mentorship, Special Accommodations Grants, Early Childhood and Family Mental Health Consultation and treatment, and Early Multi-tiered System of Supports. Ensure these professional development programs and opportunities are comprehensive and coordinate their offerings and activities.
- **Continue to commit to stakeholder engagement and national best practices within the STARS Revision work and related Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) efforts.** The updated Quality Rating Improvement Scale (QRIS) should support efforts to dismantle systemically racist and inequitable tools and structures, and to build a system that supports early childhood education programs in providing the highest quality teacher-child interactions possible through a continuous quality improvement lens.
- **Respond to the mental health challenges facing young children and their families** and the need to build resilience in our communities by:
 - **Investing in efforts to recruit a diverse mental health workforce** reflective of the communities served (including diversity of race/ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation and identity, socioeconomic status, etc).
 - **Continuing to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for mental health services** to adjust for the higher cost of providing services associated with inflation.
 - **Investing in trauma and resilience training for family-serving providers** (in the fields of mental health, education, etc.) to enable them to be better prepared to respond to the increased mental health needs of children due to the pandemic. Invest in translation services for training programs to promote equitable and broad access to training.

Goal 4: The early childhood system will be integrated, well-resourced, and data-informed

- **Prioritize collective legislative action and coordination** related to early childhood administration, governance, and any potential investments **by holding joint hearings, forming ad hoc committees, and working collaboratively** on hearing key testimony, advancing well-vetted legislation, etc.
- As legislation is considered related to Vermont's early childhood governance infrastructure, the Legislature must **prioritize accountability by tasking a specific entity to monitor governance transition**, with responsibilities that include:
 - Developing a concrete transition plan with accountability and metrics (process and success) prioritizing cross-sector stakeholder engagement
 - Monitoring any and all transitions over time and reporting annually to the Legislature
 - Defining and measuring success in process and outcomes using a continuous quality improvement framework
 - Ensuring alignment with the vision articulated in the Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan

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Goal 4: The early childhood system will be integrated, well-resourced, and data-informed (cont)

- **Respond to inequities in data collection and reporting in order to better represent and understand the intersectional experiences of people of color, children with disabilities, and other marginalized communities in Vermont.**
 - Develop a statewide strategy to gather demographic information that allows people to self-identify in an authentic and appropriate manner while meeting federal demographic reporting requirements.
 - Value qualitative data. When the small population size of a group necessitates the suppression of their quantitative data, utilize qualitative data collection to ensure that everyone is counted.
 - Secure sustained funding to support high-quality data through compensation for direct service providers who collect and report data.
 - Partner with impacted communities throughout the data cycle to ensure that marginalized communities, in particular, have ownership of their experiences and are empowered to advocate for and make decisions on behalf of themselves.
 - To enable Vermont to execute the above recommendations, secure sustained funding for additional personnel to increase capacity with a specific focus on equitable data.

