



Vermont's Early Childhood
Data & Policy Center



2022 Vermont Early Childhood Family Needs Assessment



Executive Summary

Overview:

A survey was fielded to better understand the barriers families face when accessing services and supports in order to inform policy and programs in Vermont's early childhood systems (prenatal to age 8). This report provides an in-depth analysis of how well these services are working for families, the challenges they face, and what Vermont is doing well for young families. The Early Childhood Family Needs Assessment was led by the Families and Communities Committee and supported by the Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council Network and the Vermont Integration Prenatal to 3 (VIP-3) grant.

Survey and Distribution:

From over 600 respondents of the survey fielded between mid-August and mid-October 2022, Building Bright Futures and the Families and Communities Committee gained insight into the experiences of families with children under age 9 when it comes to accessing a variety of services and supports in Vermont's early childhood system.

- Respondents were asked about their experiences with accessing a range of services—everything from child care to early intervention services, healthy food, pediatric care, and transitions between settings and services.
- Respondents were given the opportunity to rate their overall experiences with seven different services and supports in Vermont's early childhood system, and were then asked to provide more in-depth feedback on up to three services.

Findings:

- Overall, respondents reported having positive experiences with the services and supports they were asked about. Responses ranged from 71% of respondents agreeing that their overall child care and early learning settings experience was positive, to 93% agreeing their experiences were positive in medical care settings.
- Respondents suggested a number of factors made their experiences either easier or more challenging when it came to accessing services and supports for their family:
 - Relationships with staff and providers, communication, timeliness of services, and distance to services were identified as supporting families' ability to connect with resources.
 - Difficulty accessing a service or support due to availability or due to cost, and difficulty navigating the complex early childhood system were frequently cited barriers for families.
- A more in-depth overview of each of the results from the main sections of the survey are available in [Appendices B-L](#).

Limitations:

A number of limitations to both the Early Childhood Family Needs Assessment and our analysis are notable when reviewing the results. These include: a self-selection bias in those most likely to complete the survey, accessibility limitations to the survey itself (including its availability in only English), a limited ability to fully analyze a large volume of data, and continued limitations related to the COVID-19 pandemic that may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Policy Considerations:

Four policy considerations have resulted from the report's findings, Families and Communities Committee discussions, and discussions with content experts. These policy considerations can be read in full in the report.

1. Evaluate and align Vermont's strategies to inform and connect families to resources

Vermont currently has multiple formal and informal resource and referral systems. However, families reported difficulty knowing where to look for information and difficulty navigating systems and resources. An evaluation of existing systems and financing streams will help identify areas for improvement.

2. Review national best practices to reduce administrative burden and promote equity of access to necessities (diapers, food, formula, etc.)

Data has shown disparities in access to nutritious food and necessities between white and non-white and multi-racial Vermonters. To best serve and support all young children and their families, it is critical that those implementing programs or developing policies review national best practices to reduce and document their steps towards eliminating these disparities.

3. Support the implementation of clear guidance on the full scope of kindergarten transitions

Positive kindergarten transition experiences are connected to improved academic achievement and positive family engagement. Data from the survey show that families have varied experiences with their children's transitions to kindergarten and that schools handle the multiple aspects of this transition differently. Guidance on kindergarten transitions and support with implementation from the Agency of Education is a critical component of successful transitions for young children and their families across Vermont. As with all official guidance, there should be a process involving statewide stakeholder engagement and utilization of existing frameworks and best practices.

4. Pursue integration of mental health services throughout Vermont's early childhood system that encourages ease of access for families with young children

Integration of mental health services within Vermont's larger systems of services and supports is an area that has been well studied and reviewed by the stakeholders within the Mental Health Integration Council. The findings of the Family Needs Assessment reinforce their recommendations, especially a recruitment campaign for the mental health workforce and incentivized integration of mental health services in primary care to promote wellness. In addition, there are other models in which families receive or are connected to mental health services such as Children's Integrated Services, Parent Child Centers, Head Start, and others that should be considered when pursuing integration.



Publication Information



Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership, charged under Vermont Title 33 § Chapter 46 and the Federal Head Start Act (Public Law 110-134) as Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council (SAC), the mechanism used to advise the Governor and Legislature on the well-being of children in the prenatal period through age 8 and their families. BBF maintains the vision and strategic plan for Vermont's early childhood system. BBF's Network infrastructure includes 12 Regional Councils, seven VECAP Committees, and the State Advisory Council. Learn more at buildingbrightfutures.org.

The Vermont Early Childhood Data and Policy Center is a nonpartisan, independent source of data, research, publications and important information for policymakers, stakeholders, and the public on issues and priorities for children ages birth through age 8 in Vermont. Using evidence to inform policy is a key component of how we can improve the well-being of children and their families across Vermont. The Center is a critical tool for answering policy questions by centralizing data from the complex early childhood system. Learn more at vermontkidsdata.org.



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