



Early Head Start



Program Overview

The mission of Early Head Start (EHS) is to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant parents, enhance the development of very young children, and promote healthy family functioning. EHS is an intensive, comprehensive program that is designed to reinforce and respond to unique strengths and needs of each individual child and family. The EHS program offers comprehensive services through home-based and center-based program options.

Services to Pregnant Parents

Services that are offered to pregnant parents include support in accessing comprehensive prenatal and postpartum health care, prenatal education, and breastfeeding information. Prenatal education includes information about typical fetal development, including the risks of smoking and drinking alcohol, labor and delivery, nutrition education, and postpartum recovery.

Infant/Toddler Child Development

The primary goals of Early Head Start focus on the healthy cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of infants and toddlers. In recognition that parents are the primary educators of their children, EHS is designed to work with families to ensure that the developmental needs of each child are met. Through on-going assessment of each child's skills and behaviors, parents and staff collaborate to develop meaningful curriculum that is age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and tailored to meet individual needs.

Early Head Start programs provide health and developmental screenings upon enrollment and periodically throughout children's participation in the program. If staff identifies health or developmental concerns, children are promptly referred to local Part C programs for further evaluation and, if found eligible, early intervention services are provided.

Family Partnerships

Parents are true partners in Early Head Start programs. EHS has a formal structure of shared governance through which parents can participate in policy making or in other decisions about the program. EHS provides opportunities for parents to enhance their parenting skills, knowledge, and understanding of the educational and developmental needs and activities of their children. EHS also offers parents opportunities for their own growth and support in identifying and meeting goals. Referrals are made, as appropriate, to other community resources and services that support each family's needs and goals.

Community Partnerships

Early Head Start serves families within the context of the community and recognizes that many other agencies and groups may work with the same families. With this in mind, EHS collaborates with partners in their communities in order to maximize available resources, provide the highest level of services to children and families, and advocate for a community that shares responsibility for the healthy development of children and families of all cultures.

Health/Mental Health

Early Head Start seeks to provide comprehensive health services to children and families through prevention and early identification of health and development concerns, and through links to community health services. Each family is encouraged and supported to establish a "medical home" where children receive routine health care. Nutrition assessments are completed for all prenatal parents and children and education regarding good nutrition is provided. Healthy meals and snacks are served at the centers. Early Head Start participates in the USDA meals program.

Early Head Start focuses on building social competencies in children and their families through the promotion of positive mental health practices. Although mental health in EHS is preventative in nature, identification and referral are available for children of families with special mental health needs. The mental health specialist is available to meet interested parents on home visits and to lead parent groups on various topics.

Child Care

Early Head Start offers state licensed, high-quality child-care services for infants and toddlers throughout the year. EHS has a contract with the State of New Hampshire to provide child care at a reduced fee to families that qualify. The weekly cost is based on eligibility requirements and to assist parents who are in job search, in training programs, or employed. Child Care is available at the Concord and Laconia sites.