

Healthy Futures

Healthy Futures is an evidence-based, early childhood mental health consultation program that promotes positive social and emotional development in young children.

How it works

Mental health consultants provide in-classroom support to child care educators, who then work with families to address a child's social and emotional development needs and mental health concerns.

Effective social-emotional skills and support addressing mental health challenges are key to a child's healthy development. They play a vital role in helping children make friends, learn new skills, and succeed in school. Assisting children developing these skills is a significant aspect of the important work early childhood educators perform daily, and supporting them in this effort helps promote longevity in their field of work, and the overall success of early learning programs.

Healthy Futures also connects families to community-based services through direct referrals as needed.

Why it matters

Positive social-emotional development in early childhood is crucial, enabling children to:

- Play and get along with their peers and adults
- Manage stress and overcome challenges
- Learn positive decision-making skills
- Be prepared for school

Children who develop healthy social-emotional skills early on are more likely to have better long-term outcomes, such as earning a college degree and being gainfully employed as adults.¹

Healthy Futures helps improve classroom climate, enhance teacher-classroom management skills, reduce child behavioral problems, and lower expulsion rates. In one evaluation, child development center directors reported that teachers were more aware of children's behavioral challenges before they escalated, which allowed them to intervene early and appropriately.²

Healthy Futures sites have also reported improved child behavior and interactions — children played together better, followed directions more, and were less distracted. Healthy Futures is a valuable resource for early learning programs. Child care program directors have reported significant improvements in teacher-child interactions and reductions in negative staff behaviors, such as shouting at children.³



Key facts

Children with positive social-emotional skills are better able to develop and maintain positive relationships, and recognize and manage their own emotions and behaviors.

Providing in-classroom support to child care providers to identify possible mental health concerns and connect families with referrals can prevent disruptive behavior in the short term and create structures and support that significantly increase strong mental health in childhood and beyond.

300

The Birth-to-Three Act requires the addition of 300 total program sites by the fiscal year 2023.

1 Damon E. Jones, Mark Greenberg, and Max Crowley, 2015: Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness
American Journal of Public Health 105, 2283-2290, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>



Healthy Futures (cont'd)

About Under 3 DC

Under 3 DC is a broad-based coalition of parents with young children, early childhood educators, advocates, community-based organizations, and health professionals who believe every child deserves a strong start and a limitless future. Our work centers on the people experiencing racial and economic injustice every day. It shines a spotlight on the need for more public investments to support families with infants and toddlers. Together, we can set the city on a path to creating and sustaining a high-quality, equitable early childhood system.

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Who it helps

Healthy Futures is administered by the Department of Behavioral Health, pairing early childhood mental health consultants with early learning facilities that participate in the child care subsidy program across the District. A majority of sites currently working with Healthy Futures are located in Wards 7 and 8. Most programs are traditional child development centers and serve children ages 0 to 5. However, other early learning programs, such as home-based providers, pre-kindergarten spaces, and the District's Quality Improvement Network (QIN), participate as well. As of the beginning of FY 2022, 76 sites participate in the Healthy Futures program, including 27 child development centers participating in the PreK Enhancement and Expansion Program (PKEEP), 18 QIN home-based providers, and 14 QIN child development centers.⁴

In FY21, approximately 1,569 children participated in the Healthy Futures program through child development centers and homes that remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic. About 550 teachers participate in regular consultations through the program.⁵

The Birth-to-Three for All DC Law requires the DC Department of Behavioral Health to expand the Healthy Futures programs to 300 child care facilities.

What's next

As of FY22, Healthy Futures is funded at \$1.8 million⁶ in recurring funds. This funding enables the Department of Behavioral Health to employ early childhood mental health consultants, program supervisors, and administrative program staff, and cover travel and office expenses.

To add the capacity mandated by the Birth-to-Three Law, Healthy Futures must receive an additional \$4.4 million to expand their services to the remaining 225 additional child care programs. Fully funding and maintaining Healthy Futures programming in all 300 child care facilities will require a recurring annual budget of at least \$6.2 million.

It is important for the District to continue expanding the availability of Healthy Futures support. Tending to the mental health of families and educators as we rebuild from COVID-19's societal disruptions will be more important than ever. In FY 2022, the DC Council allocated \$416K⁷ to Healthy Futures. This investment will enable Healthy Futures to further deepen, expand, and evaluate its services.

DC leaders should prioritize full funding of Healthy Futures in upcoming cycles when city finances recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 Perry, Deborah. Healthy Futures: Year Three Evaluation Of Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation by the District of Columbia Department of Mental Health. Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. 2013. <https://dbh.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dmh/publication/attachments/HealthyFuturesThreeYearEvaluationReport.pdf>

3 lbd

4 Department of Behavioral Health. Healthy Futures Program. 2021. At least two of the child development programs are represented more than once in the breakdown of the various types of providers.

5 lbd

6 Office of DC Council Budget Office. Correspondence. 2021

7 Office of Chief Financial Officer. 2022 RMO Department of Behavioral Health Chapter Budget Book. RMO-5. Pg.16, 20. 2021. https://cfo.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ocfo/publication/attachments/rm_dbh_chapter_2022s.pdf