

FLOURISHING CHILDREN, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES, AND A STRONGER NATION

THE U.S.
EARLY YEARS
CLIMATE
ACTION PLAN

Executive Summary



**EARLY
YEARS**
CLIMATE ACTION
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Young children and their families are living with—and will increasingly face—the realities of climate change, from heat impacting children's health to wildfire smoke keeping children indoors to flooding threatening homes and child care centers. Support for our youngest children (prenatal through age 8) can help meet these challenges by building resilience in communities now into the future.

To date, people supporting our youngest children and families and people seeking to accelerate large-scale climate solutions have rarely collaborated. In this action plan, we map the opportunity to advance solutions at the intersection of the early years and climate change. For this plan to succeed, policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels must work with families, early years providers, and communities. We provide detailed recommendations to guide this work. We also outline recommendations for early years providers, business, philanthropy, and researchers. We all have a responsibility to work together to enable young children to thrive in our changing climate.

We envision a future in which we prioritize the healthy, resilient development of our youngest children; children have access to clean air, clean water, and safe sustainable places to grow, learn, and play; early years providers are supported and empowered to help parents understand climate impacts and what they can do; and children's futures are centered in the policy decisions we make.

Children, despite being least responsible for climate change, will live with its impacts their entire lives. They have a fundamental right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment—a right that is currently at risk. By supporting our youngest children and their families, we can protect that right today while laying the foundation for a more resilient and just society for generations to come.

THE U.S. EARLY YEARS CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

The Early Years Climate Action Task Force—20 early years leaders, climate leaders, researchers, medical professionals, parents, philanthropists, and others—came together in fall 2022. The Task Force recognized the urgency of climate change but also saw the opportunity for the early years sector to partner with people seeking to advance climate solutions to create a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable society.

Over the last year, we held listening sessions to learn more about the impacts of climate change on young children. We also explored opportunities to support young children, their families, and the programs that serve them in a changing climate. We heard from caregivers, providers, doctors, researchers, and community leaders from across the country. We are inspired by their leadership, advocacy, and action and have grounded this action plan in what we learned.

We have an opportunity to build on existing experiences, research, and bright spots. Through partnership with communities and policymakers, we can catalyze and scale policies that support young children and their families in adapting to climate change and building resilience.

We recognize that young children from Indigenous nations, communities of color, and low-income rural and urban communities bear disproportionate burdens from climate change due to overlapping systems of inequity. Policymakers must pay particular attention to the health disparities and experiences of displacement and trauma that are disproportionately experienced by historically marginalized populations. Centering these communities in solutions can help to advance equity and ensure healthy, resilient development for all children.

FRAMEWORK

To effectively support all young children, we consider impacts of climate change on and opportunities to advance solutions for the three categories of the early years ecosystem.

Climate change will increasingly impact children's health and development. Yet promoting healthy, resilient development for children can better enable our society to tackle climate challenges into the future. We outline how children will be impacted by climate change and how we can support both children and their families to ensure healthy, resilient childhoods in a changing climate.

These programs have the potential to be healthy, sustainable spaces where children are supported in building resilience and fostering an appreciation for our connection to the environment. We outline how child- and family-facing programs are being impacted by climate change and how they can both adapt and advance solutions.

1
**CHILDREN
AND FAMILIES**

2
**CHILD- AND FAMILY-
FACING PROGRAMS**

3
**LOCAL
COMMUNITIES**

Although there are many settings in which young children spend their time, all children are nested within communities: towns, cities, counties, and more. Many of these communities are preparing for climate impacts and implementing adaptation measures and mitigation strategies. In this action plan, we outline the ways communities are acting on climate change and the opportunities to ensure that those actions consider and benefit children.

This action plan recommends ways to support collaboration among policymakers, early years providers, business, philanthropy, and researchers to effectively support children and families, child- and family-facing programs, and communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FEDERAL POLICYMAKERS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Utilize leadership and leverage platforms to help children and families thrive in our changing climate.

- 1.1: Analyze climate policies and programs to promote positive health, well-being, and learning outcomes for children and families.
- 1.2: Build cross-agency collaboration to support children and families in a changing climate.
- 1.3: Include the perspectives of children and their caregivers in climate-related policy decisions.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Ensure that support for young children and families keeps pace with increasing needs and rising costs spurred by climate disruption.

- 2.1: Increase access to mental health support for young children and caregivers to help families cope with the effects of climate change.
- 2.2: Increase access to telehealth services so that families can communicate with care providers during extreme weather.
- 2.3: Ensure that families understand how the Inflation Reduction Act can help cover the costs of climate-related home repairs and improvements.
- 2.4: Ensure that benefits from federal nutrition programs keep pace with climate-related changes in the cost and availability of food.
- 2.5: Ensure that benefits from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) keep pace with climate-related increases in the costs of cooling, heating, and weatherization.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Ensure that maternal and pediatric health care providers are equipped to support pregnant patients and young children in a changing climate.

- 3.1: Equip clinicians to inform patients about the effects of climate change on early development.
- 3.2: Ensure that Medicaid pays providers for the time they spend discussing the impacts of climate change on early development.
- 3.3: Ensure that home visiting programs support caregivers in a changing climate.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Ensure that key federal early childhood programs and policies, and associated guidance and technical assistance, directly address climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

- 4.1: Ensure that the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) supports climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.
- 4.2: Ensure that Head Start and Early Head Start support climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.
- 4.3: Ensure that the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Part C and Section 619, supports young children with disabilities in a changing climate.
- 4.4: Ensure that technical assistance and workforce training help providers understand the impacts of climate change on young children and advance solutions.

- 4.5: Ensure that preschool education programming funded by Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act supports climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Ensure that child- and family-facing programs have resources to maintain and upgrade their facilities to provide healthy and sustainable environments.

- 5.1: Ensure that early years programs understand how to access funding in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Inflation Reduction Act, and other climate-related sources.
- 5.2: Establish dedicated infrastructure funding for maintenance and upgrades to child- and family-facing programs.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Ensure that existing federal climate change programs and new opportunities consider the needs of young children and their families.

- 6.1: Require set-asides and priorities for the early years in all federal programs related to climate change and the environment.
- 6.2: Help communities address the needs of young children and families facing migration or displacement due to climate change.
- 6.3: Promote policies across federal agencies to strengthen communities' capacity to support young children in a changing climate.

STATE POLICYMAKERS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Create leadership roles and collaborative structures to support young children and families in a changing climate.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Ensure that families, child- and family-facing programs, and communities have resources to create healthy, sustainable environments for young children.

- 2.1: Consider the places where children live, learn, and receive services when setting priorities and devoting resources to climate change.
- 2.2: Assess and update resources and tools to determine climate vulnerability and risk.
- 2.3: Provide financial support and information to help families with young children make their homes healthy, sustainable, and climate resilient.
- 2.4: Provide infrastructure funding specifically for early years providers to support climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.
- 2.5: Provide resources for communities to support young children and families in a changing climate.

RECOMMENDATION 3

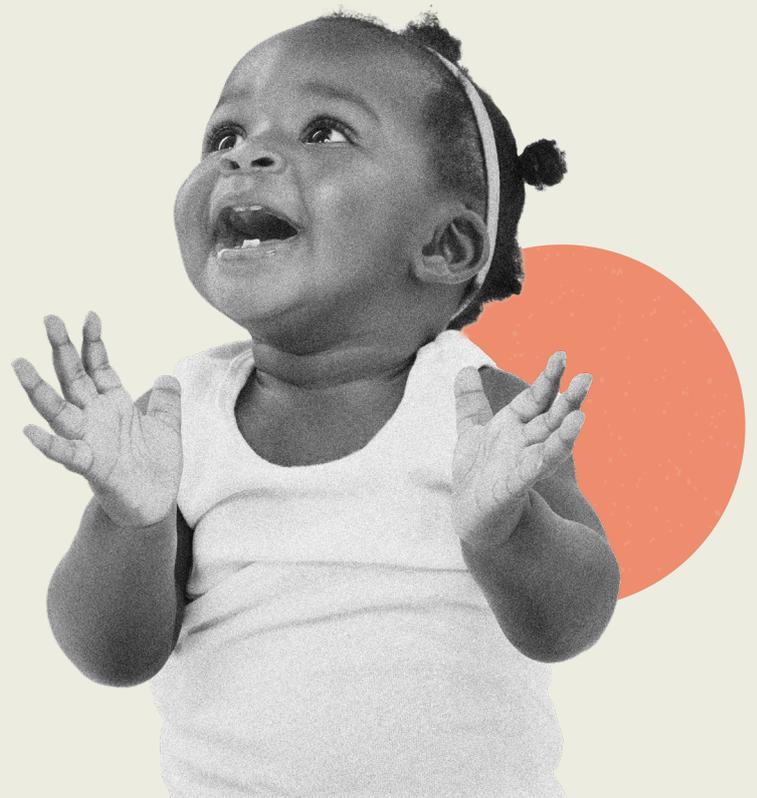
Ensure that programs supporting expecting parents and caregivers have the resources and tools to promote healthy child development in a changing climate.

- 3.1: Provide resources for health care practitioners and ensure that time spent discussing the impacts of climate change on early development is payable under Medicaid.
- 3.2: Provide additional support and reimbursement for doulas and other birth support professionals to help expecting parents in a changing climate.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Advance policies and guidance to ensure child care programs prepare for and can respond to extreme climate events.

- 4.1: Strengthen air quality and extreme heat standards, recommendations, and alerts.
- 4.2: Create contingency plans that allow for temporarily relaxing regulations that hamper child care programs' ability to operate during or after disasters.
- 4.3: Broaden Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to include climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.
- 4.4: Update licensing regulations to include climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.



LOCAL POLICYMAKERS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Incorporate the early years into climate planning and action by building authentic connections with young children and their families, especially those who have been historically marginalized.

- 1.1: Ensure that outreach efforts are inclusive and family centered.
- 1.2: Include early years providers and organizations in climate planning decisions.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Support collaboration between the early years and climate in local governmental agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Increase access to family-focused and climate-resilient outdoor spaces.

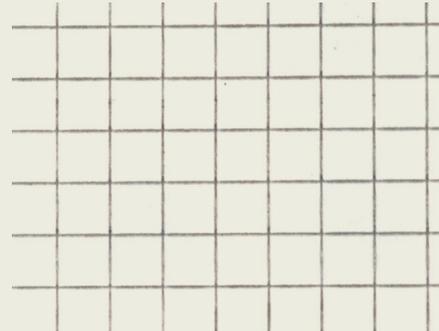
RECOMMENDATION 4

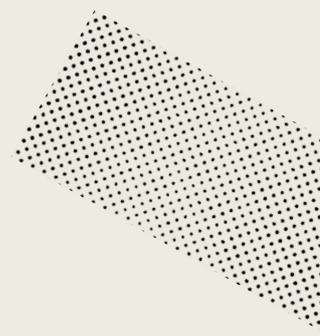
Advance strategies to support early years providers in ensuring safe, healthy, reliable, and high-quality services to children and families in a changing climate.

- 4.1: Locate early years facilities near each other, affordable housing, and sustainable transportation options.
- 4.2: Establish local air quality monitoring infrastructure.
- 4.3: Implement low-emission zones near early years facilities to promote better air quality.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Build the ability of neighborhoods to support young children and families by expanding access to climate resilience hubs, community aid, and social connectivity.





EARLY YEARS PROVIDERS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Upgrade early years facilities to advance climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Conduct and incorporate climate risk screenings and share information with families.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Distribute electronic and phone warnings and guidance during extreme climate-related events to expecting parents and families with young children.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Integrate training and anticipatory guidance on the impacts of climate change on young children into professional associations and degree and certification programs.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Build climate resilience into child care providers' outdoor learning spaces.

BUSINESS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Create climate-aware policies and programs for employees with young children.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Foster partnerships between businesses and early years facilities to fund essential upgrades.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Partner with local communities to build climate-resilient green space and community infrastructure.



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RECOMMENDATION 1

Support work that connects early years and climate change.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop a regular national scorecard on the state of young children and climate change.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Support and recognize communities in efforts that promote healthy development for young children in a changing climate.

RESEARCHERS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Investigate which interventions are most effective in improving climate resilience at early years facilities.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Research best practices in communicating with young children and their parents about climate change.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Determine and share best practices for outdoor learning environments via demonstration sites and other mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Convene the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to report on climate change impacts on pregnant women and young children and to recommend interventions.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Disaggregate climate-related data on children by age, race, ethnicity, and other demographic indicators.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Work with partners to establish a best practices clearinghouse.



“We want to make sure that we are leaving our children with a future where they can thrive and be able to grow into capable adults who care about the environment and those around them.”

LOIS A. MARTIN, MA

DIRECTOR,

COMMUNITY DAY CENTER FOR CHILDREN

