

Early Head Start and Head Start Community Needs Assessment of the District of Columbia

The federally funded Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) programs have been providing early childhood education opportunities and comprehensive supports for low-income children and families for decades. During the 2018-2019 academic year, EHS served 1,844 children and pregnant women, and HS served 5,474 children in the District of Columbia. A community needs assessment found key strengths, challenges, and recommendations for the programs as they continue to support children and families.

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and community strengths. Families are invested in their children’s learning and development. EHS and HS programs in DC are situated in strong and supportive communities that have resources available to families. • Program strengths. Programs have dedicated teachers, staff, and curricula that support children’s development, and a wealth of services to support children and families. • Systems-level strengths. Departments and agencies serving children and families in DC coordinate well with each other and facilitate information sharing and convenient services for children and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and community challenges. Challenges include finding and securing housing, neighborhood violence, accessing transportation, and accessing physical and mental health care. • Program challenges. Programs need additional language support and professional development opportunities, particularly focused on children experiencing trauma and behavioral challenges. • Systems-level challenges. Challenges include connecting with families with changing contact information, expanding slots for infants and toddlers and children with special needs, and coordinating enrollment and subsidy intake.

Program needs and future planning considerations

Program coordination, improving access, and data collection	Resources and training for workforce and families	Continued collaboration, partnership building, and resource coordination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to expand the number of child care slots available in DC, particularly at sites that accept subsidy. • Require standardized data reporting at multiple intervals throughout the school year. • Coordinate with health care providers to support access to services for families and information sharing. • Monitor and assess the impact of COVID-19 on children, families, and teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a professional development needs assessment that examines differences across sites and wards. • Offer additional training and professional development opportunities focused on trauma and behavioral challenges. • Support programs with additional resources for communicating with linguistically diverse children and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share community needs assessment findings with key stakeholders, including teachers and families. • Seek out partnerships to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expand mental health and health care availability and access for children and families. ○ Provide additional transportation support. ○ Ensure an EHS and HS voice in community economic development initiatives .

