



2022 Hampton Roads Early Childhood COVID-19 Response/Recovery Agenda

The nearly 80,000 young children (birth to 5) and their families across Hampton Roads continue to face multiple challenges as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. EVMS Minus 9 to 5, as the Ready Region Southeastern lead, works with community partners to ensure that families have what they need to raise children who are healthy, thriving, and ready to learn. This means families must have their basic needs met like housing and food, but also need access to mental and physical health care, along with high quality early learning and child care. The earliest years (birth to age 5) for children are foundational for healthy brain development, yet the ongoing stress that many families have endured as a result of the pandemic, are likely to cause a ripple effect that will follow a child into their adult life. Responsively and equitably addressing the needs arising from COVID-19, strategizing for recovery, and building a stronger early childhood system for our region are actions we must take today. Community, city, state and federal policymakers all have a role to play in this important work so that all children in our region have opportunities for success. Minus 9 to 5, along with over 200 diverse, regional stakeholders and organizations, collectively advocate for programs, services, and policies that positively impact our regions' youngest residents.

Collectively, we advocate for policies and programs that:

INCREASE FAMILY STABILITY THROUGH AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS THAT ENSURE FAMILIES HAVE BASIC NEEDS MET

In 2019, over 37,000 children in our region experienced food insecurity with numbers rising due to the on-going pandemic. Homelessness and evictions are skyrocketing due to the pandemic. Housing instability and food insecurity have significant negative impacts on a child's mental and physical health, early development and educational advancement. Many systemic barriers remain in place, making it difficult for families to utilize the existing programs. *We support:*

- Extending Child Tax Credit plan to promote economic stability and food security among Virginia's families
- Coordinated efforts between agencies for eviction prevention services (rent assistance, landlord mediation, tenant/landlord rights education) and local and state-level data sharing to strengthen outcomes and maximize funding
- Promoting funding and legislation for affordable housing retention and new development
- Extension of policies that ensure all children (0-18 years) have access to nutritious healthy meals
 - Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to allow high-need schools to offer no cost meals to all students
 - Permanent Summer EBT to help keep families nourished when school is not in session
 - Non-congregate meals (Grab-and-Go) to help summer feeding sites reach more kids

ADVANCE THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Ensuring support and access to services that address the physical and mental health needs of our young children and their families is critical. *We support:*

- Deepening understanding of health disparities caused by structural and systemic barriers within the health care system setting
- Continuation of services including community-based mental health, Medicaid coverage and reimbursement for children and pregnant/post-partum women, home visiting and doula care
- Improving coordination of services and strategic leveraging of funding streams for existing home visiting programs in our region and universal prenatal or at-birth screening to identify social vulnerabilities
- Educating families about the importance of on-time, well-child visits and immunizations including Covid-19 vaccines
- Implementing a statewide early childhood mental health consultation model with regional infrastructure to support mentally healthy and well-developed children

INCREASE ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY OF HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CHILDREN

The ongoing pandemic has highlighted the existing fragility of the child care industry across the Commonwealth. Facing challenges such as razor thin financial margins, a declining workforce population due to low wages and meager benefits, child care providers struggle to meet the demands for high-quality child care. Early care models of all types require efforts to stabilize and strengthen their business practices to ensure high-quality and affordable opportunities for all children. Our region's businesses struggle to retain a diverse and skilled workforce due to child care struggles. *We support:*

- The Bold Goal for VA for access to quality, affordable early learning for all families by 2030 through the VA Promise Partnership
- Expansion of Mixed Delivery funding for 3 and 4 year olds to coordinate and maximize existing early learning programs like Head Start and VPI, ensuring every child who qualifies can access these services
- Stabilizing and strengthening the business models of early care and education programs through:
 - Accessing federal and state supports for child care businesses to increase early educator wages and professional development incentives
 - Promoting and investing in the Hampton Roads Shared Services Alliance (HRSSA)
- Continue to engage with VA Department of Education in consolidation of child care licensing and subsidy program standards
- Exploring options for philanthropic, business and other community supports for childcare systems and "family friendly" practices

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MINUS 9 TO 5
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