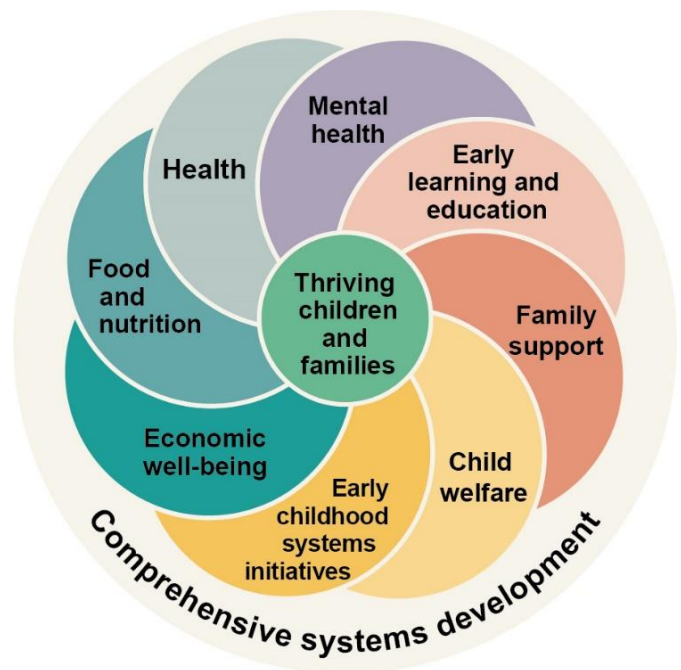


Early Childhood Systems Collective Impact Project

Recommendations to support child and family well-being for expectant parents, children ages 0 to 8, and their families through enhanced alignment, coordination, and equity across federal programs



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Early Childhood Systems Collective Impact Project: Recommendations to support child and family well-being for expectant parents, children ages 0 to 8, and their families through enhanced alignment, coordination, and equity across federal programs

Inspired by a call from the field, leaders across federal agencies, including the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Agriculture, have identified a shared vision for improving health and well-being outcomes for young children and their families. Yet, there remains significant need for greater coordination and alignment at the federal level to advance the development of a unified, comprehensive early childhood system at the state and local levels.

Funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Early Childhood Systems (ECS) Collective Impact Project aims to help advance a unified system and a coordinated approach to implementation of early childhood programs. The project’s recommendations are designed to accelerate equitable early childhood and family well-being outcomes. These recommendations reflect the voices of the field, encompassing those of family leaders with lived experience, program staff, federal and state administrators, and experts and advocates across multiple sectors. While these recommendations leverage existing resources and recommendations previously developed by a range of organizations, this resource aims—at the request of the project’s federal funders—to offer a comprehensive set of recommendations designed to inform and guide federal action across multiple agencies.

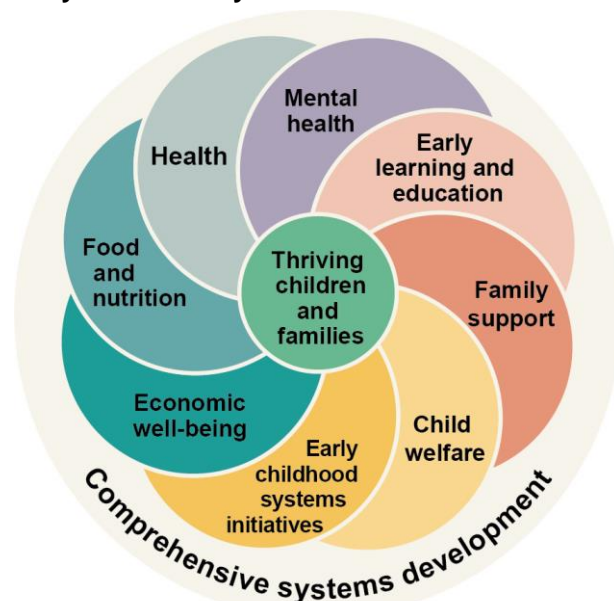
A vision of a coordinated and comprehensive childhood system guides the project (Exhibit 1). Thriving children and families are the goal.

Comprehensive systems development focused on early childhood and family well-being in the sectors illustrated in Exhibit 1 (and others not included in the project) offers the means to accomplish that goal.

Anticipated long-term impacts of this project include:

- Generating action on recommendations that improve the collective impact of early childhood federal programs
- Increasing coordination and alignment of programs at federal, state, tribal, local and grant recipient levels
- Ensuring better and more equitable outcomes in the areas of child and family health, development, and well-being

Exhibit 1. A vision of a coordinated, comprehensive early childhood system



About this document

This document presents 10 interrelated recommendations for achieving equitable early childhood and family well-being outcomes through creation of a coordinated, comprehensive early childhood system. The 10 recommendations are organized into four overarching themes: 1) build a foundation for interagency coordination, 2) align and coordinate key program elements, 3) involve and empower the voices and perspectives of families and care providers, and 4) provide leadership for comprehensive, integrated data and research. Each recommendation has a series of corresponding federal actions to achieve a re-envisioned early childhood system that can build on the strengths and meet the needs of young children and families.

The recommendations draw on information gathered throughout the ECS Collective Impact Project, bringing a range of perspectives from the broader field to the actions that can support more equitable outcomes via a more effective, coordinated early childhood system. We used a series of tasks to inform the recommendations, including:

- A [catalog](#) of 36 federal programs' statutes, regulations, and guidance that describes program requirements around five key program elements (Exhibit 2)
- A [crosswalk](#) of requirements across programs' statutes, regulations, and guidance that highlights areas of alignment and misalignment around the five key program elements
- A high-level review of 10 states' public documents for indicators of coordination, alignment, and equity (such as multi-sector governance or advisory bodies, shared goals and logic models, data systems and dashboards, and integrated eligibility processes); this review was internal, and its findings are incorporated into the recommendations
- A high-level review of 10 examples from national literature, recommendations, and initiatives on alignment and coordination of early childhood programs centered on the five program elements identified in Exhibit 2, systems integration (such as governance and data systems), and aspects of funding (such as availability, adequacy, and approaches to funding); this review was internal, and its findings are incorporated into the recommendations
- 30 interviews with federal, state, and tribal key informants engaged in system- and program-level coordination, alignment, and equity and with program participants (parent leaders) to understand their perspectives on challenges to, and opportunities for, coordination; summarized in a public [brief](#)
- Two technical working groups that provided insights and guidance on systems building efforts: one with federal program staff and one with individuals who have research, program administration, policy, and practice experience

These recommendations are advisory and are not federal policymaking or an assertion that these are the only ways to achieve a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system that supports equitable child and family health and well-being. These recommendations reflect a series of actions that, individually and collectively, could create progress towards achieving that goal.

Recommendations range from those that may be accomplished in the shorter-term and under current statutes and regulations to those that are aspirational and may require significant time, effort, resources, and/or statutory change to implement. All recommendations likely require additional considerations and deliberations by federal agencies in collaboration with their partners to determine their merit, feasibility, and any needed modifications. Similarly, to prioritize, sequence and implement these recommendations

effectively, federal leadership, resources, and coordination, as well as detailed work plans, will be necessary. Across each action, it is crucial to incorporate the voices of diverse families with young children, and of family leaders with lived experience.

- While the project’s primary focus is to develop recommendations that address unintended federal barriers to early childhood systems coordination, many recommendations can be implemented at the state and local levels. Where available, some recommended actions are accompanied by examples of existing practices, providing a potential starting point for further action and capitalizing on current efforts.

Exhibit 2. Key program elements for alignment and coordination



- The actions are marked to identify the federal policy levers that can be leveraged to accomplish each action. Those levers, described in more detail below, include executive / administrative action, statutory change, financial resources, and training / technical assistance. Each action may require multiple policy levers to implement and accomplish in a scaled, sustainable manner.
- The details of how to accomplish each action are not prescribed. Even if there is a shared commitment to adopt a recommendation, each federal program will need to consider how to adopt the recommendation given their authorities, make a commitment to planning and implementing the actions, and shape them in ways that are responsive to their own contexts.
- Central to the success of systems building is for leaders—including family leaders, staff, and partners—to approach the actions with an open mind about what actions are feasible in the short-term to produce early successes and what actions require longer-term commitment to achieve identified goals. Each program has the opportunity to find actions they are already doing or can use as a starting point before tackling those requiring more involved implementation.
- Recommendations and actions are interconnected. Systems building is not linear; many actions can be taken at once without waiting for other actions to be accomplished.

Orientation to the recommendations

Exhibit 3 shows 10 high-level recommendations, with some motivational context for each. The full recommendations are available following this introduction.

Exhibit 3: Recommendations to support child and family well-being for expectant parents, children ages 0 to 8, and their families through enhanced alignment, coordination, and equity across federal programs

Recommendations to build a foundation for interagency coordination at the federal level



1. Establish a comprehensive, supportive infrastructure for systems building at the federal level

Federal leadership is necessary to facilitate program coordination and alignment to support child and family well-being and equity



2. Develop a shared vision and guiding framework for child and family well-being and equity

A comprehensive framework for early childhood systems—that starts with a commitment to child and family well-being and equity—will help programs achieve their unique purposes, while advancing towards a shared vision for thriving children and families



3. Establish and use common definitions, including for coordination, equity, and child and family well-being

With shared concepts and vocabulary, partners can better identify and work towards common goals

Recommendations to align and coordinate elements across programs



4. Improve families' access to services through streamlined eligibility requirements, reciprocal eligibility, and coordinated program entry

One-door entry into multiple program services can help overcome bureaucratic barriers for families and facilitate their access and participation in programs supporting child and family well-being and equity



5. Coordinate, streamline, and center families' strengths and equity in needs assessments across federal programs

Coordinated needs assessments are an important step towards breaking down historic and current systemic barriers between programs that have prevented individuals from accessing and receiving services and realizing equitable outcomes



6. Define and track common outcomes focused on equity, child and family well-being, coordination, and systems change

To measure success, programs should align around common goals

Recommendations to involve and empower people to build and sustain a well-functioning system



7. Elevate family perspective and voice in decision-making about service coordination and systems change

Programs need input from families to ensure they are providing family-centered, equitable, and comprehensive services



8. Build a diverse, capable, respected, and well-compensated early childhood service delivery workforce to contribute to systems change

The early childhood service delivery workforce, spanning early care and education, maternal and child health, and family support providers, would benefit from adequate compensation, professional development, and recognition

Recommendations to provide leadership for improved federal data and coordinated research



9. Create effective mechanisms for data sharing and integrated federal data systems

Shared and integrated data are essential for program improvement and monitoring progress towards common goals of child and family well-being and equity



10. Develop a federal research agenda that guides evaluation, scale-up, and implementation of systems building and collaboration efforts

Research can track and evaluate efforts to improve collaboration and coordination to advance child and family well-being and equity

Each of the 10 recommendations begins with a statement of the recommendation goal and purpose, followed by specific actions that the federal government could take to achieve the recommendation. Each recommendation includes two sections. The first section, *Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs*, is intended to focus on systems-level coordination across federal agencies required to advance a unified early childhood system. The second section, *Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients*, is intended to identify actions that individual federal program offices can take to promote systems building to their individual grant recipients. Many recommendations in the first section reflect collective actions across the federal government that can also be implemented and executed by individual program offices, but are not repeated in both sections. Each recommendation also includes examples gathered through ECS Collective Impact Project activities that exemplify specific actions.

Recommendations highlight the need for the federal government to maximize use of all policy levers at its disposal (for example, funding and funding announcements, rulemaking, guidance, governance, staffing, technical assistance, research, and communication) to support the implementation of recommendations for states, tribes, localities, and grant recipients. In each recommendation, we identify one or more levers necessary for each federal action to happen, using the following notation:

- **Relies on executive / administrative action [E]**. This notation indicates that the action can be accomplished through regulation, guidance, research, funding announcements, communication mechanisms, or other administrative action available within federal agencies and programs.
- **Requires statutory change [S]**. This notation indicates that statutory change is necessary to implement or accomplish the action.
- **Needs financial resources [F]**. This notation indicates that the action is not possible without new or additional resource investment. All actions would benefit from dedicated, direct funding to achieve scale and sustainability, but some actions could not be implemented or accomplished without new or additional resource investment. This is often the case with systems coordination efforts. Federal agencies will be best equipped to assess the extent to which financial resources will be needed to accomplish each goal. The absence of this notation should not be interpreted to mean that additional resources are not needed.
- **Involves training / technical assistance [T]**. This notation indicates that the action could be implemented through training and technical assistance.

The focus of this project is to drive federal action to facilitate and accelerate coordination and systems development. Yet there are many actions that states, tribes, localities, and grant recipients—where the details of service delivery are decided and carried out—can take within current requirements and flexibilities. We recognize that states, tribes, localities, and grant recipients are doing exemplary work to align and coordinate programs within the current context, and that there is active federal coordination to support this tremendous work. These recommendations aim to guide the federal government to take additional valuable steps to fully realize a comprehensive, coordinated, aligned, and equitable early childhood system.

Glossary of key terms

Alignment. Making program requirements or guidance—for example, on eligibility, data collection, reporting, or family engagement—more similar to each other so they can be streamlined (and possibly combined) across programs.

Coordination. Working across different programs to manage services and information for the same young children and their families with a goal of making program processes more efficient and making it easier for families to access and navigate multiple programs.

Equity. Providing consistent and equitable access to comprehensive services and systems, fair and just treatment to all children and families and those who support them, and ensuring that regardless of their characteristics, all children and families have opportunities to reach their full potential.

Eligibility criteria. The characteristics that participants must have to participate in a program and receive services, or the criteria that programs must meet to receive funding. For example, criteria could include individual eligibility requirements to participate in the program, program eligibility requirements to receive funding, state eligibility requirements to receive funding, or a combination.

Needs assessments. Process typically used to gather data and information about communities to identify needs for and gaps in services, and to learn about community strengths to build on and inform strategic planning and service provision.

Outcomes and performance measures. An outcome is a long-term goal that answers the question, “What would it look like if the program, service, or intervention succeeded?” Performance measures include the specific and quantifiable indicators that demonstrate how much progress a person, group, or other entity is making towards a desired outcome. Areas of common outcome and performance measures across early childhood programs include child development and well-being, early identification and monitoring of potential concerns, school readiness, family well-being, parent well-being, access to services, program quality, equity, workforce capacities, and service coordination and other systems-level outcomes (for example, improvements in coordination and referrals with other community resources). These measures need to reflect what is important to families themselves.

Well-being metrics. The specific metrics that measure and recognize family and community resiliency, strengths, and needs or related systems-level metrics. Metrics or measures of children’s well-being might include development and school readiness, health, avoidance of maltreatment, and positive parenting practices. Metrics of family well-being might include maternal health, a family’s economic self-sufficiency, and program linkages and referrals. Systems-level metrics might include community-level data on service availability or service coordination and referrals. These measures need to reflect what is important to families themselves.

Coordinating councils. Bodies made up of individuals who (1) bring a range of perspectives, information and experiences from working across federal programs that serve young children and families and (2) have the authority to make and implement policies, practices, and improvements that affect multiple programs.



Recommendation 1: Establish a comprehensive, supportive infrastructure for systems building at the federal level

Federal leadership is necessary to facilitate program coordination and alignment to support child and family well-being and equity

Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Create and fund a high-level senior official position within each federal agency with responsibility for leading interagency coordination and has authority over policy and funding decisions (<i>Example 1</i>)	✓		✓	
2) Establish a federal coordinating council of program, grants management, and policy staff that can be sustained across administrations (<i>Example 2</i>)	✓		✓	
3) Outline clear responsibilities in job descriptions and allow for dedicated time for program staff to contribute to cross-program or cross-agency coordination planning and implementation	✓		✓	
4) Map the flow of funding across early childhood programs and technical assistance centers to identify opportunities for greater efficiency and impact	✓			✓
5) Incentivize and support the coordinated formation or continuation of state coordinating councils to lead systems building in states through (1) program funding announcements or (2) authorizing legislation for programs (<i>Example 3</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓
6) Develop coordinated communication structures for state, tribal, and local coordinating councils to provide input into federal assistance for systems development	✓			
7) Provide grant recipient funding (at the state, tribal, or local level) to support systems development and integrate requirements that stimulate coordination with other programs into Notices of Funding Opportunity (<i>Example 4</i>)	✓		✓	
8) Align durations of program funding authorizations through legislation to support a whole-child approach to providing services across programs		✓		
9) Deliver professional development and cross-sector online learning modules for program staff and grant recipients that provide concrete strategies and active dialogue to stimulate collaborative service delivery			✓	✓
10) Plan coordinated federal technical assistance to help states, tribes, and localities leverage funding to implement system development and support coordinated services (<i>Example 5</i>)			✓	✓
11) Fund coordinated leadership development and technical assistance opportunities for state, tribal, and local leaders on effective coordination of services and supports (<i>Example 6</i>)	✓		✓	✓

Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Identify a leader in each federal program who has authority over program policy and funding decisions to lead change and support program staff to work toward coordination and collaboration	✓			
2) Expand use of federal funding to support systems building by (1) adding to or developing flexible funding mechanisms (<i>Example 7</i>) or (2) using or creating set-asides within program discretionary funding, through statutory changes where needed, to support grant recipient staff time and capacity to pursue coordination across programs (<i>Example 8</i>)		✓	✓	
3) Create accountability in use of flexible funds by requiring and funding programs to assess the quality or impact of coordinated services and systems in program guidance or regulations	✓		✓	✓
4) Leverage program and policy levers to accelerate the development of state, local, tribal, and grant recipient infrastructure that can support system development	✓			✓

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Examples of existing practices from project activities

1. From 2009 to 2011, a deputy assistant secretary and inter-departmental liaison for Early Childhood Development in the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and a deputy assistant secretary for policy and early learning in the U.S. Department of Education led interagency efforts to coordinate services and elevate the needs of young children.
2. In 2010, the secretaries of the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services formed an Early Learning Interagency Policy Board (IPB) to advise the secretaries on how better to align programs and systems and improve coordination and administration of federally funded early learning programs serving children from birth to age 8. In 2016, the IPB expanded to include the periodic participation of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Defense and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the U.S. Department of the Interior.
3. Head Start's authorizing legislation includes requirements specifying the membership of the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care and the State Advisory Committee's responsibilities. One of the responsibilities is to "identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among Federally-funded and State-funded child development, child care, and early childhood education programs and services, including collaboration and coordination among State agencies responsible for administering such programs" (42 U.S.C. §9837).
4. The Fiscal Year 2020 Preschool Development Grant Birth–5 (PDG B–5) Renewal Grants required applicants to describe how the state would update its PDG B–5 statewide strategic plan to meet nine requirements, many focused on coordination of the ECE B–5 system. In addition, bonus points could be awarded to applicants that proposed to use grant funds to support a coordinated application, eligibility, and enrollment process.
5. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation developed a tool to assist states and local communities in braiding, blending, or layering several federal funding streams (for example, Head Start and CCDF) to increase the supply of quality early child care and education and increase access to comprehensive early childhood and family support services within a coordinated, comprehensive early childhood system. In particular, the tool will help those interested in braiding funds from several streams develop a better understanding of the nature of the process and identify needed resources (Gonzalez and Caronongan 2021).
6. During the COVID-19 pandemic, federal staff of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program worked in partnership with federal staff of Head Start and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau to develop and share technical assistance materials with state grant recipients to help them address the mental health needs of struggling families and child care providers.
7. Colorado used the flexibility of American Rescue Plan funds to gather input from individuals and groups with a wide range of perspectives on program alignment and coordination, to develop strategies to improve services and coordination based on that input, and to build the strategies into state spending plans. South Carolina used Preschool Development Grant funding that was critical to supporting and sustaining its system-building work that spans health and safety, child welfare, child care, and maternal health.
8. The Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant program of the Health Resources and Services Administration includes funding for Community Integrated Service Systems (CISS) projects that support local service delivery capacity and build community service systems for mothers and children.



Recommendation 2: Develop a shared vision and guiding framework for child and family well-being and equity

A comprehensive framework for early childhood systems—that starts with a commitment to child and family well-being and equity—will help programs achieve their unique purposes, while advancing towards a shared vision for thriving children and families

Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Commit time and resources at the federal level to bring together families, community members, service providers, policymakers, and researchers to develop or refine a comprehensive framework to guide an early childhood system	✓		✓	
a) Review and identify the strengths and gaps of early childhood system frameworks that are already in use at the federal and state levels	✓			
b) Leverage existing interagency policy groups and family and community councils—and establish smaller, inclusive, working groups as needed—to create shared priorities for a framework (<i>Example 1</i>)	✓			
c) Ensure tribal leadership and tribal and state agency staff contribute to the framework by sharing their perspectives and community practices	✓			
2) Ensure the framework is cross-sector and anchored in a holistic vision of child and family well-being, incorporates the importance of promoting early relational health and strengthening protective factors—including meeting the essential needs of families—and reflects the urgency of providing prevention services (<i>Example 2</i>)	✓			
3) Ensure the framework is grounded in a commitment to equity and recognition of existing disparities in equitable design, delivery, and evaluation of early childhood programs and services	✓			
4) Ensure the framework articulates cross-sector and long-term outcomes and returns on investment to help drive financing of preventive systems development	✓			
5) Adopt the framework for the design, delivery, and evaluation of an early childhood system across federal programs, through Executive Order or joint agency statements	✓			
6) Stimulate adoption of the framework by requiring its use across program authorizations and appropriations or in cross-program regulations and guidance	✓	✓		
7) Train program leadership, staff, grant recipients, funding applicants, service delivery providers, and other key partners in using the framework to guide services (<i>Example 3</i>)			✓	✓
8) Revise language in federal program statutes and regulations to be strengths-based, respectful of families, and refrain from using terms that are deficit-oriented like “high-risk”	✓	✓		
9) Use program guidance to consistently emphasize and reinforce family-centered services that use strengths and asset-based approaches (<i>Example 4</i>)	✓			
10) Map resources in the system to assess whether resources are contributing to disparities or advancing equity	✓			
11) Revise program regulations or requirements to build a more inclusive, equitable, and comprehensive system of services through broader participation by grant recipients and service providers	✓		✓	

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Encourage states and grant recipients to use the comprehensive framework through Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), potentially awarding additional points to applicants that apply the framework	✓		✓	
2) Encourage a process of continuous quality improvement (CQI) through program guidance or NOFOs to assess whether services are achieving the purposes set out in the framework and to facilitate connection with other programs or agencies. This CQI process should involve families and community partners with lived experience	✓			✓
3) Engage with a range of eligible grant recipients and service providers through listening sessions to learn about program regulations or requirements that inhibit their ability to participate in the early childhood system (<i>Example 5</i>)	✓			
4) Assess actual and potential impacts on equity in the organizations or entities that get funded and the families who receive services	✓			

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Examples of existing practices from project activities

1. The U.S. Department of Education recently created a National Parents and Families Engagement Council to facilitate strong and effective relationships between schools and parents, families, and caregivers.
2. The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) uses the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) to ground its Healthy People 2030 initiative in a framework that considers how the conditions in which people live, work, and play can contribute to their health, well-being and quality of life. The SDOH are categorized into economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.
3. Colorado uses the Strengthening Families' five protective factors as a framework underlying the design, delivery and evaluation of all early childhood programs. The state offers training on the framework to all early childhood professionals working across programs for young children and their families.
4. Head Start uses the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework (PFCE) to guide authentic relationship building and goal setting among program staff, families, family members, and their children. Across all levels (program foundations, program impact areas, family outcomes, and child outcomes), PFCE strives to support equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness.
5. HHS's Administration for Children and Families Regions 6 and 9 hosted a virtual listening meeting in May 2022 to engage with individuals working in state programs and communities about workforce shortages in early care and education and learn how federal resources could help.



Recommendation 3: Establish and use common definitions, including for coordination, equity, and child and family well-being

With shared concepts and vocabulary, partners can better identify and work towards common goals

Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Identify priority terms related to equity, well-being, and systems development so federal programs can use shared and consistent terms (<i>Example 1</i>)	✓			
2) Co-create definitions for priority terms with a range of partners and perspectives, including people with lived experience	✓		✓	
3) Define terms clearly and consistently, but broadly enough to allow future specification based on the implementation sector and context	✓			
4) Define child and family well-being broadly to include social determinants of health and early learning, such as early relational health, community and environmental safety, and economic and neighborhood opportunity (<i>Examples 2 and 3</i>)	✓			
5) Develop a definition of family that considers diverse family structures and living arrangements to support comprehensive measurement of family outcomes (<i>Example 4</i>)	✓			
6) Have a consistent definition of early childhood to reduce families' challenges with programs' different age eligibility	✓			
7) Use strengths-based terms, and consider holistic needs of children and families in definitions	✓			
8) Ground definitions in the context of the history of racism within public programs and services and respect of tribal sovereignty (<i>Example 5</i>)	✓			
9) Incorporate common definitions that comprehensively describe the whole child and family and highlight alignment and coordination into statutory language across programs		✓		
10) Provide training to support program staff, grant recipients, and contractors in consistently using common definitions across activities			✓	✓

Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Use common definitions and consistent terminology in program regulations and guidance documents and when communicating with program staff	✓			
2) Use common definitions to guide data collection activities within and across programs	✓			✓
3) Apply definitions and terms in Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFO)	✓			

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Examples of existing practices from project activities

1. In the guidance document, *Advancing Equity and Inclusion Through the Child and Family Services Reviews*, the Children's Bureau defines six terms related to equity and inclusion (disparity, disproportionality, diversity, equity, inclusion, and underserved and marginalized populations), stating the importance of developing a shared understanding of terms.
2. The 2021 Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) NOFO defines early childhood developmental health and family well-being as "a range of processes and outcomes associated with children's and caregivers' safety and well-being over time, including positive physical health and functioning; mental and emotional well-being; social behavior and development; cognitive, linguistic, and academic development; safe, stable, and nurturing relationships between children and caregivers; a sense of meaning, engagement, positive relationships, competence, positive emotion, and self-esteem; and opportunities for educational advancement and economic mobility, including access to critical supports." (p. 38).
3. The 2022 Infant and Toddler Court Program NOFO defines early developmental health and well-being as "positive physical health and functioning; mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being; social behavior and development; cognitive, linguistic, and academic development; safe, stable, and nurturing relationships between children and caregivers; a sense of meaning, engagement, positive relationships, competence, positive emotion, and self-esteem." (p. 55).
4. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education released a joint policy statement on family engagement that clearly defined family as "inclusive of all adults who interact with early childhood systems in support of their child, to include biological, adoptive, and foster parents; grandparents; legal and informal guardians; and adult siblings."
5. Executive Order 13985 (2021), *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government*, defines racial equity and how it can be advanced within the federal government. Programs, such as the Title IV-E Child and Family Services Review use the executive order to develop practice guidelines.



Recommendation 4: Improve families’ access to services through streamlined eligibility requirements, reciprocal eligibility, and coordinated program entry

One-door entry into multiple program services can help overcome bureaucratic barriers for families and facilitate their access and participation in programs supporting child and family well-being and equity

Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Build on existing work that maps out different eligibility requirements across programs (<i>Example 1</i>)	✓			
2) Cross-train staff about related programs to ensure the federal workforce is broadly aware of policies, regulations, and procedures across complementary early childhood programs to support family outreach and access				✓
3) Use guidance and rulemaking to align cross-program eligibility and increase the categories for automatic eligibility or priority status for enrollment (based on individual characteristics, including families in which a caregiver is a child care, health care, or otherwise essential worker) (<i>Examples 2, 3, and 4</i>)	✓	✓		
4) Align eligibility timelines so families can maintain program eligibility longer and are recertifying for programs at the same time	✓	✓		
5) Limit the required frequency of program redetermination to reduce administrative burdens for families	✓	✓		
6) Issue programmatic guidance to support the creation of a uniform application or centralized intake mechanism for multiple early childhood programs and services (<i>Examples 5 and 6</i>)	✓			
7) Dedicate financial resources across programs to build, strengthen, or expand a grant recipient-level coordinated intake and referral system			✓	
8) Assess benefit cliffs and revise program regulations or statutes where needed to ensure that, as income increases, programs’ benefits and services are phased out gradually (<i>Example 7</i>)	✓	✓		
9) Use more comprehensive measures of need to determine program eligibility—for example, the Self Sufficiency Standard (<i>Example 8</i>)—or define more inclusive, consistent income ranges for aligning eligibility requirements—for example, by using the U.S. Census Supplemental Poverty Measure (<i>Example 9</i>)		✓		
10) Endorse a two-generation approach to aligning program eligibility, such as using program guidance to align child care subsidy eligibility policies with adult education and workforce development program enrollment	✓	✓		
11) Develop a cross-program funding opportunity to (1) provide transportation assistance for families to access in-person services, or (2) to help families access technological tools for virtual services (for example, computers, laptops, high-speed Internet access)	✓	✓	✓	
12) Provide supports to grant recipients, states, and tribes—through program guidance, technical assistance, and funding—to streamline eligibility for and increase access to age-appropriate mental health resources and services that have often been disconnected from other early childhood programs	✓		✓	✓
13) Make permanent some of the flexibilities provided to states during the COVID-19 pandemic—for example, if needed by families, the ability to provide some services and complete redetermination virtually rather than in person	✓	✓		

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Provide funding and technical assistance support for states and localities to build an information technology (IT) infrastructure to establish a streamlined all-in-one eligibility process			✓	✓
2) Provide funding for states to compile required eligibility information across early childhood programs (for example, child's birth history, family financial information) that can be accessed by each program, with family consent and protecting family privacy	✓		✓	
3) Provide technical assistance or issue guidance to state and local public assistance staff on the range of earned income disregards (income not considered when determining eligibility) that can improve access to federal benefit programs. For example, clarify that receipt of tribal dividends (dividends from the government distributed as compensation for tribes) can be disregarded	✓			✓
4) Fund grant recipients to build mechanisms for follow-through with families to coordinate service receipt across programs. Examine current programmatic efforts to understand effective outreach, recruitment, and enrollment (<i>Examples 10 and 11</i>)			✓	
5) Provide federal resources and guidance to increase the co-location of services in easily accessible and trusted places	✓		✓	
6) Establish service locations in current service deserts to support availability of services among chronically underfunded communities, as identified by individuals with lived experience	✓		✓	
7) Articulate in guidance and rulemaking that grants should be awarded based on criteria that advance the goals of the program or service, centering goals related to promoting equity and reducing families' administrative burdens	✓	✓		
8) Fund grant recipient and service delivery staff training opportunities related to developmental screenings and whole family assessments to support coordinated service entry processes			✓	✓

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Examples of existing practices from project activities

1. South Carolina First Steps conducted a whole system analysis and eligibility landscape mapping of 44 early childhood programs, each having different eligibility requirements, to identify commonalities. Conducting this mapping process led to the First Five one-stop eligibility portal.
2. Using program guidance, the Office of Head Start expanded its interpretation of “public assistance” within the Head Start statute, such that eligibility for SNAP benefits now confers automatic eligibility for Head Start programs.
3. WIC outlines reciprocal eligibility with SNAP and TANF in its statutes, regulation, and guidance documents.
4. The Children’s Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 (CHIPRA) created the express lane eligibility (ELE) option for effectively enrolling eligible children in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). ELE allows states to use information from state income tax data, income, household size, or other factors of eligibility from other programs to support and streamline enrollment in health coverage.
5. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued time-limited exceptions to the Office of Management and Budget requirements that promoted states’ abilities to integrate human services program eligibility determinations within their health data systems.
6. In 1991, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture published a model application form to allow families to apply for benefits simultaneously under several maternal and child assistance programs.
7. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation released a research series using a microsimulation model which examined the effects of marginal tax rates for households of low-income.
8. An alternative to the official federal poverty level measure, the Self Sufficiency Standard is a living wage measure that determines the amount of income required for families to meet basic needs, while considering family composition, ages of children, and geographic differences.
9. The U.S. Census Supplemental Poverty Measure is a way of measuring poverty that includes both cash resources and noncash benefits from social service programs, as well as accounting for taxes and necessary expenses.
10. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funds the Continuum of Care Program, which creates regional or local planning groups that use coordinated entry processes to facilitate coordination between housing and early childhood services and prioritize provision of services based on families’ needs.
11. The Family Level Assessment and State of Home Visiting (FLASH-V) outreach and recruitment study investigated how Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)-funded programs supported recruitment of families, finding that nurturing relationships with referral partners was particularly important.



Recommendation 5: Coordinate, streamline, and center families’ strengths and equity in needs assessments across federal programs

Coordinated needs assessments are an important step towards breaking down historic and current systemic barriers between programs that have prevented individuals from accessing and receiving services and realizing equitable outcomes

Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Collectively assess the usefulness of and need for current statutory requirements for needs assessments. Reevaluate how needs assessments can prioritize communities’ and families’ needs	✓	✓		
2) Coordinate and align needs assessment elements and requirements (for example, timing, data elements) of federal programs or funding streams, acknowledging that some programs have more tailored goals and needs than others	✓	✓		
3) Issue program guidance that requires states to engage families in developing, conducting, analyzing, and using needs assessments and in developing grant proposals	✓			
4) Use statutes, regulations, and program guidance to ensure that shared needs assessments across programs and agencies reflect a systems-level perspective. For example, include elements related to coordination and community-level service availability (<i>Example 1</i>)	✓	✓		
5) Use regulations and program guidance to grant states flexibility in satisfying the elements and requirements of their needs assessments while being responsive to state-level context, community needs, and policy priorities	✓			
6) Use statutory or regulatory changes, as needed, to allow collaboration across programs to meet requirements for needs assessments	✓	✓		
7) Use statutory or regulatory language to require a focus on understanding disparities (based on race or ethnicity, tribal status, poverty level, disability status, geography, or other factors)	✓	✓		
8) Support the creation of action-oriented equity impact plans to remedy disparities identified through needs assessments—for example, outlining plans to collect and analyze disaggregated data (<i>Examples 2 and 3</i>)	✓			✓
9) Use data from periodic needs assessments at the federal level to inform gaps in service and support comprehensive planning as part of a continuous quality improvement process	✓			

Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Support programs’ efforts to work with other programs to create community-level needs assessments that take a family-driven, whole-child approach	✓			
2) Support families’ sharing of their strengths, needs, and goals, to drive personalized supports and links to coordinated services (<i>Example 4</i>)	✓			
3) Provide technical assistance to help programs use needs assessments to better understand and remedy any disconnect between the number of people eligible versus enrolled in services				✓
4) Provide technical assistance for conducting and analyzing results from needs assessments to encourage and support program-level and community capacity building				✓

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Examples of existing practices from project activities

1. The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program requires awardees to describe efforts related to coordination with early childhood partners to support early childhood systems as part of their needs assessment.
2. The Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems program 2021 Notice of Funding Opportunity encouraged applicants to include a discussion of disparities in service access or child and family outcomes related to race or ethnicity, tribal status, poverty level, or geography that would be relevant to the program in their needs assessment. A system asset and gap analysis that includes equity is expected of awardees during implementation.
3. The comprehensive needs assessment required by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education (SNAP-Ed) considers characteristics of the focal population that might face systemic barriers. The assessment is required to consider the diverse characteristics of the focal population and the needs of tribal populations. It addresses why the intervention focused on certain populations and whether services are already being delivered to these populations.
4. Tribal MIECHV Development and Implementation grant recipients and Tribal MIECHV Implementation and Expansion grant recipients are required to conduct or update community needs and readiness assessments. Grant recipients must articulate their community and organizational strengths as part of this assessment and describe how these strengths influence their program's vision, goals, objectives, and design.



Recommendation 6: Define and track common outcomes focused on coordination, equity, well-being, and systems change

To measure success, programs should align around common goals

Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Establish a common set of family and child outcomes as part of a repository of allowable measures across key domains for use by all federal programs for young children (<i>Example 1</i>)	✓			
a) Ensure that proposed outcome and equity measures undergo iterative review by and reflect the input of (1) a diverse group of parents with young children who participate in federal programs and (2) the family-led, family-serving organizations that can provide recommendations from a diverse range of families. Ensure that outreach to families is culturally and linguistically appropriate	✓			
b) Assess cultural appropriateness of measures to ensure relevance to a diverse range of families and programs	✓			
2) Use program guidance to prioritize and promote the development and use of common measures of well-being, family strengths, assets, and positive experiences	✓			
3) Establish a common set of equity measures (<i>Examples 2 and 3</i>). Define overarching equity goals and assess benchmarks of equity in partnership with individuals with lived experience	✓			
4) Incorporate shared equity goals into Requests for Proposals (RFP) and Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFO) that lend themselves to tracking by common measures	✓		✓	
5) Require specific measures of equity, impact on equity, disparities, inequities, and impacts on or reductions in disparities as part of programs' statutes, regulations, or guidance	✓	✓		
6) Support development and implementation of measures of the effectiveness of systems development, coordination, and collaboration, in partnership with three key groups: (1) the families who are the intended beneficiaries, (2) those tasked with providing and ensuring access to such programs, and (3) those building early childhood systems	✓		✓	✓
7) Use program guidance to encourage the use of similar screening tools and assessments across programs to support the coordination of services during the service entry process	✓			
8) Develop common accountability metrics for population outcomes to track progress towards goals across federal programs	✓			
9) Conduct joint monitoring of programs from the federal level to encourage common outcomes. Ensure family leaders and family-led, family-serving organizations are included in this joint monitoring	✓		✓	
10) Provide financial support and technical assistance for development of the infrastructure at the federal, state, and local levels needed to gather and analyze data for the common measures (<i>Example 4</i>)			✓	✓
11) Use clear and accessible language and format in training and technical assistance documents related to program performance and outcomes to facilitate use across programs				✓
12) Dedicate funding to improve methods for establishing and recording complete and accurate information about demographics and identity, including gender, race, ethnicity, and language			✓	
13) Ground data analysis in historical racism and structural disparities, including training for program staff who collect and interpret data				✓

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Require states, through statute and guidance, to track outcomes and equity measures <i>at the population level</i>	✓	✓		
2) Use program guidance to encourage disaggregation of data (such as by income and by race/ethnicity, language, and income) and reporting for all funding streams. Leverage data to monitor disparities and inequities	✓			
3) Incentivize states to support implementation of the same or similar measures at the locality level			✓	
4) Offer technical assistance to support states', territories', and other jurisdictions' continuous quality improvement through use of data				✓

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Examples of existing practices from project activities

1. The Children's Health Insurance Program and Medicaid rely on common child and family well-being measures.
2. Healthy Start assesses disparities in infant mortality rates to understand whether the program has helped reduce the infant mortality rate in specified jurisdictions.
3. Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act measures the difference between the percentage of American Indian and Alaska Native students in grades 3 through 8 meeting state achievement standards by scoring at or above the proficient level in reading and math on state assessments.
4. The Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five funds data infrastructure to collect data from different programs in their statewide delivery system.



Recommendation 7: Elevate family perspective and voice in decision-making about service coordination and systems change

Programs need input from families to ensure they are providing family-centered, equitable, and comprehensive services

Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Convene a family advisory council that works with program administrators across federal programs to inform coordination efforts and support program and policy development (<i>Example 1</i>)	✓			
2) Provide training for federal staff on how to build trust and equal partnerships among community residents, service participants, and program leaders—including those with lived experience—by acknowledging and integrating the social, political, and historical context into interactions (<i>Example 2</i>)				✓
3) Reexamine and revise Paperwork Reduction Act requirements around data collection to allow for greater family involvement in decision-making and respectfully compensate families for their time and participation		✓		
4) Support, through Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) or program guidance, the creation of dedicated leadership opportunities within programs for community and family representatives (<i>Examples 3 and 4</i>)	✓		✓	
5) Define meaningful family engagement in NOFOs so grant reviewers can appropriately assess proposed projects	✓		✓	
6) Provide agencies with the statutory authority to compensate families for their involvement in decision-making and leadership opportunities		✓	✓	
7) Identify and incorporate common language into funding opportunities to encourage programs' outreach to and engagement with families. This approach is designed to raise awareness about available supports, promote understanding of early childhood services, and encourage program participation and family leadership among members of underserved groups (<i>Example 5</i>)	✓	✓		
8) Outline, in program guidance, required measures of program implementation and methods for implementation monitoring that prioritize families' engagement and satisfaction with services (<i>Example 6</i>)	✓			
9) Affirm, through statute, regulation, or program guidance, the value of all cultures, languages, races, ethnicities, and abilities represented across the families participating in programs (<i>Examples 7 and 8</i>)	✓	✓		

Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Require states to engage families in needs assessments related to services, both as respondents, and as members of teams designing needs assessments, interpreting data, and making decisions about the state's proposed course of action	✓			
2) Identify or hire program staff to support linguistic and cultural responsiveness to families (<i>Example 8</i>)	✓		✓	
3) Articulate in guidance to grant recipients that they can use their grant or program funding for family engagement, including through direct stipends to family participants that recognize the value of their time	✓	✓		
4) Require grant applicants to specify family and community involvement throughout the grant-making process: for example, how they engaged families and communities in developing the application, plan to engage families in service design, will collaborate among programs serving similar populations, and how the program aligns with the community's cultural context	✓			
5) Encourage, through program guidance, the use of community input to drive decisions about allocation and spending of grant or program funds, while requiring accountability about how goals were accomplished (<i>Examples 9 and 10</i>)	✓			

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [L] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Examples of existing practices from project activities

1. The Recognize, Assist, Include, Support, and Engage (RAISE) Family Caregivers Act established the Family Caregiving Advisory Council. This council, comprising voting members who reflect the diversity of family caregivers and people who receive support, provides recommendations to the Secretary of HHS on effective models of family caregiving and support as well as on improving coordination across federal programs.
2. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) released a brief discussing methods and emerging strategies to engage people with lived experience to improve federal research, policy, and practice.
3. Family-to-Family Health Information Centers encourage families, health care professionals, and state or community organizations to partner in shared decision-making in supporting children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN). Program objectives include tracking and increasing the number of CYSHCN and families, particularly families from underrepresented and diverse communities who have undergone training to partner in the shared decision-making process.
4. The Early Childhood Comprehensive System NOFO states that applicants must “outline how they plan to . . . promote family leadership across the early childhood system” and “discuss how they will secure and support the involvement of a Family Leader, who will contribute to the planning and implementation of the project and support family engagement.”
5. For Community-Based Child Abuse and Prevention grants, the statute requires state applications to “include a description of outreach activities that the entity and the community-based and prevention-focused programs designed to strengthen and support families to prevent child abuse and neglect will undertake to maximize the participation of racial and ethnic minorities, children and adults with disabilities, homeless families and those at risk of homelessness, and members of other underserved or underrepresented groups” (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Section 204(8)).
6. IDEA Part B, Section 619 and IDEA Part C use program guidance to articulate measures of parent satisfaction and engagement. IDEA Part B, Section 619 requires states to report on the percentage of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. IDEA Part C requires states to report on the percentage of participating families reporting that early intervention services have helped the family know its rights, effectively communicate its children’s needs, and help its children develop and learn.
7. Head Start uses the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework (PFCE) to guide authentic relationship building and goal setting among program staff, families, family members, and their children. Across all levels (program foundations, program impact areas, family outcomes, and child outcomes), PFCE strives to support equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness.
8. In statute, the Health Center program requires health centers to identify staff members who are fluent in both the language of the relevant service population and English and who will provide guidance to appropriate staff members with respect to cultural sensitivities and bridging linguistic and cultural differences.
9. Military child care programs require a parent board to function in an advisory capacity for each child development center. The programs also require each center to provide a space in which parents can offer input regarding policies, procedures, and plans for meeting children’s needs.
10. The Health Center program requires that at least 51 percent of each center’s governing board include patients served by the health center and that governing boards should reflect the individuals served by the center with regard to race, ethnicity, and gender. Some responsibilities of governing boards include ensuring compliance with laws and regulations and adopting policies related to personnel, service eligibility, and financial management and practices.



Recommendation 8: Build a diverse, capable, respected, and well-compensated early childhood service delivery workforce to contribute to systems change

The early childhood service delivery workforce, spanning early care and education, maternal and child health, and family support professionals, would benefit from adequate compensation, professional development, and recognition

Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Develop a comprehensive definition of the early childhood service delivery workforce that encompasses the full range of providers across child and family serving sectors and settings (e.g., child care, education, health, mental health, family support, child welfare, libraries/museums), using broad and inclusive input	✓			
2) Promote adoption of this common definition through joint agency letters from leadership and by creating common language for use in program guidance	✓			
3) Provide funding to support a diverse, capable, inclusive, and well-compensated workforce sufficient to meet the needs of families and young children (<i>Example 1</i>)		✓	✓	
4) Invest training dollars to build a pipeline of workforce members in prenatal–8 programs			✓	✓
5) Invest resources in the professional development of the entire workforce, including family, friend, and neighbor caregivers; home visitors; community health workers; and family advocates, in formats and content tailored to their needs (<i>Example 2</i>)	✓		✓	✓
6) Review and consider revision of education or other access-based program training requirements for the workforce that disproportionately burden individuals of color and inhibit entry into, or progression within, their profession	✓			
7) Develop and communicate core competencies for the workforce appropriate to provider setting and type, and align with roles and responsibilities	✓			
8) Incorporate lived experience into credential requirements to elevate the importance of diverse perspectives in career preparation, training, and qualifications	✓			
9) Develop affordable, accessible ways to meet required skills-based education or training requirements to enhance equity in who can enter the workforce, advance in their responsibilities, and increase their compensation			✓	✓
10) Establish scholarship, mentorship, and apprenticeship opportunities to help people from underrepresented groups, especially people of color, advance to leadership roles (<i>Example 3</i>)	✓		✓	
11) Activate workforce development in disadvantaged communities by funding and supporting replication of strategies that have shown promise			✓	✓
12) Embed concrete examples and action steps to ensure equity in service access and delivery across all federally sponsored workforce training and technical assistance				✓
13) Develop common metrics that look at the composition and cultural competency of the workforce for use in needs assessments (<i>Example 4</i>)	✓			

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [R] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients

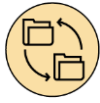
	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Promote diversity across the workforce by using program guidance and Notices of Funding Opportunities to encourage programs to prepare local community members to enter the workforce and provide services	✓			
2) Emphasize and support staff training on equity, leadership, quality improvement, data practices, and systems-building			✓	✓
3) Train service delivery staff on discrimination and stigma to ensure all persons receiving services feel valued and welcome and can receive culturally, linguistically, and ability appropriate services			✓	✓
4) Train service delivery staff on trauma-informed care to alleviate the stress on families and individuals of discussing traumatic experiences as they enter programs or receive multiple services			✓	✓

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Examples of existing practices from project activities

1. In June 2022, the Office of Head Start released an information memorandum that described providing competitive financial incentives via existing grant funds as a short-term strategy to invest in the Head Start workforce, promote retention of current staff, and recruit new staff to fill vacant positions.
2. The FY 20 Preschool Development Grant Birth–5 (PDG B–5) Renewal Grants required applicants to describe how they would provide professional development to the early childhood workforce. Applicants were required to discuss plans for eight specific elements of professional development, including “providing interdisciplinary professional development to build shared understanding and connections across early care and education, health and human services providers that serve families and young children” (p. 31).
3. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration supports the Minority Fellowship Program created to reduce health disparities and improve health care outcomes for racially and ethnically diverse populations by increasing the number of culturally competent behavioral health professionals available to underserved minority populations in the public and private nonprofit sectors.
4. Applicants for Title IV of Elementary and Secondary Education Act are required to conduct a "comprehensive local assessment and prioritization of the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of the [AIAN] students from whom the [LEA] is providing an education" (Part 1 FAQ, p. 30). Guidance states that applicants may want to consider factors such as the academic achievement levels and cultural competency of the teaching staff (Part 1 FAQ, p. 31).



Recommendation 9: Create effective mechanisms for data sharing and integrated federal data systems

Shared and integrated data are essential for program improvement and monitoring progress towards common goals of child and family well-being and equity

Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Foster a supportive culture within and across programs of using data for continuous quality improvement through leadership, program guidance, staff training, and community input (<i>Examples 1 and 2</i>)	✓		✓	✓
2) Use statutory authority to fund states' creation of an integrated data system that can inform services and programs across all levels		✓	✓	
3) Convene cross-program data workgroups to build infrastructure for data collection and data sharing across agencies, including developing technical assistance centers for integrated data; model agreements for confidentiality; model agreements and templates for data sharing; common performance measures; and evaluation plans (<i>Example 3</i>)	✓		✓	✓
4) Support states in establishing a common identifier for families—without compromising confidentiality and sensitive personal information—to better understand patterns of service use and how those patterns relate to outcomes	✓		✓	✓
5) Align federal and state data reporting requirements to reduce barriers to alignment and coordination	✓	✓		
6) Require or encourage data sharing across programs and early childhood systems through statutes, regulations, and guidance, to enhance program evaluation and program improvement, and to reduce demands on families who might be asked to provide the same information to multiple programs (<i>Example 4</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓
7) Across programs, streamline data governance structures related to data ownership, use, privacy, and protections to ensure collected data can be shared without compromising confidentiality and sensitive personal information. Ensure that disparities in those being served can be tracked and shared	✓	✓		
8) Respect the data sovereignty of tribes and build data-sharing agreements together that describe tribes' rights to access and share data in partnership with federal programs. These rights include where they can access data, mechanisms to understand the data (for example, by creating data dashboards), and how to use the data	✓			✓
9) Develop and implement measures that assess the strength of programs' data infrastructures (<i>Examples 5 and 6</i>)	✓			
10) Use plain language in program guidance about the level, categories, and format of disaggregated data that grant recipients should collect and report to promote transparency, comparability, interpretation, and usefulness for policy and program practice (<i>Example 7</i>)	✓			
11) Disseminate resources that highlight case studies of successful data sharing, lessons learned, and best practices				✓

Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Require the collection of disaggregated data on the entire sequence of a service—access, quality, and outcomes—in program statutes, regulatory language, guidance, funding announcements, or funded grants (<i>Example 8</i>)	✓	✓	✓	
2) Dedicate funding and resources to support effective data collection and analysis, including staff time for training on the role of using and sharing data to improve services			✓	✓
3) Provide guidance and technical assistance about existing programmatic flexibilities to collect relevant data on programs' overlapping domains or constructs of interest.	✓			✓

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Examples of existing practices from project activities

1. The 2022 Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Strategic Plan recommends "expand[ing] access to and use of data to improve the design and delivery of all ACF programs."
2. Congress has previously provided federal funds to support states' development of early childhood development data systems. For example, some states used grant funds from the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge to develop an integrated database for early childhood programs.
3. The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) in the U.S. Department of Education supports many technical assistance providers, including the State Longitudinal Data Systems Support Team, which provides a variety of resources for states developing longitudinal data systems.
4. The Preschool Development Grant Birth through 5 program requires reporting on data sharing. In the Annual Performance Progress Report, recipients of the renewal grant must describe how the funds helped enhance data sharing in the early care and education system.
5. The Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant Program application/annual report includes a narrative section for reporting on Maternal and Child Health data access and linkages.
6. Title IV-B Child Welfare Services programs and Title IV-E Federal Foster Care programs must report on seven systemic factors operating within a state that, if they function well, can promote child safety, permanency, and well-being. One of these systemic factors is a statewide information system.
7. The Plain Language Action and Information Network developed a resource to support clear communication and the use of plain language in governmental written materials.
8. As a new part of the Child and Family Services Review process, the Children's Bureau recommends several possible ways to incorporate equity into the review process, including by "collecting, generating, and analyzing disaggregated program and administrative data to identify disparities in services and outcomes; to understand the role that child welfare programs, policies, and practices may play in contributing to those disparities; and to inform and develop system improvement."



Recommendation 10: Develop a federal research agenda that guides evaluation, scale-up, and implementation of systems building and collaboration efforts

Research can track and evaluate efforts to improve collaboration and coordination to advance child and family well-being and equity

Actions to Improve Federal Coordination Across Early Childhood Programs

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Create a strategic plan and set goals for conducting systems coordination research that connects to the proposed framework for an early childhood system (refer to Recommendation 2)	✓			
2) Gather input from federal, state, tribal, and local program staff grant recipients, in addition to parents, caregivers, and providers to understand research questions of interest to multiple programs	✓		✓	
3) Determine priority measures and indicators of coordination (refer to Recommendation 6)	✓			
4) Articulate research questions that address how systems coordination can improve outcomes for families	✓			
5) Use research findings combined with input from families and workforce members with lived experience to identify and implement practices that address long-standing systemic barriers to accessing, receiving, or participating in a range of services	✓		✓	
6) Map program metrics and performance measures to the proposed framework (refer to Recommendation 2) to identify gaps in information	✓			
7) Examine child and family outcomes, in association with the number and types of programs they participate in, to assess the performance and collective impact of the early childhood system	✓		✓	
8) Use program data currently collected to address questions about systems transformation (such as the effect of family engagement on improvements in services) (<i>Example 1</i>)	✓			
9) Pilot test efforts—and leverage existing pilots—to support coordination of programs in states, tribes, and localities to understand process and outcomes (<i>Example 2</i>)	✓		✓	
10) Document and expand evidence around positive well-being outcomes resulting from system-level interventions	✓		✓	
11) Document and assess the unique context of a state, tribe, or locality to understand factors important for replication or scale-up of pilot tests of coordination efforts	✓		✓	
12) Fund coordinated technical assistance efforts for scaling up cross-program and cross-sector systems-building initiatives and supporting cross-program research approaches and metrics (<i>Example 3</i>)			✓	✓
13) Fund efforts to evaluate systems-building initiatives to assess their effectiveness after scale-up			✓	
14) Assess the extent to which common metrics are already collected and determine their usefulness for addressing research gaps	✓			
15) Conduct research to establish indicators of equity that are feasible for states, tribes, and localities to collect and report (refer to Recommendation 6)	✓		✓	

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Actions for Program Offices to Support System Building for State, Local, and Tribal Grant Recipients

	[E]	[S]	[F]	[T]
1) Evaluate how well services address child and family well-being disparities based on race and ethnicity, tribal status, poverty level, geography, or other factors	✓		✓	
2) Fund and incentivize states, tribes, and localities to participate in evaluations and collect data on coordination efforts through requirements in program funding authorizations or in Notices of Funding Opportunities	✓	✓	✓	
3) Provide evaluation training and technical assistance to build capacity within states, tribes, and localities to pursue systems research, link research to a common framework, and support ongoing program improvement (<i>Example 4</i>)			✓	✓

Levers for federal actions:

[E] Relies on executive or administrative action; [S] Requires statutory change; [F] Needs financial resources; [T] Involves training or technical assistance

Examples of existing practices from project activities

1. The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program guidance suggests tracking data on how extensively family participation in the program resulted in improvements in coordination and referrals to other community resources and supports.
2. Some states are developing new models of coordinated services use a direct services model, in which the state becomes directly involved in coordinating services by offering specific services for families. In a study of coordinated services approaches, two of the six states using direct services developed pilot programs and identified local areas to implement them. For example, the pilots for one state included a home visiting program and a hub for services designed for families experiencing homelessness (Baumgartner et al. 2021).
3. The Early Learning Interagency Policy Board convened a research and data work group in 2017 that developed recommendations for how to align research efforts across agencies to help inform federal early learning initiatives.
4. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Child Care Technical Assistance Network includes resources for Preschool Development Grant Birth–5 (PDG B-5) grant recipients to develop and implement program performance evaluation plans.

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Appendix A: Foundational Resources

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