



Healthy Futures

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

Key Facts

- Children with positive social-emotional skills are better able to develop and maintain positive relationships, and recognize and manage their own emotions and behaviors.
- Providing in-classroom support to childcare providers to identify possible mental health concerns and connect families with referrals can prevent disruptive behavior in the short term and create structures and support that significantly increase strong mental health in childhood and beyond.

How Healthy Futures Works

Mental health consultants provide in-classroom support to childcare providers, who then work with families to identify when their child might be at risk of—or display signs and symptoms of—social, emotional, or other mental health problems.

Poorly developed social-emotional skills and untreated mental health disorders can lead children to display disruptive behaviors, potentially resulting in high rates of early childhood teacher turnover and pre-kindergarten expulsion. Healthy Futures connects families to community-based services through direct referrals, if needed.

Why Healthy Futures Matters

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

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

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

classroom climate, enhance teacher-classroom management skills, reduce child behavioral problems, and lower expulsion rates. In one evaluation, child development center directors reported that teachers were more aware of children's behavioral challenges before they escalated, which allowed them to intervene early and appropriately. Healthy Futures sites have also reported improved child behavior and interactions – children played together better, followed directions more, and were less distracted.

Who Healthy Futures Helps

The Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) administers Healthy Futures. Most sites that participate in the program are traditional child development centers and serve children ages 0 to 5. However, other sites, such as home-based providers, pre-kindergarten incentive, and the Quality Improvement Network, participate as well.

In FY 2017, 75 sites participated in Healthy Futures, including 43 child development centers, 3 home-based providers, 17 pre-kindergarten spaces, and 12 sites that are part of the Quality Improvement Network. The new Birth-to-Three law requires the DC Department of Behavioral Health to expand the Healthy Futures program by 75 childcare centers each year until FY 2023, when there would be 225 additional participating sites, assuming funding is available. Current data on the number of children that Healthy Futures serves is not available. However, the 2011-2013 evaluations show that the program served an average of 1,300 children each year.

Early childhood educators would likely benefit significantly from the expansion of the Healthy Futures program. Center directors have reported significant improvements in teacher-child interactions and reductions in negative staff behaviors, such as shouting at children. These outcomes underscore the value of fully investing in Birth-to-Three.

What's Next

The District's Chief Financial Officer estimates that it costs \$20,000 per childcare facility to provide mental health consultations. The FY 2020 DC budget provides \$1.5 million in new funds to expand the Healthy Futures program. This increase matches the amount needed for FY 2020. In FY 2021, DC lawmakers should provide \$3.1 million to keep the program's expansion on track.

The estimated funding amounts needed to fully expand Healthy Futures by FY 2023 are:

- FY 2020: \$1.5 million
- FY 2021: \$3.1 million
- FY 2022: \$4.7 million
- Total: \$9.3 million

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