

Thrive By Five Yolo



An Opportunity for Progress

Yolo County is known for its innovation, close community collaboration, and creative approach to solving problems. Now, the Board of Supervisors has a rare opportunity to change the trajectory of health, development, and wellbeing for Yolo County's youngest and most vulnerable residents by establishing a ***dedicated funding stream for early childhood prevention and intervention services, using a portion of cannabis-related revenues***, with the intent to:

- **Invest in the earliest years of childhood** (prenatal to five years old), during the most rapid and critical period of brain development and the greatest point of leverage for true prevention and early intervention.
- **Invest in evidence-based prevention and early intervention approaches** that achieve meaningful outcomes for young children facing adversity by improving outcomes for their parents and caregivers, including:
 - ✓ Increased percentage of mothers getting prenatal care in the first trimester
 - ✓ Decreased percentage of babies born preterm and low birthweight
 - ✓ Increased percentage of young children up to date on well-baby check ups
 - ✓ Increased percentage of mothers and fathers with reduced stress levels, increased understanding of children's developmental milestones and needs, and more positive parenting perspectives during pregnancy and the child's first years of life
 - ✓ Improved parental confidence, parenting practices, stability in times of crisis, and successful parent-child relationships
 - ✓ Decreased parent reports of substance abuse, harsh parenting, neglect, physical abuse, and psychological abuse
 - ✓ Decreased rates of substantiated child maltreatment and entries into foster care among infants and toddlers
 - ✓ Increased high-quality early learning for infants and toddlers



There are strategies (including, but not limited to, evidence-based home visiting, evidence-based parent education, and early childhood mental health programs) designed to achieve these outcomes, build strong and healthy children and families, and change lives in Yolo County.

- **Invest in improving outcomes for children and families facing the greatest cumulative risk**, giving our community's most vulnerable children equal opportunity to reach their full potential and improving the future for our entire community.

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The Critical First Five Years, The Smartest Investment

The first five years of life – starting in the prenatal period – provide the greatest window of opportunity to build a strong foundation for lifelong health and wellbeing. During this critical period of development, a healthy brain forms 700 new neural connections every second, with 90% of brain development occurring by age five. Responsive, nurturing caregiving in safe, engaging environments fosters healthy brain development, laying a strong foundation for children to develop the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills needed to thrive in school and throughout life. Research at Harvard University finds that, “the foundation for sound mental health is built early in life, as early experiences—which include children’s relationships with parents, caregivers, relatives, teachers, and peers—shape the architecture of the developing brain.”ⁱ

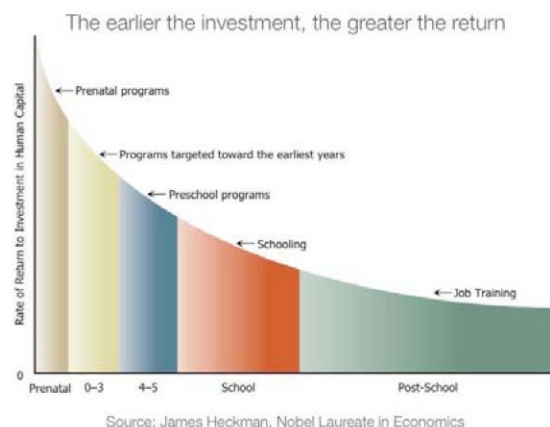
There is now well-documented and growing awareness of the critical importance of early childhood. *However, not all children begin life with the same foundation.* Exposure to chronic stressors (poverty and discrimination) or adverse childhood experiences (e.g., abuse and neglect, parental mental illness and substance abuse, or family violence) can disrupt healthy brain development, creating lifelong negative impacts on learning, behavior, and health. As the number of adverse experiences in a child’s life increases, so does the risk for developmental delays, behavioral problems, low educational attainment, lower wages in adulthood, and poor health outcomes later in life such as heart disease, diabetes, substance abuse, and depression. The cumulative effects of adversity, stress, and trauma are even greater for children who lack nurturing relationships with their parents and primary caregivers.

Scientists and economists agree that **investing in high-quality early childhood development programs produces the greatest benefits to children, families and society.** Recent research

from Nobel Laureate James Heckman and colleagues shows that investments in early childhood programs and services for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% annual return on investment by improving life outcomes related to health, education, employment, and social behaviors, which in turn decreases the costs to taxpayers for more

expensive treatment and remediation services.ⁱⁱ Investing “upstream” of problems that deepen later in life yields the highest rate of return.

Efforts should focus on the first years for the greatest efficiency and effectiveness.ⁱⁱⁱ



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Yolo Children are in Need

While many young children and families in Yolo County are healthy and thriving, there are also warning signs that too many young children are starting life at a disadvantage and could be at-risk for problems with health, safety, and learning. Most notably:

- Nearly one in five children under age five is living in extreme poverty (based on the Federal poverty level), and only 52% of all families in Yolo County can afford basic living expenses.^{iv}
- In Yolo County, 51% of all school aged children are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch.^v
- Nearly 20% of all mothers in Yolo County do *not* receive early prenatal care, and among young mothers, that number rises to nearly 30%.^{vi}
- Mothers are reporting hardships and emotional distress during and after pregnancy that elevate the risk of poor child health and developmental outcomes. In the 2013-14 Maternal and Infant Health Assessment Survey, just over 8% of mothers in Yolo County reported prenatal depressive symptoms, nearly 10% reported postpartum depressive symptoms, over 7% experienced intimate partner violence during pregnancy, and 3% reported they had no practical or emotional support during pregnancy. Close to 15% reported binge drinking 3-months before pregnancy.^{vii}
- The rate of substantiated allegations of child maltreatment is more than double for children under age three (16.7 per 1,000 children) compared to all children (8.2 per 1,000) in Yolo County.^{viii}
- 58% of children in Yolo County are *not* reading at grade level by 3rd grade.^{ix}
- Statewide, 70% of children with developmental delays go undetected until kindergarten.^x

Taken together, these data points indicate risk factors that could pose lifelong threats to children's health and wellbeing. *However, they also highlight opportunities to make strategic, targeted, and effective investments that could change the course of health and development for Yolo County's most vulnerable children.*

Committing "The First Dollar" of New Revenue to Early Childhood Prevention and Intervention

There will be many legitimate requests for funding from new revenue at both the county and city level. While not every dollar can be allocated to early childhood, ***the time is now to ensure that the first dollar is spent 0-5 for early childhood prevention and intervention, at the greatest point of leverage to build a better community.*** As cannabis becomes legalized in California, there will be additional, though often unintended, impacts on pregnant and breastfeeding women and the youngest children birth to age five. It will become vital to the

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community that local municipalities direct funds to support and protect Yolo County children to ensure these impacts do not go unaddressed.

Although there is growing awareness of the importance of early childhood, local, state, and federal policies could better align with the science and economics of investing “upstream,” in early childhood, with greater investment in quality programs serving children prenatal through five. At the local level, limited and/or restricted public funds are often necessarily consumed by “downstream” investments, many of which are intended to treat or remediate problems that are deeply entrenched later in life in youth, families, and communities. *If investments are not made “upstream” now, in early childhood prevention and intervention, there will likely never be enough dollars to solve problems (e.g., homelessness, poor academic performance, substance abuse, school drop outs, serious health or mental health complications, joblessness, crime and incarceration) downstream later.*

The Yolo County Board of Supervisors has a unique opportunity to address the earliest prevention and intervention needs by establishing a dedicated funding stream to early childhood, a “Thrive by Five” initiative, using a portion of cannabis-related revenue. **Creating a dedicated funding stream would make a bold and definitive statement about the County’s commitment to true prevention and early intervention by investment in the youngest and most vulnerable citizens.** Such policy action could also serve as a catalyst for strengthening the countywide system of early childhood development services by joining community partners in emphasizing prevention and early intervention, innovation, measurable results, and leveraging resources.

Value in Collaboration

It is particularly important to realize this opportunity to dedicate a portion of the new cannabis revenue for early childhood development services, given the progressive decline in Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenue across the state. Since the inception of Proposition 10 (The Children and Families Act), First 5 Yolo has invested over \$35 million from Proposition 10 in programs and services for our youngest children birth through five years old and their families. First 5 Yolo now has nearly 20 years of on-the-ground experience working to make young children healthy, safe, and ready to learn. While these strategic investments have effectively improved the lives of thousands of local children and families, First 5 revenues alone cannot sustain *or scale* these efforts. In FY 2016-17, Yolo’s allocation of Proposition 10 tax revenue was approximately \$1.54 million, less than half of the initial disbursement of \$3.32 million in FY 1999-00.

Given the evidence underlining the importance of investing in the earliest years of childhood, we cannot afford to scale back on our collective efforts to ensure all children in our community thrive and address, at the root, the many ongoing issues that only become more entrenched and costly to our community down the line. Committed by state statute to

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systems change efforts, First 5 Yolo already has the funded infrastructure to evaluate and monitor programs, allocate funding, and provide assistance in quality improvement for early childhood programs. As a partner government agency and potential co-funder, First 5 Yolo is ready, in coordination with other early childhood agencies and professionals, to assist the County to move forward with a Thrive by Five initiative.

Leading at the New Frontier

The critical nature of early childhood is an imperative for policymakers to take action. As a new industry emerges, both impacts and revenue generation, through taxes, development agreements, or other mechanisms, are beginning to unfold. Other local jurisdictions, including Santa Cruz County and City and County of Humboldt, have dedicated a portion of new cannabis-related revenue to early childhood. **Now is the time for County leaders to create change in our community by improving the outcomes for our youngest children and families through the establishment of a dedicated “Thrive by Five” funding stream for investments in early childhood development.** The health, safety, and education of our youngest and most vulnerable children depends on it. The health, safety, and economic vibrancy of our whole community demands it, now and for generations to come.

Acknowledgement

The architecture for this brief on early childhood prevention and intervention and cannabis-related revenue devoted to supporting the youngest members of our community to Thrive by Five is based on the groundbreaking work of Thrive by Three in Santa Cruz County. Portions of The Thrive by Three Fund Proposal are incorporated with the permission and supportive collaboration of First 5 Santa Cruz County.

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Endnotes

- ⁱ Center on the Developing Child (2013). Early Childhood Mental Health (InBrief). Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.
- ⁱⁱ García, Jorge Luis, James J. Heckman, Duncan Ermini Leaf, and María José Prados. "The Life-cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program." (2016)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Heckman, J. 2014. Invest in Early Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy. www.heckmanequation.org
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- ^v California Department of Education. Student Poverty FRPM Data. Unduplicated Student Poverty- Free or reduced Price Meals Data 2016-17. www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filessp.asp
- ^{vi} Dabritz, Haydee and Babb, Jan. Live Birth Profile for Yolo County 2016 Births. May 2017
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- ^{ix} Kidsdata.org. Students Proficient in Reading, by Grade Level (2016), www.kidsdata.org
- ^x First 5 Association of California and Help me Grow California. Early Identification Matters. 2017.