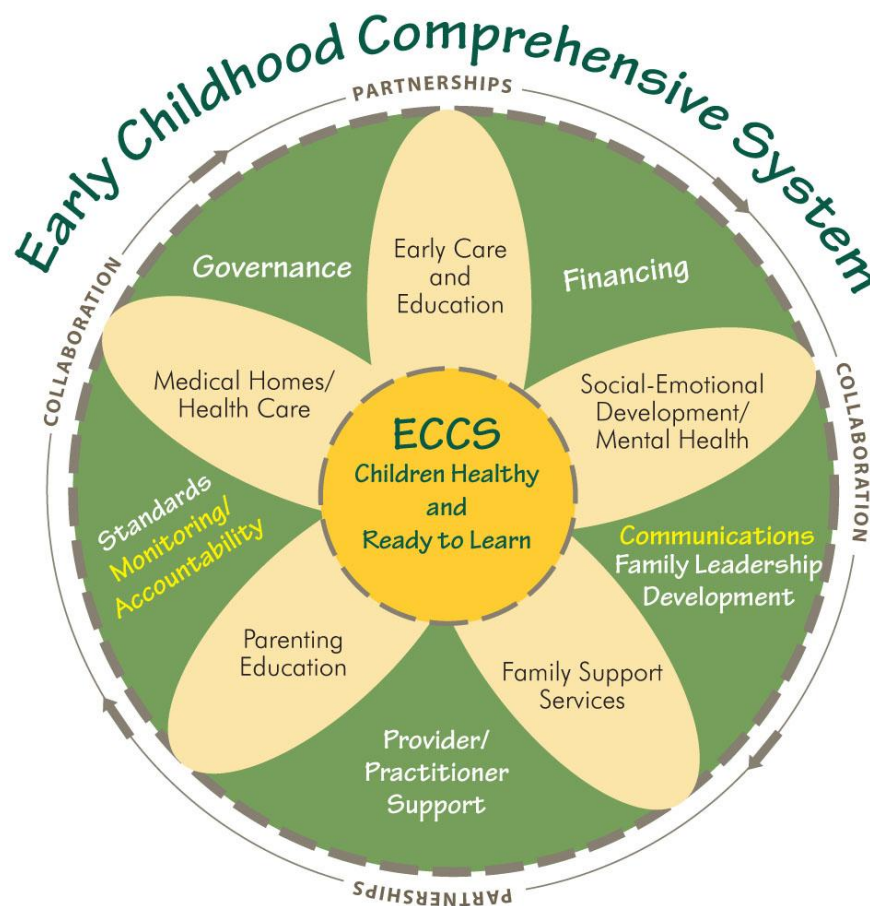


# Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan

**A L A S K A**

*Creating a culturally responsive, comprehensive & accessible service delivery system that links service providers, empowers families, & engages communities.*



Revised May 2009

State of Alaska

[Hss.state.ak.us/ocs/ECCS](http://Hss.state.ak.us/ocs/ECCS)

## **GOVERNANCE & INFRASTRUCTURE- KEY ELEMENTS:**

**Outcome #1: There will be a permanent governance structure to provide oversight of a comprehensive, integrated service system for young children prenatal to eight.**

**Outcome #2: There will be a culturally responsive, comprehensive, accessible service delivery system that links service providers, empowers families, and engages communities.**

- **There will be an early childhood governance structure with clearly defined responsibilities and decision-making authority.**
  - Determine governance structure that best supports a comprehensive early childhood system
  - Determine roles and membership
- **There will be a network of effective community and regional organizations supporting comprehensive early childhood services.**
  - Support local and regional partnerships between parents, health and social services, early care and learning programs, elementary schools, local boards and organizations to ensure continuity of quality, comprehensive services
  - Support and promote coordination between state, tribal, local and private entities.
  - Identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally-funded, state-funded, and privately-funded programs and services
- **State plans and policies will reflect a comprehensive, integrated approach to services for young children and their families.**
  - Promote a common language and shared vision for early childhood services
  - Ensure periodic statewide needs assessments
  - Conduct joint planning and support coordination and collaboration
  - Integrate state plans for young children and their families whenever possible
  - Review, revise, and recommend state policies to reflect comprehensive, integrated best practices for services to young children and their families
  - Facilitate coordination of statutes and regulations
  - Incorporate current research in program recommendations and policy decisions
- **Integrated fiscal strategies will exist to support early childhood programs and services.**
  - Conduct a fiscal scan to identify current resources
  - Through joint planning, develop a cross-agency fiscal strategy to sustain and expand early childhood programs and services
  - Identify strategies to maximize Medicaid and insurance coverage
  - Seek additional resources as needed
- **There will be a system for supporting integrated, cross-agency professional development that maximizes state resources and supports identified outcomes.**

- Support professional development across disciplines and programs
- Develop a cross-systems approach to delivery of training and TA
- Recommend and support early childhood workforce development initiatives
- **There will be clear mechanisms for communicating with stakeholders about early childhood issues and developments.**
  - Develop strategies for keeping stakeholders informed about state efforts, initiatives, systems building, and best practices
  - Produce annual reports on the status of Alaska's young children that can be used for planning and decision making
  - Collect and disseminate information on major children's issues in order to foster public awareness and building support for investments
- **Program standards will reflect effective EC practices and qualified personnel.**
  - Establish standards that reflect effective practices and programs
  - Establish standards for practitioners
- **A monitoring system will be in place to ensure accountability and continual quality improvement.**
  - Use logic models to plan early childhood programs and initiatives.
  - Identify cross-sector objectives and performance/outcome indicators
  - Develop evaluation plan for systems, programs and initiatives
- **Families will have opportunities to enhance and exercise their leadership skills.**
  - Create opportunities for families to develop their leadership skills
  - Include families on boards, committees and workgroups

## ACCESS TO MEDICAL HOMES & INSURANCE:

**Outcome #3: The physical, developmental, and/or social emotional concerns of young children will be identified and addressed as early as possible.**

- **Medical practitioners will provide comprehensive well-child exams which include developmental and social emotional screenings consistent with the American Academy of Pediatrics periodicity schedule.**
  - ◊ Promote the use of Bright Futures and other recognized guidelines for health supervision and anticipatory guidance
  - Identify & implement policy changes needed to promote the use of standardized screening instruments
  - Educate providers on the benefits of standardized, comprehensive developmental and social emotional screening
  - Provide information to providers on screening instruments, billing procedures and codes
  - Develop and standardize the process for children in state's custody to have timely EPSDT exams which include the use of standardized screening
  
- **Children identified with developmental or medical needs will be referred to appropriate services and receive the services and care they need.**
  - Identify care coordination services and support a system to facilitate access to needed services
  - Provide information to providers on appropriate billing procedures and codes for care coordination
  - Develop and maintain a system for managing health care information for foster children
  - Inventory and organize screening & care coordination information in easy to access modalities (websites, etc.)
  
- **Young children will have access to oral health prevention and intervention programs and services.**
  - Support educational activities to increase awareness on oral health and implications for general health including information on preventing oral disease and injuries and the benefits of early intervention.
    - ✓ Encourage incorporation of oral health information in curricula and health education in early care and learning programs (ECL).
  - Expand and/or improve oral health programs and interventions in ECL programs.
    - ✓ Support development of program based or program linked dental sealant programs.
    - ✓ Support development of program based fluoride rinse or fluoride varnish programs.
  - Increase access to dental care services especially for young children who are at risk for oral disease or complications of oral disease.
    - ✓ Support development of preventive dental services in ECL programs with significant numbers of children from low-income families.
    - ✓ Encourage primary care practitioners to incorporate oral health screening & preventive oral health in their care of young children.

- **Young children, especially those at risk for lifelong chronic conditions, will have access to overweight/obesity treatment services.**
  - Encourage primary care practitioners to incorporate the expert committee recommendations on the assessment, prevention, and treatment of child and adolescent overweight obesity.
  - Support the development of overweight/obesity treatment services in ECL programs in populations identified at high risk.
  
- **Early childhood programs will have access to health information and consultation.**
  - Identify health training, technical assistance, and consultation currently available.
  - Educate early childhood professionals on the services available to them.

**Outcome #4: Young children and their families will have access to medical homes that provide accessible, family centered, coordinated, continuous, comprehensive, compassionate and culturally competent care.**

- **More children will be enrolled in public health insurance programs (Medicaid, Denali KidCare (DKC), etc.)**
  - Increase income guidelines for eligibility for Denali KidCare
  - Partner with programs to facilitate enrollment in public health insurance programs and engagement with a medical home (WIC, ECE programs, etc.)
  
- **Families will be informed about the importance of their child's health and development and recognized as the principal caregivers and decision makers in their child's care.**
  - ⊖ Distribute information to parents regarding the importance of regular well-child exams through the EPSDT Program
  - ⊖ Promote the use of parent consultants or relationships with parent navigation systems in primary care offices

## **MENTAL HEALTH & SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT:**

### **Outcome #5: Young children and their families will receive appropriate early mental health services through Medicaid and other sources.**

- **There will be reimbursement mechanisms so young children and their families have access to the services necessary to address their social/emotional development.**
  - Implement the crosswalk between diagnosis for young children and billing requirements.
  - Identify funding streams and support strategies for young children with serious emotional/behavioral concerns that may reflect emerging serious emotional disturbances.
  - Educate providers on appropriate diagnostic procedures and billing codes.
  - Expand the number and/or location of Medicaid eligible providers to serve young children and their families
  - Expand service codes to ensure that services for young children are grounded in the environment and the family and are culturally appropriate.
  - Educate employers on the importance of choosing insurance that provides for mental health services to young children.
  
- **Health care providers will recognize the importance of caregiver mental health on early childhood social emotional well-being and regularly screen primary caregivers for maternal depression and adult mental health and substance abuse issues.**
  - Educate the public on the impacts of caregiver mental health on young children
  - Educate providers on the benefits of screening primary caregivers for risk factors.
  - Educate providers (in addition to office managers) on billing procedures and codes.
  - Distribute a menu of screening instruments.
  - Coordinate with EPSDT and medical providers regarding information to parents.
  - Inventory and organize service information in easy to access modalities (Web site, referral lists, etc.).
  
- **Services will reflect best practices including evidenced based programming when appropriate.**
  - Review Standards of Practice and revise as necessary.

### **Outcome #6: The State of Alaska will have a qualified, well-trained workforce providing for the social and emotional well-being of young children.**

- **There will be a statewide early childhood mental health professional development plan which supports, connects and aligns efforts into a comprehensive system of training and education.**
  - Identify current/available workforce development opportunities.
  - Conduct a survey to determine current level of expertise in the field.
  - Research and articulate service provider core competencies by levels of service provision (including services reimbursed by Medicaid) across all early childhood disciplines.
  - Work with the universities and training entities to incorporate early childhood mental health content into their course curriculum.

- Develop a professional development plan for training and education in early childhood mental health.
- Explore use of a “registry system” to track individual training.
- **There will be a system for clinical consultation and support for mental health professionals working with young children and their families.**
  - Develop a system for early childhood mental health consultation, supervision and mentorship for paraprofessionals and professionals working with early childhood mental health issues (i.e., Mental Health Clinicians, Infant Learning Program staff, Behavioral Health Aides)
  - Explore the use of tele-behavioral health methods to deliver consultation and support.
- **Early childhood programs will have access to mental health specialists and mental health consultation.**
  - Develop and implement a system for specialists in early childhood mental health to provide consultation to early care and learning and family support programs.
  - Assist early childhood programs in educating parents on the importance of social emotional development

## **EARLY CARE & EDUCATION/CHILD CARE:**

**Outcome #7: Early care & learning (ECL) programs for children birth through age 8 will be based on standards of best practice.**

- **ECL programs will be guided by a standard ECL framework that meets or exceeds established health, safety, and program standards.**
  - Establish a standard foundation and framework for all ECL programs
    - ✓ Review & revise systems to ensure a standard foundation and framework for all programs, Pre-K, child care, Head Start, etc.
    - ✓ Establish ECL program standards and regulations that reflect markers of quality (or standards of best practice).
    - ✓ Require ECL programs to meet or exceed established health, safety, and program standards.
    - ✓ Implement a quality rating & improvement system (QRIS) that encourages programs to meet high standards through a clear, coherent & equitable system for program compliance
    - ✓ Use monitoring portion of the QRIS in the Pre-K Pilot
    - ✓ Raise requirements for entry level pre-service requirements and continual licensing.
  
- **ECL programs will use ELGs to better understand, support and enhance children's development and learning.**
  - Support the use of Early Learning Guidelines to guide practice in ECL programs
    - ✓ Disseminate user-friendly ELG materials for early childhood educators
    - ✓ Develop and implement a plan for ongoing support for early childhood educators on how to use the ELG's in their programs
    - ✓ Encourage early childhood educators to commit to the use of ELG as a learning tool.
  
- **ECL programs will use a menu of appropriate methods to regularly screen, assess and monitor progress of individual children.**
  - Develop and disseminate information on the importance *and methods* of screening, assessing and monitoring children's progress
  
- **ECL programs will use specialists in health, mental health, curriculum, developmental, family support, program administration, etc. to improve practice.**
  - Develop & implement a system for specialists to provide consultation to ECL Programs.
  
- **ECL programs will implement obesity prevention (or physical activity and nutrition promotion) and intervention programs and services.**
  - Support educational activities to increase awareness of overweight/obesity and implications for lifelong health.
    - ✓ Encourage incorporation of physical activity and nutrition information in curricula and health education in ECL programs.
    - ✓ Encourage ECL programs to apply the principles of the current version of the dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations into meal planning, preparation and service.
    - ✓ Encourage ECL programs to develop their physical activity curriculum based on the National Association of Sports and Physical Educations guidelines for infants and toddlers



**Outcome # 8: The early childhood workforce will be well qualified and fairly compensated.**

- **There will be a statewide system of professional development (utilizing the State Professional Development Plan).**
  - Establish and implement a statewide system of ECE professional development (PD)
    - ✓ Further develop the Statewide Professional Development Plan and implement the system throughout early care and learning programs.
    - ✓ Develop **Core Knowledge** and core competencies that will provide a fundamental and consistent set of knowledge and skills areas
      - ❖ Ensure professional development opportunities include family support strategies (such as Strengthening Families) and early childhood mental health information.
      - ❖ Include caregiving temperament and professional behaviors/dispositions in pre-service training.
    - ✓ Coordinate and maintain a clearinghouse of information, resources and technical assistance for early care and school-age professionals (**Access & Outreach**):
    - ✓ **Ensure quality early education training** (Quality Assurance)
      - ❖ Develop and implement a registry of approved trainers and professional development opportunities
      - ❖ Develop and provide professional development opportunities and training for ECE administrators/school principals/superintendents
      - ❖ Support the university system in meeting the requirements for accreditation in Early Childhood Education.
- **The professional development framework articulating career advancement will be utilized by ECL providers and employers (*Qualifications, Credentials & Pathways*)**
  - Disseminate information about the professional development framework and encourage its use by providers and employers.
- **ECL practitioners will meet educational requirements for their positions. (*Qualifications, Credentials & Pathways*)**
  - Establish and embed ECE practitioner educational standards across all ECE programs including child care, Head start, Pre-K, etc.
    - ✓ Expand and sustain the registry system which documents the professional development of individual providers
  - Develop and advocate for guidelines to be adopted by the State Board of Education and Early Development moving pre-K-3 teachers toward certification in early childhood development or an early childhood endorsement.
- **The ECL workforce will be compensated comparable to professionals with like qualifications & responsibilities in education and healthcare. (Funding)**
  - Develop a recommended wage structure tied to levels of professional development
    - ✓ Conduct an annual survey of providers regarding early childhood workforce issues.
    - ✓ Conduct a wage and benefit study in conjunction with the Pre-K pilot expansion.
    - ✓ Establish a minimum “worthy wage”.
    - ✓ Develop a subsidy program to fund fair compensation,
    - ✓ Establish a system for rewarding programs demonstrate a commitment to livable wages and benefits and provide merit wages tied to performance evaluations.

- Develop strategies for improving benefits for ECL providers
  - ✓ Develop strategies for including benefits equal to or greater than 35% of wages
  - ✓ Develop strategies for including health care benefits comparable with like professions
  - ✓ Establish a loan forgiveness program.

**Outcome #9: Children and families will be able to find and access appropriate ECL programs.**

- **There will be a range and supply of program models to meet the developing needs of young children and their families.**

- Ensure a range of program models, including center-based, home-based, and home visiting models are available.
- Develop and implement a state-funded, voluntary, Pre-K system which includes existing providers & community providers for all families that want it.
- Develop and implement strategies to increase programs for underserved populations.
  - ✓ Research and implement strategies to increase the supply of programs where needed, especially programs serving; infant and toddlers, children with special needs, children in rural areas, school-age children, children needing non- traditional hour care.
  - ✓ Support collaboration between early care and learning programs, child protection services and other community services
- Establish eligibility for the Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program at a 25% developmental delay in one domain or 20% in two domains or more.

- **Families will be able to make informed choices about their ECL program.**

- Provide consumer information that is user friendly and available in multiple formats, languages, and locations
  - ✓ Implement a quality rating system statewide to help parents determine program quality.
  - ✓ Develop public service announcements for radio and television with consumer information regarding quality programs.
  - ✓ Provide consumer information in places where families naturally go such as- places of employment, medical offices, WIC, Public Assistance, etc.

- **Families with financial needs will have access to resources to help cover the costs of ECL.**

- Establish child care assistance rates and eligibility requirements that ensure access to resources to families in need
  - ✓ Bring current the family income and contribution schedule to the 2008 state median income and implement annual updates
  - ✓ Establish a child care assistance rate schedule in which parents pay no more than 10 percent of their income for child care.
  - ✓ Ensure the child care assistance rate is equivalent to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the current market rate.
  - ✓ Provide support in helping parents and providers understand the child care assistance system.

**Outcome #10: Families will be full and respected partners in their children’s ECL programs.**

- **ECL programs will have active family support and parent involvement components.**
  - Support the implementation of family support models such as Strengthening Families in all ECL settings
    - ✓ Research and disseminate information on best practices in outreach, engagement and family support models.
    - ✓ Provide training for early childhood educators in the Strengthening Families framework and Stronger Together curriculum
    - ✓ Require the use of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment in early care and learning programs.
    - ✓ Provide regular training to child care licensers on the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool.
  
- **ECL programs will support and encourage moms to breastfeed and continue breastfeeding when returning to work.**
  - Encourage programs through training & information to support families in their efforts to initiate and continue breastfeeding
    - ✓ Assist programs in supporting families wishing for their child to be fed pumped milk while at childcare.
  
- **ECL programs will be responsive to the different cultural and language needs of the families and children that they serve.**
  - Support culturally and linguistically appropriate programming
    - ✓ Encourage programs to support children in the continuation of their home culture and language while helping them to speak, read and write English.
    - ✓ Encourage programs to recruit, hire, and train staff representing the cultures that they serve.
    - ✓ Provide training information and strategies to early childhood educators on how to successfully engage families of diverse cultures.
    - ✓ Create opportunities for community members with diverse backgrounds to participate in a network of support for early care and learning programs.
  
- **ECL will facilitate the smooth transitioning of children between various settings.**
  - Support smooth transitions for children by promoting continuity of key elements of best practice and collaboration between programs; developmentally appropriate practice, parent involvement and support services for children and parents.
    - ✓ Develop and disseminate information on the importance of transitioning children and their families and assist programs in developing transition procedures.
    - ✓ Support collaboration between early care and learning programs, Infant Learning Programs and school districts.

## **FAMILY SUPPORT AND PARENT EDUCATION:**

### **Outcome 11#: Families of young children will have access to community-based parenting and family support programs.**

*Family partnerships are embedded in each of the other Component Areas*

- **All families with young children will have access to a user-friendly, culturally competent, integrated service delivery system.**
  - Promote “one door opens every door” by supporting; community-based family resource centers; one-stop shopping service delivery models; family-to family support; integrated case management
  - Support programs that provide easily accessible parenting information and referrals for all Alaska families with young children (“parent lines, web-based services, home-based delivery, etc.)
- **Programs serving young children and their families will be responsive to emerging family and community issues and model the principles of family support in all program activities.**
  - Create a statewide family support clearinghouse that: serves as a repository of information regarding best practices in family support services; supports interdisciplinary training; provides technical assistance; distributes information to programs, stakeholders and policy makers; and links to services
- **Families will be well-informed regarding parenting and child development issues.**
  - Distribute Early Learning Guidelines in a multiple languages in a family friendly format
- **Young children and their families will have access to healthy food and nutrition information.**
  - Provide healthy foods and meals for children through child care programs, schools, food banks, farm standards, residential child care institutions, afterschool programs, summer camps, emergency shelters, and grocery stores.
  - Provide nutrition education for life-long health and well-being.
- **Families will be supported in their role as primary caregivers.**
  - Support programs that promote families as resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities
  - Encourage employers to develop family friendly policies (e.g., family health benefits, on-site childcare facilities, flexible work schedules, changing stations in restrooms, access to parenting information, etc.
  - Support and recognize community activities which promote health and wellness in families with young children.

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