

Healthy Futures

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

How it works

Mental health consultants provide in-classroom support to child care educators, who then work with families to address a child's social and emotional development needs and mental health concerns.

Poorly developed social-emotional skills and untreated mental health challenges can lead children to display disruptive behaviors. As a result, children may have trouble making friends, struggle to learn new skills, or even be expelled from preschool. Supporting children demonstrating these behaviors can be difficult for teachers, who can experience high rates of burnout as a result, and that turnover can be detrimental to early learning programs.

Healthy Futures also connects families to community-based services through direct referrals as needed.

Why it 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.

Healthy Futures is a valuable resource for early learning programs. Child care program directors have reported significant improvements in teacher-child interactions and reductions in negative staff behaviors, such as shouting at children.

Who it helps

Healthy Futures is administered by the Department of Behavioral Health, pairing early childhood mental health consultants with early learning facilities that participate in



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 child care 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.

75

The Birth-to-Three Act requires the addition of 75 new program sites each year.



Healthy Futures (cont'd)

About Under 3 DC

Under 3 DC is a broad-based coalition of parents with young children, early childhood educators, advocates, community-based organizations, and health professionals who believe every child deserves a strong start and a limitless future. Our work centers on the people experiencing racial and economic injustice every day. It shines a spotlight on the need for more public investments to support families with infants and toddlers. Together, we can set the city on a path to creating and sustaining a high-quality, equitable early childhood system.

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the child care subsidy program across the District. A majority of sites currently working with Healthy Futures are located in Wards 7 and 8. Most programs are traditional child development centers and serve children ages 0 to 5. However, other early learning programs, such as home-based providers, pre-kindergarten spaces, and the District’s Quality Improvement Network (QIN), participate as well. As of the beginning of FY 2021, 58 sites are participating in the Healthy Futures program, including 23 child development centers participating in the PreK Enhancement and Expansion Program (PKEEP), 18 QIN home-based providers, and 15 QIN child development centers.¹

In FY21, approximately 1,569 children were participating in the Healthy Futures program through child development centers and homes that remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic. About 550 teachers are participating in regular consultations through the program.

The Birth-to-Three for All DC Law requires the DC Department of Behavioral Health to expand the Healthy Futures programs to 300 child care facilities over 4 years.²

What’s next

As of FY20, Healthy Futures is funded at \$1.39 million in recurring funds. This funding enables the Department of Behavioral Health to employ early childhood mental health consultants, program supervisors, and administrative program staff. The District’s Chief Financial Officer estimates that it costs \$20,000 per childcare facility to provide a year of mental health consultations (with an annual inflation rate of 1.75%). This cost includes consultant and supervisor salaries, travel and office expenses, and program administration.

To add the capacity mandated by the Birth-to-Three Law, Healthy Futures must receive an additional \$1.53 million per year to expand to 75 additional child care settings. Full funding to enable Healthy Futures to reach at least 225 additional early learning programs would require a recurring annual budget of at least \$6.2 million. For the four-year funding schedule according to the law’s Fiscal Impact Statement, please refer to Table 1.

Table 1

- FY2019: --
- FY2020: \$1.53 million (actual allocated: \$1.3 million)
- FY 2021: \$3.1 million (actual allocated: no enhancement from FY21)
- FY 2022: \$4.7 million
- Beyond the scope of the FIS -- FY2023: \$6.23 million

It is important for the District to continue expanding the availability of Healthy Futures supports. Tending to the mental health of families and educators as we rebuild from COVID-19’s societal disruptions will be more important than ever. **In FY 2022, the Under 3 DC Coalition is calling on DC lawmakers to provide at least \$675,000 in enhancements to the Healthy Futures budget** so the program can deepen, expand, and evaluate its services. This investment would enable Healthy Futures to hire additional consultants, provide training to improve the quality of Healthy Futures services, cover associated overhead expenses, and evaluate the program as it expands.

DC leaders should prioritize full funding of Healthy Futures in upcoming cycles when city finances recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ At least two of the child development programs are represented more than once in the breakdown of the various types of providers.

² D.C. Law 22-179. Birth-to-Three for All DC Amendment Act of 2018. <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/laws/22-179.html>