



The Effect of Hostile Immigration Policies on California Children's Early Childhood Development



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Introduction

What do you do when a worried parent asks you to take care of their four-year-old if Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deports them? For early care educators, childcare workers, home visitors, and preschool teachers, this question has become more common. However, immigrant parents are not the only ones worried about deportation. Professionals working with immigrant families and their young children—such as early childhood education (ECE) providers and teachers, pediatricians, home visitors, and others—report a noticeable drop in participation of these families in essential programs and services, including preschool and childcare, nutrition assistance (like CalFresh), preventive health care (like immunizations), and parenting education groups and visits.¹ Many providers describe frequent absences after real or rumored raids in the community or major policy changes. Providers report that when immigrant families do participate, their young children express an increase in separation anxiety during drop-offs, aggressive behavior, and withdrawn interactions during the day.²

Shantel Meek, founding director of the Children's Equity Project at Arizona State University, explained in an LA School Report article, "When we think about early childhood development, what's the number one thing that we think is critical to healthy development? Securely attached relationships. It's this notion of dependability of 'I'm going to cry and I trust you to be there to meet my needs'.... Taking away that trust, that security that kids have in their primary caregiver. We're fundamentally messing with the social-emotional foundation of these kids... It's like we're intentionally causing trauma."³

“*We're fundamentally messing with the social-emotional foundation of these kids... It's like we're intentionally causing trauma.*”

– Shantel Meek, Children's Equity Project at Arizona State University



Overview

A spread of anti-immigrant policies stretching from heightened immigration enforcement activities, changes to public charge policy, and promises of massive raids have unmistakably changed the climate in which immigrant families are living across the United States.⁴ These policy shifts have made immigrant families increasingly wary of utilizing health coverage, nutrition assistance, early education, and other essential safety net services.⁵

As a result, young children under the age of five—most of them citizens—are experiencing significant anxiety and stress that is hindering their ability to focus on learning, making their daily lives unstable, creating obstacles to getting their basic needs met, and increasing their vulnerability to long-term, poor health outcomes.⁶ With one in two California children living in an immigrant family and an even larger proportion in households where a language other than English is spoken (known as Dual Language Learners, or DLLs), programs that seek to effectively serve young children must be aware of and responsive to the needs of the families of these children in order to help all children succeed.⁷

This policy brief highlights characteristics of the large and growing population of immigrant families with young children in California that make them a key priority for effective early learning programs. Accordingly, this brief discusses barriers and challenges related to equitably serving these families and proposes strategies to help early childhood programs better ensure young children in immigrant families in California feel safe, healthy, and ready to learn. For new leadership in California to make meaningful strides toward their stated priority of early childhood development, it is critical that the particular needs of immigrant families are addressed in the context of expanding access to early care and education programs.

This brief draws heavily on three reports from our partners at the **Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)**: Wendy Cervantes et al., *Our Children's Fear: Immigration Policy's Effects on Young Children*, 2018; Hannah Matthews et al., *Immigration Policy's Impact on Early Care and Education*, 2018; and Rebecca Ullrich, *A Guide to Creating "Safe Space" Policies for Early Childhood Programs*, 2019. These reports are available at <http://www.clasp.org>.

The Wellbeing of Young Children in Immigrant Families Is an Integral Component of California's Future

Close to three million children under five years old call California home, and almost half of them (1.3 million) are children of immigrants.⁸

- ▶ Nearly all preschool-age children of immigrants (96 percent) in California are U.S. citizens.⁹
- ▶ Most of these children have at least one parent who is a U.S. citizen. (82 percent)¹⁰
- ▶ Half of all children under six speak a language other than English at home.¹¹
- ▶ Three in every five preschool-age children of immigrants attend a childcare center.¹²
- ▶ Although 93 percent of immigrant households have at least one parent working,¹³ 46 percent are living in poverty.¹⁴

Impacts of Immigration Policy and Actions on Early Childhood Development

The current anti-immigrant political climate has specific implications for children in immigrant families that are uniquely harmful. Early childhood programs, due to their proximity in serving families, are on the frontlines in witnessing and combatting the impacts of such a climate on the healthy development of young children in immigrant families.

HOSTILE POLICIES ARE EXPOSING YOUNG CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES TO CONTINUOUS STRESS.

- ▶ Although they are not able to discern the details of immigration policies, young children of immigrants are experiencing persistent fear and anxiety as a result of hostile immigration policies.¹⁵ Young children fear being separated from their parents, even if their parents are not at risk of deportation. Studies surveying childcare providers across the country highlight that young children are deeply affected by the anti-immigrant climate. CLASP heard reports of children as young as three years old expressing these concerns directly to their teachers. Early childhood providers also described children's distress being evident in separation anxiety during drop-offs, aggressive behavior, increased hyperactivity, decreased engagement, and social withdrawal.¹⁶
- ▶ Early childhood providers described more significant behavioral changes among children who had experienced immigration enforcement against their parents or other loved ones. For example, a preschool director described a three-year-old child who became aggressive and began fighting more often with his classmates after his father was deported.¹⁷ She noticed he particularly targeted three children whose fathers drop them off and pick them up from school.



“ There are a few houses that have a sign on the door that says “Do not open the door” in Spanish at kids’ eye level. They see that every day going in and out. **They know that if you open the door for someone, they can come in and take you.**” – Home visitor in CA

▶ Children are keenly aware of their social surroundings—in fact, young children are able to perceive social cues, unusual behavior, tensions, and body behavior of the adults around them as early as fourteen months’ old. ¹⁸ That means that young children are both observing and internalizing their parents’ stress and worry about immigration issues.

▶ Another provider described a four-year-old girl, whose father had been deported a few weeks before the school year started, as upset, withdrawn, and nervous. ¹⁹ She witnessed her father’s arrest along with her two older siblings. The separation of families is particularly harmful for children, and the absence of a parent is a form of toxic stress. Toxic stress response may happen when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity without sufficient adult support. Toxic stress in a young child’s life can increase their vulnerability to poor health outcomes as adults. ²⁰ The presence of a parent or a caring adult is critical to children’s healthy development.

▶ Having a loving, interactive, and safe environment is essential for the brain development of a young child. ²¹ As a child’s first caregiver, parents play an important role in buffering the effects of stress in their children’s life. When parents are worried, afraid, or absent, children suffer the consequences. When parents stop taking their children to childcare, preschool, the library, and community events because they are afraid, children suffer. When a child does not have frequent positive interactions with their caregivers, (parents, childcare providers, community members), it can affect their ability to form healthy attachments, impact their brain development, and promote physical and mental illness over their life course. ²² Children of immigrants in California are at risk of not having what healthy children need: routine, stability, a sense of safety, and a loving adult presence.



State Leadership Opportunity: California Surgeon General Puts a Spotlight on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

*“Yet our immigration policies continue to forcibly separate children from their caregivers and place them in conditions known to harm their healthy development. ... **Regardless of what one thinks about immigration, there’s one price no child should have to pay: a shortened life.**” - Dr. Nadine Burke-Harris, July 11, 2019, Washington Post*

On January 7, 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom issued Executive Order N-02-19 establishing the position of the first-ever State Surgeon General and appointing Dr. Nadine Burke-Harris to the role.

The order declares, “Whereas California faces serious health challenges rooted in early social determinants of health,” marking the first time the executive office has explicitly named the impact of social determinants of health with emphasis on a child’s earliest years.

The appointment of Dr. Burke-Harris signals a commitment to confronting childhood trauma and toxic stress, and we must include immigration in our policy response to adverse childhood experiences.

CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS ARE HAVING THEIR CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES DISRUPTED.

“ I asked one of my clients, ‘Oh how were you doing today?’ And she said, ‘Oh, ICE was in the neighborhood so I had to go the long way to school through all these back allies and we were late. And my kids were wondering why we had to hurry and I won’t let them play outside.’” – Home visitor in CA

- ▶ Families are afraid of running into ICE agents or being apprehended as they go about their daily lives. As a protective measure, they have become hyper vigilant. Many parents are wary of taking their children to parks, public libraries, and museums. Others have stopped going grocery shopping or running errands as a family. As a result, their young children are missing learning, playing, and community-building opportunities.
- ▶ In California, 60 percent of young children from immigrant families attend childcare centers, requiring parents to travel every day so their children can learn.²³ Early education programs reported drops in attendance, fewer applicants, trouble filling available spaces, and decreased parent participation in classrooms and at events.²⁴ “We don’t feel safe even taking the kids to childcare,” a parent in California shared. As a result of decreased participation in early care and education programs, children are losing out on enriching early childhood experiences that are important to prepare them for success in school and in life.
- ▶ Some parents are taking particularly drastic measures to avoid the potential consequences of immigration enforcement. A home visitor in California said one of her clients decided to send her children to live with her mother in Mexico after she lost her job at a fast food restaurant. She was afraid of being deported and losing her three children—ages two, four, and six—in the child welfare system forever.²⁵

CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS ARE NOT GETTING THEIR BASIC NEEDS MET.

“ One family disclosed that they didn’t want to apply for WIC because they heard that immigration would come to their door.” – Head Start provider in CA



- ▶ Parents are concerned about public benefit records affecting their future opportunities for legal permanent residence, for example, under the now court-enjoined public charge rule. Although many immigrant families are not eligible for all federal benefits due to restrictive immigration laws, even those eligible are hesitant to enroll; this reluctance has increased since the last election.²⁶ Survey data and enrollment patterns suggest that families are also declining to use critical nutrition benefits like SNAP and WIC. Over one quarter of WIC agencies surveyed in 2017 reported that undocumented parents are refusing services, even though WIC is one of the programs for which they are eligible.²⁷



- ▶ Immigrants are feeling threatened as public targets for immigration enforcement and raids. Health providers reported that pregnant women are delaying prenatal care, children are missing routine appointments, and families are disenrolling from health programs.²⁸ One provider said that a SNAP enrollment specialist asked one of her parents, “You’re not even legal anyway, why are you here?”²⁹
- ▶ Early childhood is also a period where regular well-child visits are vital to healthy development. Eighty percent of vaccines are issued before the age of five.³⁰ Equally as influential is early and consistent prenatal care for mothers. Medical care is especially critical for children with special health care needs.³¹ These are children who often have serious, sometimes life-threatening medical and developmental conditions. Any missed medical appointments or lapse in insurance can be significant and carry the possibility of negative long-term outcomes. A provider that serves children with special needs said that families have been facing increased hostility in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) office. One woman was told that she could come back to apply for SSI when she could speak English.³² If parents are afraid to bring their children in for health care, children run the risk of missing vital preventive services.
- ▶ Conceding their access to healthy food and medical care for a sense of personal safety is not a decision any parent should have to make.

CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS ARE BEING FURTHER PUSHED INTO ECONOMIC AND HOUSING INSTABILITY.

*A childcare provider in California said she noticed families changing addresses every three months. She was receiving notifications of changes in employment, **as parents moved to less formal and often lower-paying jobs to avoid the risk of a worksite raid or other enforcement actions.***

- ▶ The current policy climate is threatening the employment stability of immigrant families, putting their children at even greater risk of living in poverty. While immigrant families are slightly more likely to work a substantial number of hours, many are still not able to get ahead.³³ Although 93 percent of immigrant households have at least one parent working, young children of immigrants in California are more likely to live in poverty.³⁴ Childcare providers share that families are changing addresses and employment with more frequency as a tactic to stay under the radar.³⁵
- ▶ The overall anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies pressure employers to lay off undocumented workers, and in other instances, they put undocumented workers in a position more vulnerable to exploitation.³⁶ Parents in California reported that more employers were receiving notices regarding immigration inspections and, as a consequence, letting undocumented employees go. One father reported losing his job at a carwash that he had held for more than a decade.³⁷ In some cases, parents stated that their employers let them go preemptively “because they [did]n’t want to have problems.”
- ▶ For some immigrant families, living conditions for young children have also worsened. A childcare provider described families changing addresses every three months. She said she thinks it’s a way for them to feel safe.³⁸

- ▶ Families who experience the detention or deportation of a loved one are especially vulnerable to economic insecurity. Research shows that close to 90 percent of deportees are men, many of them fathers and breadwinners.³⁹ The sudden loss of the breadwinner can result in a decrease in the family's income by half or more.⁴⁰ This leaves immigrant families more susceptible to crowded living conditions and significant material hardship and poverty in addition to creating greater emotional and financial stress on parents and early childhood providers. As a result of increased economic and housing instability, young children are at risk of poorer health and life outcomes.

HOSTILE IMMIGRATION POLICIES ARE AFFECTING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROVIDERS.

“*Yeah, you do go home and think about it. It's heart-wrenching for me. It can be a little depressing because you're worried about your families. We work not only with the children but the whole family. When you go home, you're worried about your families. It seems like the harder it gets, the harder we work.*” – Head Start provider in CA

- ▶ In California and across the nation, early childhood programs are staffed by a diverse and effective workforce that positively impacts children.⁴¹ However, with one-fifth of ECE staff claiming an immigrant identity, many are experiencing personal stress along with the emotional burden that comes with serving immigrant families.⁴²
- ▶ For immigrant families, these professionals have been trusted sources of early learning for their children in addition to connections to resources and services for their families. Since so many of these workers come from the communities they serve, the political climate is challenging to them as well as to the families they serve.
- ▶ Early childhood providers feel unprepared to meet families' needs.⁴³ Given their concerns about immigration, families are asking for legal advice and want to know how these policies will directly affect them. ECE providers in particular are conflicted about what they can do to make their centers and programs safer. As caregivers, ECE providers understand how important it is to a child's early learning experience to have their basic needs (food, housing, health care) met. However, connecting immigrant families to these public services has become increasingly difficult.



California Has Prioritized Early Childhood Development

Governor Gavin Newsom and the California Legislature committed a \$2.3 billion increase for early childhood programs and supports. By expanding access to subsidized preschool and childcare and investing in California's early learning infrastructure, the 2019-2020 budget brings California one step closer to our goal of high-quality universal preschool and a birth-to-five early care and education system that prepares all children for success in life.

In addition to funding preschool expansion, the budget includes ongoing funding to expand access to childcare and makes significant one-time investments in early learning facilities, data, and workforce training.⁴⁴ It also provides funding for the development of Governor Newsom's master plan to implement universal preschool and a comprehensive, high-quality early care and education system in California to ensure a whole-child approach in supporting the development needs of our youngest, from a health and education perspective. Accordingly, the budget boosts funding for developmental screenings of infants and toddlers and provides resources for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) screenings of young children and adults receiving Medi-Cal, while also investing in voluntary CalWORKs and other home-visiting programs.

It is clear that California's leaders are fully aware and committed to the wellbeing of young children, and now is the time to build on these efforts and strongly encourage California's policymakers to center children in immigrant families in their long-term vision for early childhood development.



Photo Credit: First 5 LA

Recommendations For California to Better Support the Healthy Development of Young Children in Immigrant Families

To safeguard the healthy development of California’s young children in immigrant families, the following actions should be taken:

- **Proritize building the capacity of all providers working with young children to meet the needs of children in immigrant families.**

An early childhood workforce that is trained to understand how to identify and respond to signs of trauma, that is aware of migration-related trauma and other adversities that families may be facing, and that is knowledgeable about other services in the community to which families can be referred can bolster resilience and significantly improve the socio-emotional health of both young children and their

caretakers.⁴⁵ This would result in a more proficient early childhood workforce that is better prepared to adequately respond to children exposed to toxic stress.

Equipping the early childhood workforce with materials for use in their outreach to and discussions with families is important for strengthening the capacity of the system to respond to today’s climate. For example, in response to reports of heightened community stress around immigration, First 5 Association of California partnered with Sesame Street in Communities in 2017 to create the “Care, Cope, Connect” booklet for families in several languages.⁴⁶ Available for distribution by all providers working with children, this workbook includes self-care tips

for parents and caregivers; activities that adults can do—and words they can use—with children to reassure and calm them; and engaging activities children can do on their own to empower and comfort themselves.

California can explicitly prioritize vulnerable immigrant and refugee families through home visiting programs and use models designed to take a two-generation approach to address trauma, maternal stress, child and adult mental health needs, and child development. Governor Newsom’s final 2019-2020 budget included funding to train home visitors in cultural competency and community based immigration resources through the CalWORKs Home Visiting Program in the California Department of Social

Services. As home visiting programs expand across California, many counties are making sure that the culturally-responsive home visitors have specific training in helping immigrants adapt. San Diego’s First 5 Steps program provides home visiting to diverse communities – including military families and pregnant and parenting teens – as well as newly



arrived refugees making the difficult transition to life in a new country.

Similarly, in Los Angeles, the Best Babies Network, a coordinating body that supports organizations that are dedicated to improving the health of pregnant women, newborns, and their families, provides training to home-visiting programs on recent immigration and public charge regulations to ensure immigrant families know their rights and feel safe as they continue to participate in the home-visiting program. First 5 LA staff also collaborate with experts on immigration policies impacting families to ensure that home-visitor providers (Parents As Teachers, Welcome Baby, and Healthy Families America) have the most accurate and up-to-date information to share with parents, who are then empowered to make the most informed decisions that best fit the circumstances of their families.

As the state continues to invest in home-visiting initiatives, exploring programs and models that take a culturally competent and trauma-informed approach will help ensure young children in immigrant and refugee families are effectively served.

► **Create a Safe Spaces initiative to strengthen the early childhood system’s support of immigrant families.**

Early childhood programs play an important role in the lives of young children and their families. However, in today’s political environment, many parents are concerned it’s unsafe to bring their children to early childhood programs. Families are worried about sharing their personal information, how participating in publicly funded programs could affect their ability to obtain long-term status, and the possibility of encountering immigration agents at or near the childcare center.⁴⁷ Though early childhood programs are classified

as sensitive locations,⁴⁸ anecdotal reports suggest the policy is not being consistently followed or enforced. Early childhood programs, like preschools and childcare programs, can take steps to protect families’ safety and privacy by implementing policies that designate their facilities as a safe space from immigration enforcement.

In 2018, AB 699 went into effect in California, a law that provides critical protections for immigrant students in K-12 schools including the following measures: prohibiting the collection of information regarding immigration status, requiring the adoption of model policies to prevent immigration enforcement on school grounds, and prohibiting discrimination based on immigration status. As work is done to support California schools in implementing AB 699, more must be done to provide additional safe spaces for parents and family members to express concern and learn about immigration policy, including programs that educate families about their rights.



Early childhood programs should implement similar policies to AB 699 that designate their facility as a safe space from immigration enforcement. A “safe space” policy is a plan or set of protocols to safeguard early childhood programs against immigration enforcement actions and protect families’ safety and privacy. Policymakers should encourage the

implementation of “safe space” policies by all state ECE providers and provide resources to ensure all staff are trained on the policy and prepared to take action. Such a policy will equip staff with the necessary information to be prepared if an unwelcome, unannounced visit from immigration agents or other law enforcement officials occurs. These visits are disruptive, and having a plan in place—and communicating that plan to staff and parents—will help prepare staff and protect families. A “safe space” policy will also help ECE providers create a more welcoming and safe space for immigrant families, communicating to families the extent to which their safety and security is taken seriously.⁴⁹

► **Expand early relational health programs that support families, children, and providers with trauma-informed approaches.**

Investing in initiatives that encourage programs to use a trauma-informed lens when connecting the families they serve with other community resources that address socio-emotional and mental health needs is necessary for successfully responding to the needs of California’s young children.⁵⁰ Infant and early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC) conducted in ECE or other nonclinical settings has been identified as a particularly effective strategy to provide critical socio-emotional supports and identify and address mental health concerns among young children.⁵¹ As they conduct IECMHC, mental health professionals work collaboratively with early childhood professionals, pediatricians, and other service providers through techniques such as skilled observations, strengthening teacher-family relationships, identification of at-risk children, and referrals to additional services and supports. Additionally, counties are responding to the potential collective impact that comes from working with trauma-informed coalitions to prevent the early childhood trauma relevant to immigration experiences and intervene

early by connecting these populations to community resources.

California has a number of funding streams for children’s mental health. Second to the largest funding (Medi-Cal) is Proposition 63, or the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA). Counties are continuing to determine how best to use MHSA dollars to their full potential to support children.⁵² Counties should prioritize opportunities to support the mental health of young children in immigrant families and work collaboratively with early childhood providers to improve services and supports to promote the healthy development of young children.

Across California, many counties, led by local First 5 Commissions, are focusing on early mental health collaborations that support immigrant families with culturally relevant and supportive programs. In Monterey County, mental health training for ECE providers aims to build participants’ understanding about mental health, including early relationships, socio-emotional development, and trauma-informed approaches.⁵³ Each year, the program reaches over 200 providers, including a cohort conducted solely in Spanish.

► **Support early childhood network building between early childhood providers, health and legal services, and other immigrant-family-specific needs.**

Childcare providers are in the unique position to influence, educate, and connect with parents and guardians about existing resources and strategies they can adapt to buffer toxic stress and support the development of their young children. Early Head Start, home-visiting, and childcare programs can institute formal partnerships, for example, with health and mental health services, legal services, and other entities to ensure immigrant parents have the continuum of supports necessary to meet the holistic needs of themselves and their children.

Immigrant Families and Protective Factors

In a framework used by the Magnolia Community Initiative and many others, individuals working within organizations and community members are introduced to “**protective factors**,” which are the conditions or attributes in individuals, families, and communities that act to **mitigate risks and promote positive wellbeing and healthy development**.⁵⁵ Protective factors serve as buffers to help individuals find the resources and strategies to function effectively, even under stress. They also enable parents, such as those impacted by immigration enforcement and other immigration-related policies and actions, to find resources, supports, and strategies that help them to parent effectively.

Co-locating services is a particularly effective method of alleviating access and service challenges for families that are hard for mainstream service providers to reach.⁵⁴ With over seventy community partners, the Magnolia Community Initiative seeks to increase protective factors and the reliability of service/support systems in providing prevention and timely need-based care.⁵⁶ As part of this community-wide effort, St. John’s Health Clinic administers a screener tool to identify other non-medical needs faced by families. Families are then provided with referrals to such services through the network of community partners.

In many instances, immigrant families need legal services to address outstanding questions and concerns. Immigrant legal services can ensure that immigrant families are properly and appropriately referred to services for which they are eligible in areas of health and human services.⁵⁷ The Project DULCE (Developmental Understanding & Legal Collaboration for Everyone) model is an innovative partnership that bridges early childhood development and legal assistance. It started in Boston and is now expanding to sites in Los Angeles, Alameda, and Orange Counties, led by county First 5s and the Center for the Study of Social Policy. Referral to legal resources is a key part of Project DULCE, which pairs families with newborns with a specialist who helps them navigate

the early childhood system of care. In Alameda County, the program is based at the county’s Highland Hospital and serves about 150 families a year—98 percent of whom are covered by Medi-Cal.⁵⁸ Approximately 70 percent of the families DULCE serves are immigrants, and nearly half of DULCE families are referred for legal assistance through partner East Bay Community Law Center, often for immigration, housing, and public benefits issues. Families report decreased anxiety and fear after receiving this legal assistance, directly impacting the mental health of parents.

In its prioritization of early childhood development, California must seek to create a coordinated system of programs, policies, and services that promotes the healthy development of, and responds to the needs of, young children and their families. Emerging evidence strongly suggests that structured partnerships with legal-community stakeholders can expand and accelerate families’ access to the supports and services they need to help children and their families thrive.⁵⁹

► **Strengthen communications from state agencies around immigration policy changes to eligibility workers, enrollment specialists, and others in the early childhood system.**

Given the important role early childhood providers already play in the lives of immigrant families, it is

imperative that the state and local agencies communicate information and guidance regarding immigration policy changes, support their development of new capacities, and promote access to appropriate training resources and tools to connect with immigrant families.

A system-wide approach to communicating immigration policy changes also strengthens efforts to integrate such information into programmatic-level policies and practices and to better support the diverse families served by programs (for example, building capacity across the early childhood system by training staff on mental health and other trauma-informed ECE learning strategies). For example, in 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families released a "Resource Guide to Trauma-Informed Services" that includes resources specific to early childhood, immigrants, and refugees.⁵⁹ This is intended to guide programs (including direct-service programs such as Head Start, but also administrative staff in programs such as SNAP) in expanding their capacity to respond to trauma.

Ensuring a system-wide approach will also provide opportunities for ECE providers to demonstrate leadership in advocacy. For example, First 5 Alameda has held seven trainings in the past two years for early childhood providers—early care providers, health care providers, social workers, Head Start workers, and others—related to immigration issues. Topics have included how to help families create preparedness plans in case of family separation, the mental health impacts on small children and families of immigration policy, policy and legal updates on immigration issues, and how to help ensure immigrant families are informed and connected to resources. Similarly, in more rural counties, where the supply of ECE settings is very limited, family resource centers and



playgroups also fill an important role. First 5 Humboldt has assembled kits to be distributed to all playgroups, family resource centers, and made available to the schools as well, with resources on how to support families in the face of fears around immigration actions. ECE providers are a powerful constituency and have the opportunity to use their voices on behalf of young children in immigrant families to engage, educate, and strengthen the network of support.

► **Improve data collection to inform improvements in services and programs.**

Data collection in this time of uncertainty is challenging for many community providers that seek to create a welcoming environment for immigrant families and their children. However, identifying opportunities to collect data in a mindful and sensitive way can provide the information needed to better track the specific needs of young children in immigrant families. For example, tracking enrollment changes (e.g., precipitous declines) in childcare settings (e.g., changes in Head Start or childcare subsidy uptake enrollment) or in community event attendance, as identified by community partners. Declines in enrollment among this population may be a signal of exclusion. Such data can be disaggregated by county or geographic area and analyzed according to immigrant concentration.⁶⁰ Examining

data from multiple perspectives allows for a better understanding of systemic barriers to enrollment and/or outreach challenges.

To inform program improvement efforts, early childhood development programs, such as home-visiting programs, should collect data on the home languages of participating families and the English proficiency of parents.⁶¹ Gathering this information at the program level would help staff gain a more complete understanding of the families they are serving and how they are faring. It would also allow researchers and policymakers to disaggregate performance data, providing critical information about the specific experiences and outcomes of various subgroups within larger ethnic and racial groupings. Understanding the linguistic backgrounds of families, moreover, would be an important step for programs seeking to tailor their outreach strategies, hire staff with relevant language skills, and improve their approaches to working with immigrant communities.

Conclusion

When the wellbeing of children of immigrants is compromised, California's future is compromised. Therefore, our policies must put the needs of children front and center. In today's challenging political climate and hostile national environment toward immigrant communities, California has the opportunity to intentionally focus its efforts on ensuring young children in immigrant families are able to achieve their full potential—through access to high-quality early educational experiences, health care, nutrition assistance, and other supports that promote healthy development from birth through adulthood.⁶²

With one in two California children part of an immigrant family, early childhood programs must be responsive to the changing landscape for immigrant families and consider meeting these families' needs as core to their mission to advance the wellbeing and development of children. Supporting and expanding existing regional and statewide collaboration efforts between early childhood providers and immigrant-family advocates will allow for training to be facilitated and best practices to be shared more widely. Robust training and supports will strengthen the capacity of early childhood professionals to respond to today's environment by offering the information, skills, supports, and partnerships necessary to meet families' most pressing needs.

California policymakers must demonstrate the political will and leadership necessary to combat the harmful effects of immigration enforcement and anti-immigrant policies on young children and the early childhood professionals working with them. Until policymakers at the national level advance immigration policies that value families and prioritize child wellbeing, states like California will be critical in buffering the negative implications of federal activity. California must take the lead to protect and defend the wellbeing of young children in immigrant families, to strengthen the cross-sector collaborations needed to improve childcare and early childhood practices and policies, and to increase supports for the early childhood workforce that serve immigrant families.



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Endnotes

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