Early Childhood Utah Advisory Council

2025 annual report

Utah Department of
Health & Human
Services

Executive summary

➡️ Partnership with Medicaid leading to improvements in customer experience. (Health and access to medical homes subcommittee)

➡️ Updated and released new Early Learning Standards Birth to Age 3 to unite workforce professional development. (Early care and education subcommittee)

➡️ Data sharing agreement with Utah State Board of Education (USBE) for evaluation of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) coordinated developmental screening project. (Data and research subcommittee)

➡️ Parent leaders actively involved in all council work. (Parent engagement, support and education subcommittee)

➡️ Survey of parents in Utah indicated that suspension or expulsion from an early care setting can hurt the relationship between parent and child. (Social-emotional and mental health subcommittee)

The work of the 5 subcommittees of the Early Childhood Advisory Council is summarized in the following pages. In July 2024, the subcommittee work changed to align with the priorities identified in the Utah Early Childhood 5-year Strategic plan funded by the Preschool Development Grant B-5 (PDG) Renewal published in June 2024.

The advisory council has 26 members, and approximately 75 additional members participate in the subcommittees. The combination of subject matter experts and parents with lived experience with leadership of organizations is an effective mix that impacts improved early childhood outcomes in Utah.

Organizations represented

➡️ Utah Department of Health and Human Services

➡️ Utah Department of Workforce Services

➡️ Utah State Board of Education

➡️ Utah Local Education Agencies

➡️ Utah Local Health Departments

➡️ Utah Head Start Association

➡️ Utah Governor's Office

➡️ Help Me Grow Utah

➡️ Baby Watch Early Intervention provider

➡️ Parent representative

➡️ Child Care provider

➡️ Mental Health providers

➡️ Pediatricians

Health and access to medical homes

Current goal

Help more families complete Medicaid applications correctly so they can be insured. Improve customer experience for families enrolling in Medicaid.

Why was this goal chosen?

Two factors that affect access to medical care are whether a child is insured, and whether they have a regular place to go for well-care and sick-care. In Utah, many families are not insured by Medicaid because they were unsuccessful in the application process, not because they were over the income or asset limit. This is referred to as "procedural disenrollment."

- 48.5% of members in April 2024 had cases closed due to procedural disenrollment. [1]

- Although much improved, in March of 2025, 25.3% of Utah cases were disenrolled for procedural reasons, only 3% determined ineligible.[2]

> The impact of not having health insurance as a child is lifelong. Uninsured children grow into adults with poorer health, including higher risks for premature death, cancer, heart disease, and other illnesses. PDG Needs Assessment, 2024, pg. 131.

Subcommittee work in progress

The subcommittee explored the help available for the Medicaid application process. Representatives from both the Utah Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Integrated Healthcare, the Medicaid single agency for Utah, and the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) Division of Eligibility, which handles the enrollment process for Medicaid, are part of the subcommittee. The subcommittee also looked at what other states do to make applications easier. The subcommittee partnered with Take Care Utah, a healthcare system navigator in Utah, to understand the ways support personnel help a family apply for Medicaid.

Subcommittee accomplishments

➡️ Integrated Healthcare has prioritized creation of a Medicaid companion guide.

➡️ DWS Division of Eligibility is exploring the addition of explanatory language and videos to the DWS's MyCase online application platform.

Broader systems work

Medicaid recently released an Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) training for providers. This will help providers understand how to bill for well-child visits under the new policy. The Office of Early Childhood hired a full-time program specialist, paid for with Title V funding, to lead quality improvement initiatives for young children's access to medical homes and well-child visits.

Subcommittee upcoming goals

➡️ Create training materials for early childhood providers to empower them to help families completing Medicaid applications.

➡️ Help develop video guidance for families to better understand the Medicaid application requirements.

Early care and education

Current goal

Update and share the new Early Childhood Coaching Competencies for Professionals. Update and share Utah's Early Learning Standards for Birth to 3.

Why was this goal chosen?

For early childhood educators to work together, they need a shared language and vision. Creation of tools for workforce development is necessary, but even more important is the wide distribution of the materials and promotion of their use.

- ➡ In a survey of 412 people in Utah's early care and education system, 54% said they had either never or rarely used the Early Learning Guidelines for Birth to Age Three.

- ➡ An additional 38% said they didn't know the Early Learning Guidelines existed.[3]

> When common measurements are in place, parents and early childhood educators can more effectively work to get children ready for success in kindergarten. PDG Needs Assessment, 2024, pg. 88.

Subcommittee work in progress

The subcommittee has worked to align the employment requirements and training of the early care and education workforce in order to support use of best practice and promote better outcomes for children. This subcommittee membership includes leadership from Head Start, the Office of Child Care, and USBE, which made it possible to prioritize and achieve these goals.

Subcommittee accomplishments

→ Updated and released Utah's Early Learning Standards for Birth to 3, which had not been revised since 2007.

→ Updated the Coaching Competencies. The updated Coaching Competencies will be made into a interactive website to engage early childhood professionals.

Broader systems work

Earlychildhood.utah.gov, a website with resources for families with children age birth through 8 launched in March 2025. Having a single source for resources builds trust and makes it easier for families to find services.

Subcommittee upcoming goals

→ Finish Coaching Competencies web application.

→ Promote the Kindergarten Transition Toolkit and the Early Learning Standards for Birth to 3.

→ Create a clear way to define kindergarten readiness that matches with Utah's early learning standards. (PDG Strategic Plan, Theme 2, Action 2.3)

Parent engagement, support and education

Current goal

Increase parent involvement, decision-making, and representation in the early childhood system.

Why was this goal chosen?

Parent engagement and leadership is vital to the success of Utah's early childhood programs. The Early Childhood Utah Advisory Council recognizes parents as the best and first teachers of their children. As such, they must be actively consulted in the planning, development, and implementation of projects affecting their children. In addition, parent input is vital in evaluation of existing programs.

In order to be at their best, parents need support, including education on child development, parenting skills, and access to resources in times of need. PDG Needs Assessment, 2024, pg 122.

Subcommittee work in progress

Each of the Early Childhood Utah subcommittees presents to the parent engagement subcommittee every three months. This deeply involves parents and offers them a safe space to provide insight and feedback on the work of the council. Educational presentations help parents learn about complex systems and empower them to become strong leaders and early childhood advocates.

Subcommittee accomplishments

➡ A parent serves as chair-elect of the subcommittee.

➡ Three new parents joined the subcommittee.

➡ Parents joined other subcommittees as participants.

Broader systems work

In November 2024, the Early Childhood Utah program hired a part-time family lead who serves on the subcommittee. This staff member has engaged with national programs to pilot and review curriculums for family leadership which can be adapted to Utah use.

Subcommittee upcoming goals

➡ Educate current parent members and help them become leaders.

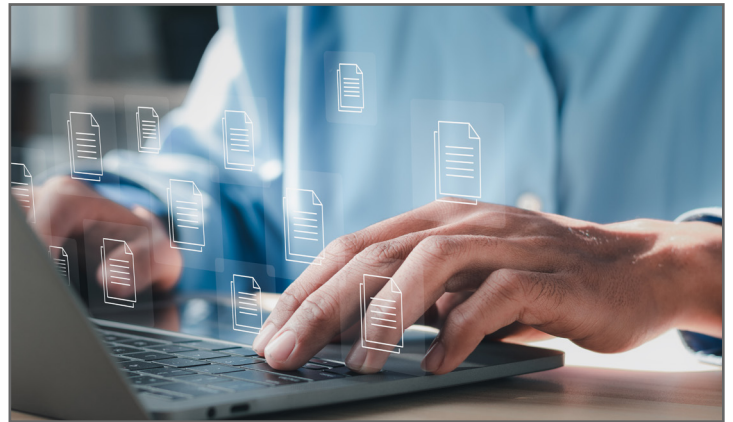➡ Recruit parents that represent all of Utah families, including parents from non-traditional households.

Data and research

Current goal

Over the next 5 years, develop and begin implementation of a strategic plan for improving longitudinal and coordinated early childhood databases that links data with outcomes and includes data standards. This includes work with Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS) and Utah Data Research Center (UDRC).

Why was this goal chosen?

Utah's mixed delivery early childhood system is just beginning the journey toward integrated data. While data is collected by the various programs, it is rarely shared between programs and agencies. Integrated and shared data is crucial in tracking outcomes and evaluating programs.

> State-level integrated data is a crucial factor in targeting EC efforts where they can make the most difference for Utah's children and families. PDG Needs Assessment, 2024, pg 74.

Subcommittee work in progress

The subcommittee is working on creating a data sharing training toolkit. This resource will be used to help programs understand the why behind sharing data, how to share data safely, and how to overcome challenges and barriers.

Subcommittee accomplishments

The subcommittee is supported by decision-makers and data stewards from many different early childhood systems. This membership works together to influence many of the programs in the state's mixed delivery system. In addition, the sharing of information monthly between members of the subcommittee leads to greater collaboration between programs.

Broader systems work

Utah Data Research Center is continuing to onboard Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) data shared by the DHHS Office of Early Childhood. Research on this data will begin in July 2025. In addition, a data sharing agreement was signed between the Utah State Board of Education and the DHHS Office of Early Childhood for sharing matched outcome data for children who had been screened using the ASQ screening tool. On a local level, data sharing agreements are in progress between grantees from the Home Visiting program and local WIC agencies.

Subcommittee upcoming goals

➡ Create training materials for data sharing including sample data sharing agreements and templates for use by local agencies.

➡ Support connections across organizations for data sharing.

Social, emotional and mental health

Current goal

Use survey data on early child care and preschool suspension and expulsion rates and experiences in Utah to suggest policy changes.

Why was this goal chosen?

Suspension and expulsion from early care and education settings can have a significant impact on a child's future success. Students that have been expelled from these settings are more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system and may be at 10 times higher risk of becoming a high school dropout. [4]

When children are excluded from learning environments by being suspended or expelled, they miss valuable educational opportunities and are at greater risk of disengagement and diminished educational opportunities. Such disproportionate trends promote a "preschool to prison pipeline" where young boys and girls are put on the tumultuous track that increases their risk for academic failure, absenteeism, and even incarceration. (Adamu, M., & Hogan, L. (2015). Point of entry: The preschool-to-prison pipeline.)

Subcommittee work in progress

The second annual parent survey to collect Utah-specific data about experiences with suspension and expulsion will be distributed in mid-2025. A provider survey is in its final testing phase.

Subcommittee accomplishments

The subcommittee created two surveys, one for providers and one for parents, to collect Utah-specific data.

Broader systems work

The Utah Pyramid Model began work in 2023 to help early childhood educators and parents of young children cope with challenging behaviors. They are currently supporting 44 sites, serving nearly 9,000 children.

Subcommittee upcoming goals

➡ Gather information for a landscape survey of rural early childhood mental health service availability.

➡ Create or find and help promote a toolkit for families managing challenging behaviors.

References

1. https://medicaid.utah.gov/unwinding/unwinding-eligibility-data/

2. https://medicaid.utah.gov/eligibility-data/

3. PDG B-5 Needs Assessment pg. 88

4. (HHS and ED Joint Statement on Suspension and Expulsion, 2014.)

Contact

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