

Investing in Healthy Child Development Will Yield Immediate and Long-term Economic Benefits

Introduction

Prevent Child Abuse America and our national network of 47 state chapters and over 400 Healthy Families America home visitation programs thanks President-Elect Obama for the opportunity to provide our recommendations for considering the role of early childhood policies in the context of our current economy. Like you, we believe that the early years of life are the foundation for a child's future development. When we invest in child development, we are investing in community and economic development. When we don't prevent intensive stress on children, like child abuse and neglect, we undermine their healthy development. Prevent Child Abuse America believes that including child development as a focus in an economic recovery package would have profound immediate and long-term effects on our nation's economy.

Policy Recommendations for an Economic Recovery Plan

By implementing the following recommendations, the new Administration can immediately enhance the work of prevention in states and communities across the nation:

- Invest in building comprehensive statewide systems of home visitation by enacting and funding the **Education Begins At Home Act** (EBAH). A compelling body of research demonstrates the measurable outcomes attributable to programs that employ home visitors with a wide range of backgrounds. For example, results from the randomized trial of a Healthy Families New York program, based on the Healthy Families America model using Family Support Workers, showed that the program had positive effects in the areas of parenting and child abuse and neglect, birth outcomes, and health care.¹;
- Increase funding for **CAPTA community-based grants**, which help states develop and implement effective approaches to preventing child abuse and neglect. Increased funding will provide communities with additional support to implement effective prevention strategies such as parenting education, home visiting programs, mutual self-help support groups for parents, and crisis nurseries.
- Increase funding to **Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF)** and the **Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)**. Increased funding to PSSF will promote the expansion of family support services in communities across the nation and provide more intensive help for families in crisis. SSBG's built-in flexibility enables states to address a range of needs that families experience during periods of economic instability and upheaval

Sustainable change cannot occur until there is a national policy and commitment to prevent child abuse and neglect. As the economic recovery plan takes hold and we seek to bolster the impact of these immediate recommendations, we ask that the Administration create a **national strategy** on prevention that coordinates the work of federal agencies, and assures that all federal funding, policies, and regulations related to child well-being are coordinated and working towards complimentary goals.

Short-term Economic Impact of Investing in Prevention

Investing in prevention will have an immediate impact on the economy by reducing costs incurred after a child has been abused or neglected. Our organization conservatively estimates the following annual costs to society directly attributed to abuse and neglect, which could be significantly reduced through evidence-based prevention: **over \$25 billion** in child welfare expenditures; **over \$1 billion** in mental health care services for victims of child maltreatment;

¹ DuMont, Kimberly A., Susan Mitchell-Herzfeld, Rose Greene, Eunju Lee, Ann Lowenfels, and Monica Rodriguez, *Healthy Families New York (HFNY) Randomized Trial: Impacts on Parenting After the First Two Years*, Rensselaer, N.Y.: New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Bureau of Evaluation and Research; Albany, N.Y.: Center for Human Services Research, State University of New York at Albany, Albany, N.Y.: Department of Psychology, State University of New York at Albany, June 2006. As of January 2008:
<http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/prevention/assets/HFNYRandomizedTrialWorkingPaper.pdf>

over \$6.6 billion in costs for children injured seriously enough to require hospitalization; and **over \$33 million** in costs for police services related to abuse and neglect.²

Beyond reducing costs, investing in the infrastructure of prevention has the potential to create jobs in every community across the country. For example, if you invest in building statewide home visitation systems, communities will be able to hire more home visitors, program managers, trainers, and evaluators to serve the additional families able to participate.

Long-term Impact of Investing in Prevention

Prevention has the long term impacts of: (1) reducing health care, juvenile justice, mental health, substance abuse costs, all demonstrated outcomes of child abuse and neglect; (2) enhancing the educational outcomes of children now better equipped to focus and thrive in a school setting; (3) fostering a more productive, capable and competitive workforce with less time loss due to health, mental health and substance issues; and (4) reducing the total amount of costs to society in terms of the insurance and health care that are compounded over time.

Research, such as the *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)*,³ shows that child abuse and neglect have life-long impacts, not only for the child but for the nation. ACE and related studies show a strong correlation between child abuse and neglect and: debilitating and chronic health consequences; drug dependency; mental health illness; and impaired worker performance, including absenteeism. Our organization conservatively estimates that abuse and neglect in childhood translates into: **over \$33 billion** in lost earnings; **almost \$28 billion** in interactions with the adult criminal justice systems; **over \$7 billion** in juvenile delinquency costs; and **almost \$68 million** in mental health and health care costs.⁴

Conclusion

The actions we take to promote healthy child development are the very actions that help to prevent child abuse and neglect, like parent-child interaction, reading, and constructive play. Healthy child development starts a chain of events that follow a child into adulthood. It leads to a more educated and productive workforce, which is good for community development and economic development. At a time when we all concerned about the economy, it just makes sense (and “cents”) to spend more time learning how stable, nurturing relationships influence a child’s developing brain and provide a foundation for all future development.

Unfortunately, children are sometimes exposed to intensive stress like child abuse and neglect. Too much stress is bad for anyone and can be devastating to child development. This is where prevention comes into play, and this is where the above recommendations provide the country with a great opportunity to enhance child development, support communities, reduce child abuse and neglect and ultimately have a profound impact on the economy, education and workforce productivity.

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² Wang, CT, & Holton, J (2007). *Total estimated cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States*. Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America.

http://www.preventchildabuse.org/about_us/media_releases/pcaa_pew_economic_impact_study_final.pdf

³ Felitti, VJ, Anda, RF, Nordenberg, D, Williamson, DF, Spitz, AM, Edwards, V, Koss, MP, & Marks, JS. (1998). [The relationship of adult health status to childhood abuse and household dysfunction](#). *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14, 245-258.

<http://download.journals.elsevierhealth.com/pdfs/journals/07493797/PIIS0749379798000178.pdf>

⁴ Wang, CT, & Holton, J (2007). *Total estimated cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States*. Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America.

http://www.preventchildabuse.org/about_us/media_releases/pcaa_pew_economic_impact_study_final.pdf