

# Children, Families, and Communities

## Program Overview

The Children, Families, and Communities Program strives to ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Our grantmaking strategies address two interrelated and fundamental needs that must be met for children to thrive: health and education.

### The Challenge

While most middle-class children will be blessed with community, public, and family resources to help satisfy these basic needs, too many low-income children are uninsured, do not receive high-quality care and connections to early learning opportunities, and have little opportunity to learn and grow in the hours after school and during the summer. Access to appropriate health care, to high-quality early learning, and to enrichment opportunities that are aligned with school are all evidence-based means of supporting children's development.

Many barriers exist to creating these opportunities for low-income children. The foundations for health and learning are built in the first five years of a child's life, but many of the adults caring for children do not have the support they need to provide quality care and early learning opportunities. Formal caregivers need opportunities for training and professional development, while parents, family, and friends need to know the importance of reading, playing, and forming quality relationships.

In addition, millions of children still do not have health care to support their development. The implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) has the potential to increase access to health care for millions of Americans through insurance reforms and greater emphasis on: prevention and quality

both inside and outside the health care system. If implemented well, more than three million additional children and up to eight million additional parents could have and be able to retain affordable and comprehensive health insurance by 2017.

And, we believe that for our most vulnerable children, it is important that they maintain early gains in health and learning once they transition to formal school. Learning opportunities, both in and outside of the classroom, become critical so they do not fall behind or suffer the devastating effects of summer learning loss. When the school doors close for the summer, too many children are set loose to play on the streets unsupervised or, because of safety concerns, are forced to stay indoors, isolated, and alone.

### Our Strategy

All children will have access to quality health care and early learning opportunities—so they can stay healthy, get ready for school, and stay on track to reach their full potential. Our grantmaking strategies support early learning, children's health, and after-school and summer enrichment. More specifically:

*Early Learning:* Improve the quality of early learning and developmental experiences, in both formal and informal settings, for children in California from birth through age five, by building the skills and knowledge of the adults who care for these children.

*Children's Health:* Ensure strong implementation of the ACA that secures health insurance coverage for children and their families, in ways that expand families' access to high-quality health care, and begin to explore ways to connect the healthy development of children with their early learning experiences.

*After-school and Summer Enrichment:* Strengthen California's commitment, particularly among education leaders, to publicly funded after-school and summer learning programs. We seek to ensure expanded learning programs are fully integrated into the education system and education leaders are aware of the devastating effects of summer learning loss.

### Early Learning

The Early Learning strategy focuses on two approaches: (1) the *Formal system* of professional caregivers caring for children in licensed settings, which serve approximately 60 percent of children in California, and (2) within *Informal* networks of families, friends, and neighbors (FFN) who are estimated to be caring for the other 40 percent of children.

The Formal System strategy aims to improve training and professional development for caregivers and early educators of children birth through age five in formal settings. Our grantmaking focuses on the following:

- Quality professional development programs
- Effective educator preparation programs
- Planned and well-coordinated transitions between early learning settings and school
- Advocacy and stakeholder engagement at the local, state, and federal levels
- Research and evaluation that support best practices and inform the field

Our work in the *Informal networks* aims to create opportunities for FFN caregivers of infants and toddlers to access child development and early learning opportunities and resources. Our grantmaking focuses on the following:

**Research:** we will set out to learn about the informal caregivers, what they know, what they want, and how best they receive information

**Experimentation:** we will select several experiments to reach informal caregivers and improve quality.

### Children's Health

The Children's Health strategy focuses on continuing its grantmaking strategy, Insuring America's Children (IAC), which includes support for state-based groups advocating for children's health insurance efforts in their states, technical assistance for state program directors and policy makers, as well as an evaluation component.

Children's Health is also exploring grantmaking approaches on ways to connect healthy development with early learning experiences.

### After-school and Summer Enrichment

The After-school and Summer Enrichment strategy focuses on ensuring children and youth have access to high-quality after-school and summer learning opportunities that support their year-round development and well-being. The main goal is that after-school and summer learning programs become fully integrated in to the education system because they play a crucial role in reducing the opportunity and achievement gaps for low-income students. Additionally, we support expanded learning programs using agreed upon measure of quality across the state.

### Learn More

To learn more about our subprograms, visit our website at: [www.packard.org/children-families-and-communities](http://www.packard.org/children-families-and-communities).