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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases New Report *Infants, Toddlers, and their Families Rhode Island*

A child's brain has grown to 90% of its adult size by age 3

Young children are the age group most likely to live in poverty and to experience abuse or neglect in Rhode Island and the U.S.

"Toxic Stress" (adverse childhood experiences) can cause immediate and long-term consequences for health and development

Providence, RI (June 4, 2015) – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its newest *Issue Brief – Infants, Toddlers, and Their Families in Rhode Island* – at a policy roundtable attended by more than 60 policy makers, state agency leaders, and community members. The event was held today from 1:00–3:00 p.m. at Save the Bay, 100 Save the Bay Drive, in Providence.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director, provided welcoming remarks, and Senior Policy Analyst Leanne Barrett presented highlights from the *Issue Brief*. Elizabeth Roberts, Secretary of the RI Executive Office of Health and Human Services; Senator Gayle Goldin, Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, Director of the RI Department of Health; Melba Depeña, Director of the RI Department of Human Services, Jamia McDonald, Chief Strategy Officer at the RI Department of Children, Youth, and Families; and Mary Ann Snider, Chief of Educator Excellence & Instructional Effectiveness at the RI Department of Education provided perspectives.

The first 1,000 days of life are a time of great opportunity and great vulnerability. The basic architecture of the human brain develops during the infant and toddler years. By age three, a child's brain has grown to 90% of its adult size and the foundation of many cognitive structures and systems are in place.

"Early experiences lay the foundation for future learning, and strong, positive relationships with parents and other caregivers are the building blocks for healthy development," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "Investing in healthy development and learning in the earliest years will pay dividends to Rhode Islanders in terms of short-term benefits and long-term gains."

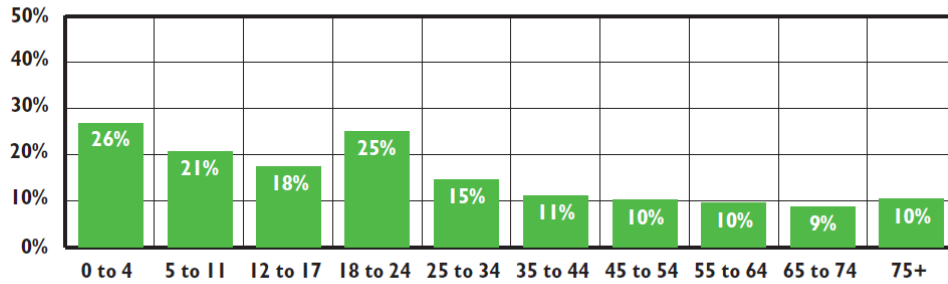
The Issue Brief provides a variety of data on highlights relevant to the health and development of infants and toddlers in Rhode Island.

Young Children are the Age Group Most Likely to Live in Poverty in Rhode Island

- In the U.S., infants and toddlers are the age group most likely to live in poverty with 25% living below the poverty line in 2013 (\$18,751 for a family of three).

- An additional 23% live in low-income families with incomes below 200% of the poverty line (\$37,502 for a family of three). Nationally, children under age three are almost three times more likely to live in poverty than adults 65 years and older.
- In Rhode Island, 26% of children under age five live in poverty.

Percent of Population Living Below Poverty Threshold by Age, Rhode Island, 2011-2013



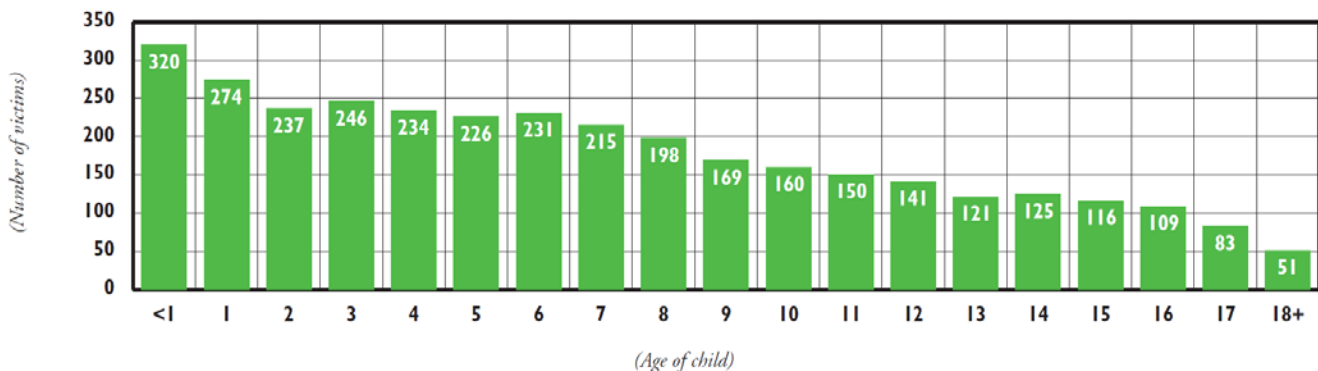
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2013. Table B17001.

- Living in poverty during infancy and the early childhood years is especially harmful. Inadequate family resources during the time when babies' brains are establishing foundational neural functions and structures can have long-lasting negative impacts. Economic insecurity in early childhood may compromise the child's lifetime achievement and employment opportunities.

Young Children are the Group Most Likely to Experience Child Abuse or Neglect

- Infants and toddlers are also more likely to experience abuse or neglect than other age groups. Infants under age one are the most likely age group to experience maltreatment.

Child Abuse and Neglect by Age of Victim, Rhode Island, 2014



- In the U.S. and Rhode Island, infants and toddlers are the largest group of children entering foster care. Of the children who entered foster care in 2013, 31% in the U.S. and 32% in Rhode Island were less than three years old.
- Between 2009 and 2013 in Rhode Island, 25% of deaths due to maltreatment were children under age three and 62% of hospitalizations for maltreatment were children under age three.

Rhode Island's Demographics of Young Children are Changing

Rhode Island has 5th Lowest Birth Rate in U.S.

- In 2013, the U.S. birth rate for women ages 15 to 44 reached a record low and Rhode Island had the 5th lowest birth rate in the U.S.
- There were 10,788 babies born to Rhode Island families in 2013, 18% lower than in 2003 (13,202).

Increasing Racial and Ethnic Diversity, Especially with Infants and Toddlers

- The U.S. population is becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, with infants and toddlers leading the way. In 2012, 51% of infants and toddlers in the U.S. were identified either as Hispanic or non-White.
- In Rhode Island, young children are less likely to be identified as White non-Hispanic than any other age group. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of children under age five in Rhode Island identify as White non-Hispanic (compared with 71% of adults ages 25 to 44 and 91% of people age 65 or over identifying as White non-Hispanic).
- Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing racial/ethnic minority group in the U.S. In Rhode Island in 2013, 23% of all births were to women who identified as Hispanic.

Toxic Stress can Harm Development for Young Children – Causing Permanent Changes

- Early exposure to adverse experiences in infancy and early childhood, known as “toxic stress,” can disrupt the developing brain architecture, causes enduring trauma to a child’s developing brain, and can lead to permanent changes in learning, behavior, and physiology.
- Examples of adverse experiences are frequent socioeconomic hardship, parental divorce or separation, parental death, parental incarceration, witnessing domestic violence, witnessing violence in the neighborhood, experiencing racial or ethnic discrimination, living with someone who is mentally ill or suicidal, and living with someone who has problems with substance abuse.
- Nearly one in four infants and toddlers in the U.S. has experienced one or more adverse experiences. Even after excluding economic hardship, children under age three who live in poverty are four times more likely to experience two or more adverse experiences.

Evidence-Based Home Visiting Programs Can Improve Outcomes for Infants and Toddlers

- As of October 2014, 500 Rhode Island families with infants and toddlers were enrolled in one of one of three evidence-based home visiting programs in Rhode Island (Healthy Families America, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Parents as Teachers).
- 88% of participating families lived in one of the four core cities (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket), more than 20% were families with teen parents, and more than half of the mothers in participating families had a high school diploma or less.
- Children in at-risk families who participate in high-quality, evidence-based family home visiting programs have improved language, cognitive, and social-emotional development and are less likely to experience child abuse and neglect. Families who participate are more likely to provide an enriching home environment, use appropriate discipline strategies, and become economically secure through education and employment.

Recommendations

A companion publication, *Next Steps for Rhode Island's Infants, Toddlers, and Their Families*, was also released at the Policy Roundtable. *Next Steps* includes a complete set of recommended policy priorities for Rhode Island infants, toddlers, and their families developed under the leadership of a public-private steering committee using input from more than 200 early childhood experts from across the state. *Next Steps* has been endorsed by a variety of statewide planning groups, including the Rhode Island Early Learning Council and Successful Start.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT included a summary of the *Next Steps* recommendations as the recommendations of the *Issue Brief* (see page 16).

Economic Security

- Expand job opportunities and work supports for parents
- Prevent and improve responses available for homeless families
- Expand the availability of affordable housing
- Expand access to the Child Care Assistance Program

Maintain Focus: Affordable Health/Dental Insurance, Paid Family Leave

Mental Health & Well-Being

- Implement routine depression and psychosocial screening for pregnant women and parents of infants and young children
- Ensure access to infant/toddler and family mental health treatment and support
- Support cross-sector professionals to develop infant/toddler mental health expertise
- Improve family court and child welfare practices to support healthy development of parent-child relationships

Maintain Focus: Affordable Health/Dental Insurance, Universal Developmental Screenings

Family Support & Parenting

- Broaden eligibility for evidence-based family home visiting programs
- Expand availability of effective community-based resources and parenting programs
- Prioritize child welfare resources to meet the needs of young children who have experienced child maltreatment

Maintain Focus: Paid Family Leave, Evidence-Based Family Home Visiting

High-Quality Early Learning & Development Programs

- Improve the quality of infant/toddler child care
- Expand outreach and screening in low-income and at-risk communities to find and enroll all eligible children in Early Intervention
- Expand access to Early Head Start and expand collaboration between Early Head Start and child care programs
- Ensure infants and toddlers in the child welfare system have access to high-quality early learning and development programs
- Strengthen the infant/toddler workforce across the early care and education system

Maintain Focus: Universal Newborn Screening, Medical Homes, Universal Developmental, Autism, and Lead Screenings, BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, RI Early Learning and Development Standards, and Health and Safety Promotion Programs

“Rhode Island KIDS COUNT’s *Issue Brief* and the *Next Steps* policy agenda provide key data and information for policymakers about what areas are important to infants, toddlers, and their families. Rhode Island has many areas in which it excels for children, such as access to high quality and comprehensive health coverage, developmental screening, and early learning programs. There are also areas that, given increased attention and resources, can help Rhode Island families, and therefore our state, succeed and prosper,” stated Bryant in closing the event.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.