A State-Level Brief: Participation of Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness in Early Childhood Programs in Pennsylvania

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The current brief builds on the earlier *A State-Level Brief: Participation of Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in Early Childhood Programs in Pennsylvania* (PA Head Start State Collaboration Office, January 2022) and provides a more focused examination of the experience of homelessness for infants and toddlers and their participation in early childhood programs. One is more likely to be in a shelter as an infant or toddler than at any other age. As stated in the earlier brief, young children who experience homelessness are at increased risk of poor health and academic outcomes, and homelessness can disrupt a child's development, resulting in persistent developmental delays.[1] Because of where they are developmentally, there is a relatively short window to address the trauma and toxic stress caused by homelessness before it becomes a serious problem that affects them as adults."[2] In addition to leading to difficulties in school and adulthood, homelessness during the earliest years of life poses the greatest risk of child welfare involvement and out-of-home placement.[3]

This brief contains data for children from birth to age 3 (or 0-3 defined as "through the age of 2" or "prior to their 3rd birthday"). When data specific to infants

Defining Homelessness:
McKinney-Vento Definition vs. HUD Definition

Using the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless to identify and determine eligibility for young children is critical to ensuring their access to services and benefits designed to address their unique needs.

The McKinney-Vento definition for children and youth can be found at **McKinney-Vento Definition – National Center for Homeless Education**.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition which focuses primarily on adult individuals can be found at **HUD's Definition of Homelessness: Resources and Guidance - HUD Exchange**.

and toddlers are not available, data are presented for young children birth to age 5 or birth to age 6, and so noted, to suggest possible trends or implications relevant for infants and toddlers. The brief describes what is known about infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness from

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[1] Brown, S.R., Shinn, M., and Khadduri, J. (January 2017). *Well-being of Young Children after Experiencing Homelessness.* Homeless Families Research Brief. OPRE, Report No. 2017-06. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/opre_homefam_brief3_hhs_children_02_24_2017_b508.pdf

[2] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (July 31, 2019). Child Homelessness: A Growing Crisis. Rockville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources/hpr-resources/child-homelessness-growing-crisis

[3] Perlman, S. M. (2010). Building Bridges to Promote Educational Well-Being: A Population Based Study of the Impact and Timing of Out-of-Home Placement, Child Maltreatment and Homelessness. "Building Bridges to Promote Educational Well-Being: A Populati" by Staci M. Perlman (upenn.edu)

data available in the housing and early childhood sectors and their participation rates in these programs. Variations in the way data are defined and/or recorded are noted and suggestions are offered to enhance data accuracy and usefulness. Trends over time are indicated to establish baselines, to demonstrate change, and, perhaps, to help direct future action. Policy suggestions are offered, and areas are identified for further study.

What We Know About Children Birth to Age 3 in Pennsylvania

Consistent with national trends, data for Pennsylvania show a steady decline in the number of children from birth to age 3. Data in Table 1 show a decline in the population of children ages birth to 3 of 6.4% from 2015 to 2021, with the greatest decline of nearly 10% for children under 1 year of age.

Table 1. Population of children 0-3 living in Pennsylvania 2015-2021.[4]

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<1	141,423	140,009	137,312	137,090	134,272	133,457	127,582
1	142,398	141,997	141,005	138,488	137,949	136,096	134,571
2	142,397	142,970	142,869	141,737	139,206	139,650	136,973
Total 0-2	426,218	424,976	421,186	417,315	411,427	409,203	399,126

Although important to this discussion, data are not readily available on poverty experienced by infants and toddlers, so Table 2 contains data for children birth to age 5 living at various income levels. As shown, rates steadily decline for all poverty levels from 2015 to 2019. Note, though, that after a lapse in data in 2020, poverty trends no longer align. The trend for those below 200% of poverty (low income) continues to decline. However, for those below 100% of poverty, following a decline from 2015 to 2019, the rate increases slightly in 2021, and for those below 50% of poverty (extreme poverty), no data is reported for 2019 and 2021.

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Table 2. Children ages 0-5 living in poverty in Pennsylvania 2015-21.[5]

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021
Total 0-5 population	843,450	838,960	826,680	822,220	842,950	826,710
Number/Percent 0-5 < 200%	352,410	334,940	329,920	315,950	--	--
	41.8%	39.9%	39.9%	38.4%	39%	37%
Number/Percent 0-5 < 100%	178,090	167,730	162,960	145,990	143,000	145,000
	21.1%	20.0%	19.7%	17.8%	17%	18%
Number/Percent 0-5 < 50%	87,380	89,045	83,865	81,480	--	--
	10.6%	10.0%	9.9%	8.9%	--	--

Another way to examine the prevalence of infants and toddlers in poverty is to compare trends for young children with trends for all children. Since data are unavailable for infants and toddlers, Table 3 compares poverty rates across poverty levels for children ages 0-5 with rates for all children up to age 17. Overall, young children have a greater likelihood of living in

Table 3. Children 0-5 and 0-17 living in poverty in Pennsylvania 2015-21.[6]

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021
Percent 0-5 < 200%	42%	40%	40%	39%	39%	37%
Percent 0-17 < 200%	39%	38%	36%	36%	37%	35%
Percent 0-5 < 100%	21%	20%	20%	18%	17%	18%
Percent 0-17 < 100%	19%	17%	17%	17%	17%	17%
Percent 0-5 < 50%	11%	10%	10%	9%	--	--
Percent 0-17 < 50%	9%	8%	8%	8%	8%	9%

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[5] Data sources: Total population data for all years from Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Updated October 2022, https://datacenter.aecf.org/, retrieved June 3, 2023; Poverty data for 2015-2018 from analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey data, cited by Annie E. Casey Foundation Data Center, KIDS COUNT Data Center website, retrieved July 12, 2021. Notes: Several counties are not reported due to low counts resulting in undercount of total children 0-5. Poverty data for 2019 and 2020 from Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, cited by Annie E. Casey Foundation Data Center, The Annie E. Casey Foundation (aecf.org). Retrieved February 20, 2023. Table assembled using multiple downloads since site is dynamic due to data updates and changes to overall website, available data and aggregate reports.

[6] Data sources: Age 0-5 data is rounded from Table 2. Age 0-17 data is from U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, cited by Annie E. Casey Foundation Data Center, https://datacenter.aecf.org/. Retrieved June 2, 2023. Data for <50% (extreme poverty) by age cohort, e.g., 0-5, unavailable after 2018.

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poverty, and data suggest a divergent trend for children 0-5 after 2019. Although data are not available, it is reasonable to interpret that there was a slight increase in extreme poverty for children 0-5 in recent years and it is equally reasonable to question whether for children 0-3 this may be more pronounced. Additional data on young children, particularly children birth to age 3, in families with incomes below 50% of poverty would be helpful since extreme poverty is associated with homelessness, and it is important to know if efforts to provide economic assistance to families has had different impacts on low income, poverty, and extreme poverty rates based on child age. Such trends can inform policy and planning as early childhood programs set targets, measure progress, and explore ways of engaging children and families most in need of quality early education, intervention, care, and family support services.

Understanding Poverty – What does this say about infants and toddlers?

Young children are more likely to experience extreme poverty.

Extreme poverty is associated with a homelessness.

While recent economic policies have decreased the number of low-income families, the number in extreme poverty may have increased, creating a greater risk of homelessness.

What We Know About Children Birth to 3 Experiencing Homelessness in Pennsylvania

Overall, infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness remain invisible in data sets on housing and homeless services. However, while U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) data focus primarily on various populations of adults receiving HUD services, their 2018 report to Congress did state that, nationally, nearly half (48.9%) of children in sheltered families were birth through age 5, and 1 in 10 children were infants less than 1 year of age.[7] HUD's 2020 and 2022 reports to Congress did not include infants and toddlers specifically, but again stated that nearly half of all children in sheltered families nationally were younger than 6.[8] The more recent HUD report suggests caution when using data prior to the pandemic since policies and practices changed markedly during those years. It is important to note that HUD data does not include all shelter and housing programs in the Commonwealth,

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[7] The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress Part 2 submitted by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, October 2018.

[8] The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress Part 2. Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, September 2020; and The 2019-2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress Part 2 submitted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, July 2022.

and that there is no federal or state capacity for aggregating and publishing data for all shelter and housing programs, including HUD programs, in all communities across Pennsylvania.

To address this gap, in 2022, for the first time, data were compiled to better understand how HUD shelters and housing programs are serving as a resource for young children. Each of the 16 Continuums of Care (CoC) in Pennsylvania were contacted and 13 of the 16 CoCs responded and shared the data they gather and regularly report to HUD.[9] Of all children ages 0-17 served in 2020, 42% were ages birth to 5. Of the 11 CoCs that reported children 0-3 and 3-5 separately, 2,825 children ages 0-3 and 2,827 children ages 3-5 were served by their homeless housing programs in 2022. This report also explored risk factors in addition to homelessness in these children's lives and found a moderate positive relationship between child homelessness and child abuse, low birth weight, and prenatal care beginning in the third trimester; and a significant relationship between child homelessness and child poverty, mother under 18, and no prenatal care.[10] Because these findings are specific to families with infants and toddlers living in the Commonwealth, they can be especially helpful for policy and practice.

Perhaps the most extensive resource for understanding child homelessness in Pennsylvania is gathered and published annually and reported to the U.S. Department of Education by Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) program. Although focused on school-aged children and youth, these data are helpful because they are based on the broader McKinney-Vento definition of homeless and recognize housing situations omitted by HUD, but which pose risks to children's health, development, safety, and learning. Children identified as homeless in both HUD's data system or ED's data system have been found to face similar challenges in school, despite the common belief that HUD-homeless children face higher risks than McKinney-Vento-homeless children.[11]

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[9] Jung, J, Cutuli, J.J., and Willard, J. (October 2022) Childhood Homelessness in Pennsylvania. Nemours Children's Health and HopePhL. www.phila.gov/media/20221117095314/Childhood-Homelessness-in-Pennsylvania.pdf
[10] Same as above.
[11] Lowell, W. and Hanratty, M. (December 2022). Counts? Educational Disadvantage among Children Identified as Homeless and Implications for the Systems That Serve Them. The University of Chicago Press: *Social Service Review*, 96: 4. https://doi.org/10.1086/722003581

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More specifically, ECYEH data document the degree to which children are living temporarily in the homes of others, often moving multiple times though ineligible for housing services from HUD because they technically have a place to stay. In fact, for the 2020-2021 school year, children living 'double-up' represented 66% of children identified as experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania.[12] ECYEH data highlight the importance of including the homes of others as well as hotels, motels, and other settings when identifying, supporting, and reporting children 0-3 experiencing homelessness. This broader definition is to be used to by early childhood programs to determine eligibility for special accommodations and services since these housing settings present multiple risks to infants and toddlers, e.g., an increased risk of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID).[13] Because ECYEC data are gathered annually, these reports are helpful to direct resources and to recognize trends over time.

Using ECYEH data for children in first grade and population data for children ages 0-3, SchoolHouse Connection estimates that for the 2020-2021 school year, 3% of infants and toddlers experienced homelessness nationally, including 12,376 infants and toddlers in Pennsylvania.[14] While they suggest this to be a conservative estimate considering it is based only on the number of children and youth identified by public schools and because fewer children were identified during the COVID pandemic, it can still

Understanding homelessness for infants and toddlers:

CoC 2020 homeless housing programs - Eleven of 16 CoCs in Pennsylvania reported that:
- 2,825 children ages 0-3 were served in shelters/transitional housing

ECYEC 2020-2021 school year - Children identified by school districts were living in the following settings:
- 22% shelter/transitional housing
- 10% motels/hotels
- 66% doubled-up
- 2% unsheltered

~ 78% NOT in shelter ~

School districts across Pennsylvania reported that:
- 2,814 children ages 0-3 were identified as experiencing homelessness

A conservative estimate is that for the 2020-2021 school year nationally, 3% of infants and toddlers experienced homelessness, including 12,376 infants and toddlers in Pennsylvania.

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[12] Pennsylvania Department of Education. (May 2022). Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program 2020-2021 State Evaluation Report. www.education.pa.gov/Documents/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Reports/2020-21%20ECYEH%20State%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf

[13] Rechtman, L.R., Colvin, J.D., Blair, P.S., Moon, R.Y. (November 2014). Sofas and infant mortality. *Pediatrics*. 134 (5): e1293–e1300.

[14] SchoolHouse Connection. (November 2022) *Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness.* Washington, DC: SchoolHouse Connection. https://schoolhouseconnection.org/infant-and-toddler-homelessness/.

provide a useful starting point for this age group and it generally aligns with estimates calculated for the federal *Early Childhood Homelessness State Profiles* which suggested rates of between 2% and 4% for Pennsylvania children under the age of 6.[15]

What We Know About the Participation of Children Birth to 3 Experiencing Homelessness in Early Childhood Programs in Pennsylvania

Table 4. Number of children 0-3 participating in early childhood programs in Pennsylvania identified as experiencing homelessness.

	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
ECYEH programs[16]	2,461	3,096	3,450	4,636	3,803	2,814	3,378
Early Head Start[17]	651	881	903	659	NA	654	654
Early Intervention[18]	215	213	716	623	219	108	90
Home Visiting programs[19]	NA	NA	NA	230	212	193	193
CCDF child care subsidy[20]	106	109	148	167	144	99	147

Table 4 contains available data on the number of infants and toddlers participating in early childhood programs in Pennsylvania who have been identified as experiencing homelessness. Although infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness have been specified for outreach, priority enrollment, and accommodations to remove barriers to entry and ongoing participation due to the risks posed by mobility and homeless situations to their health and wellbeing, these enrollment figures are likely undercounts since early childhood programs differ in their

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[15] Data source: US Department of Education. (2020). *Early Childhood Homelessness State Profiles: 2013-14 to 2017-18*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education. Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development Office of the Chief Data Officer. www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/homeless/early-childhood-homelessness-state-profiles-2020-a.pdf

[16] Data source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program, State Evaluation Reports for the years 2015-2016 through 2021-2022.

[17] Data source: Office of Head Start. Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) Enrollment Reports for Program Years 2015-2016 through 2021-2022. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Note that data were not aggregated for the 2019-2020 program year.

[18] Data source: EI Total and Homelessness Counts 2015-2022. Communication with Kim Koteles, Project Manager, Early Intervention Technical Assistance/Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, March 8, 2023.

[19] Data source: EBHV Programs Homelessness Summary Data. Communication with Kim Koteles, Project Manager, Early Intervention Technical Assistance/Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, March 8, 2023.

[20] Data source: PA OCDEL, Child Care Works data (PELICAN data system) represents a point in time at the end of June each year and includes all infants, young toddlers, and older toddler enrolments.

proficiency in using the McKinney-Vento definition to determine homeless status. Additionally, methods used for collecting and reporting data vary widely and have changed over time. For instance, Early Head Start did not report data in 2020 for the 2019-2020 year. Early Intervention programs in Pennsylvania changed their data reporting from using the program year in FY18-19 to using the calendar year in FY 2020. Child care reporting is based on monthly counts and/or points in time. Data cited in reports have differed, for example, Pennsylvania early intervention, home visiting and Early Head Start data gathered for this brief do not fully align with data reported by SchoolHouse Connection, perhaps due to varying time periods captured. Limitations imposed by the pandemic have created further inconsistencies and should be considered. A more detailed discussion of data for each of the early childhood programs follows.

Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) in Pennsylvania

Table 5. Children 0-3 identified through ECYEH programs in Pennsylvania.[21]

School Year	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22
Total children identified 0-17	27,724	30,264	36,823	39,221	37,930	32,666	40,003
Number children 0-3 identified	2,461	3,096	3,450	4,636	3,803	2,814	3,378
Percent of all children 0-17 identified by public schools that children 0-3 represent	8.9%	10.2%	9.4%	11.8%	10.0%	8.6%	8.4%

Although primarily focused on school-aged children and youth, children birth to 3 are included among the federal reporting categories for ECYEH, and among all programs serving infants toddlers, ECYEH identifies the largest number who are experiencing homelessness. In Table 5, the number of infants and toddlers included in ECYEH reports for the 2015-2016 to 2021-2022 school years are shown with the percentage of all children birth through high school identified by ECYEH that children ages birth to three represent. On average over the years, about 10% of all children identified by the public schools are infants and toddlers. These data suggest the need for further study of the role of ECYEH in supporting families and connecting with programs specifically designed to engage those children most in need of services. Because early

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[21] Data source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program, State Evaluation Reports for the years 2015-2016 through 2021-2022.

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childhood programs may be located within school districts thus included within ECYEH data systems or they may be sharing their data with their ECYEH, any duplicate data reporting must be further explored to accurately understand state and local trends. However, these data are particularly valuable since it does not appear that such data are reported systematically anywhere other than through Pennsylvania's ECYEH program. And while this data set is unique in its scale, it is limited by the information unavailable regarding the kinds of programs infants and toddlers are engaged in and any services they and their families are receiving or may need. Because the number of young children identified by ECYEH is the largest of any number identified by other programs, it would be important to continue to report, explore, and share these findings.

Early Head Start in Pennsylvania

Due to the prioritization of children and families experiencing homelessness by the Office of Head Start for many years, the most extensive information related to the needs of children and families experiencing homelessness is available from Head Start programs. Head Start's annual Program Information Reports (PIR) provide the most detailed and ongoing record regarding identification and program participation. Table 6 contains the number and percent of infants, toddlers, and pregnant women enrolled based on their homeless status and the number and percent of infants and toddlers identified at any time during the program year as experiencing homelessness. The numbers increase from 2014-2015 through 2018-2019 but that increasing trend was disrupted by the pandemic.

Head Start tracks the services provided to families which is unique among all early childhood programs. Table 7 contains data on the number of families served by Early Head Start from 2014-2015 through 2021-2022 and the family services they received. Of the 16 family services tracked from 2014 to 2019 and the 17 services tracked after 2020, although the ranks changed, 1 in 4 families received emergency assistance related to food, clothing and shelter, with demand increasing notable during the COVID pandemic; and 1 in 7 families, or about 15% of all families participating in Early Head Start, received housing assistance, such as help with subsidies, utilities, and repairs, and this rate remains fairly consistent over all years despite the change in the rank of housing assistance among all family services tracked.

Table 6. Early Head Start participants experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania for program years 2014-2015 to 2021-2022.[22]

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022
Cumulative enrollment of pregnant women and children	7,038	8,423	9,307	10,222	10,116	9,048	9,396
Number (percent) of pregnant women and children enrolled by homeless status	456 (6.5%)	481 (5.7%)	521 (5.6%)	701 (6.9%)	802 (7.9%)	607 (6.7%)	619 (6.7%)
Number (percent) of children experiencing homelessness at any point during the year	537 (8.5%)	645 (8.3%)	651 (7.6%)	881 (9.3%)	903 (9.6%)	659 (7.8%)	654 (7.4%)

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[22] Data source: Office of Head Start. Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) Enrollment Reports for Program Years 2015-2016 through 2021-2022. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Note that data were not aggregated for the 2019-2020 program year.

Table 7. Family services received by families participating in Early Head Start programs in Pennsylvania in 2014-2015 to 2021-2022.[23]

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022
Total families served	5,662	6,828	7,358	8,223	8,274	7,247	7,533
Number (percent) of families receiving at least 1 family service	4,694 (83%)	5,382 (79%)	5,383 (73%)	6,253 (76%)	6,566 (79%)	6,300 (87%)	6,423 (85%)
Number (percent) of families receiving emergency/ crisis intervention services (e.g., meeting immediate needs for food, clothing, or shelter)	1,485 (26%)	1,633 (24%)	1,486 (20%)	1,861 (23%)	2,019 (24%)	3,201 (44%)	2,501 (33%)
Rank of emergency/crisis intervention services among all services received	3rd of 16	3rd of 16	3rd of 16	3rd of 16	3rd of 16	7th of 17	6th of 17
Number (percent) of families receiving housing assistance	973 (17%)	1,122 (16%)	1,032 (14%)	1,171 (14%)	1,285 (16%)	1,111 (15%)	1,097 (15%)
Rank of housing assistance among all services received	4th of 16	4th of 16	4th of 16	4th of 16	4th of 16	8th of 17	8th of 17
Families experiencing homelessness at any point during the year	442 (7.8%)	553 (8.1%)	562 (7.6%)	775 (9.4%)	779 (9.4%)	580 (8.0%)	585 (7.8%)

Table 7 also includes the number and percentage of all families identified as experiencing homelessness during the program year. These data suggest that while many families are identified as experiencing homelessness, perhaps twice as many families receive services of some type related to housing.

Early Intervention (IDEA Part C) in Pennsylvania

Federal funds and guidelines under [Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) are provided to states to identify infants and toddlers with or at risk of delays and disabilities. States supplement federal funds and set actual policy for implementation of IDEA Part C. [Pennsylvania's Early Intervention (EI) program](#) for infants and toddlers has been a national model for many years for establishing the categorical eligibility of children

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[23] Data source: Office of Head Start. Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) Family Services Reports for Program Years 2015-2016 through 2021-2022. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Note that data were not aggregated for the 2019-2020 program year and that the number and types of family services tracked was changed for the 2019 to 2021 reporting periods which impacted the ranks for emergency/crisis services and housing assistance.

experiencing homelessness for screening and ongoing monitoring services.[24] Table 8 contains data on the number of infants and toddlers who have been served by EI, the number who are experiencing homelessness, and the percentage they represent of all children served beginning in 2015-2016. The impact of the pandemic on service capacity is reflected in the trend in the number of children experiencing homelessness served since 2019. Also note the change in the time period used for reporting data from the program year to the calendar year in 2020.

Table 8. Children 0-3 receiving Early Intervention services in Pennsylvania 2015-2022.[25]

Fiscal Year	FY15-16	FY16-17	FY17-18	FY18-19	FY19-20	FY2021	FY2022
Unduplicated number of children 0-3 served by Early Intervention	38,004	39,931	42,729	45,024	44,837	42,360	46,254
Number (percent) of children served by EI experiencing homelessness	215 (0.6%)	213 (0.5%)	716 (1.7%)	623 (1.4%)	219 (0.5%)	108 (0.3%)	90 (0.2%)

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[24] ANNOUNCEMENT: OCDEL-13 #01 Children Experiencing Homelessness. Effective Date: 5/9/2013
[25] Data source: EI Total and Homelessness Counts 2015-2022. Communication with Kim Koteles, Project Manager, Early Intervention Technical Assistance/Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, March 8, 2023.

Table 9. Living situation/nighttime status for counties reporting for children experiencing homelessness receiving Early Intervention services in Pennsylvania 2020-2021.[26]

County	Doubled-up	Shelter/ Transitional Housing	Hotels/ Motels	TOTAL
Allegheny	<11	<11		<11
Berks	<11	<11		<11
Bucks			<11	<11
Carbon/Monroe/Pike	<11			<11
Dauphin		<11		<11
Erie	<11	<11	<11	<11
Fayette	<11			<11
Lancaster		<11		<11
Lawrence			<11	<11
Lehigh	<11	<11	<11	<11
Lycoming/Clinton		<11		<11
McKean	<11	<11		<11
Northumberland		<11		<11
Philadelphia	<11			62
Potter	<11			<11
Tioga	<11			<11
Wayne		<11		<11
Westmoreland			<11	<11
York/Adams			<11	<11
Total PA EI	**22**	**78**	**8**	**108**

Additional EI data in Table 9 illustrate the variation across counties for both the number of children identified as experiencing homelessness and their living situation/nighttime status. Children may be identified at any point prior to or during their participation in EI. Nineteen of the 47 counties reported serving children experiencing homelessness. Of children receiving EI services, 78, or 72%, were in shelter/transitional housing and 62, or 57%, resided in Philadelphia. Important to note is that Philadelphia has a rigorous EI outreach and engagement effort, including a monthly newsletter, which likely increases both identification and participation. During the 2021-2022 program year, a Community of Practice was offered for all EI providers across the Commonwealth to support additional engagement of children and

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[26] Data source: PELICAN EI, SFY 2020-21. Counts of 10 or less have been suppressed. Additional counts have been suppressed (S) when a single unsuppressed value would allow for the suppressed numbers to be calculated.

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families and may result in an increased number of children experiencing homelessness being served.

Home Visiting in Pennsylvania

Data on access to home visiting services are difficult to summarize which is unfortunate since the home visiting model is especially suitable for tailoring services to the needs, including mobility-related needs, of expectant families and those with infants and toddlers who are experiencing homelessness. Pennsylvania has a variety of Evidence-Based Home Visiting (EBHV) programs operated under the US Maternal and Child Health Bureau's (MCHB) Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) system, which includes 23 approved evidence-based service models.[27] Table 10 contains data available for Pennsylvania's EBHV programs which suggest that in recent years, about 200 families experiencing homelessness received home visiting services each year.

Table 10. Children 0-3 receiving Evidence-Based Home Visiting Services in Pennsylvania 2019-2020 to 2022-2023.[28]

	SFY 19-20	SFY 20-21	SFY 21-22	SFY 22-23[29]
Total Families served	11,487	11,767	11,336	9,454
Homeless	2.0% (est. 230)	1.8% (est. 212)	1.7% (est. 193)	2.1 % (est. 199)
Not Homeless	91.9%	92.6%	93.0%	97.7%
Unknown	6.1%	5.5%	5.3%	0.3%

A recent report by SchoolHouse Connection, based only on participation in Parents As Teachers home visiting programs in Pennsylvania estimated that 322 families with children up to age 4 were enrolled.[30] For the 2021-2022 program year, about 60% of Pennsylvania's Early Head Start capacity was for Home-based (home visiting) services, representing 4,361 of the total 7,424 funded enrollment.[31] The Office of Head Start PIR reports combine the data of all Early

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[27] Approved MIECHV home visiting models: https://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/HRSA-Models-Eligible-MIECHV-Grantees

[28] Data source: EBHV Programs Homelessness Summary Data. Communication with Kim Koteles, Project Manager, Early Intervention Technical Assistance/Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, March 8, 2023.

[29] Same as above. Note: * SFY 22-23 data is for the first half of the year.

[30] SchoolHouse Connection. (November 2022) *Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness.* Washington, DC: SchoolHouse Connection. https://schoolhouseconnection.org/infant-and-toddler-homelessness/.

[31] Office of Head Start, Program Information Report, Summary Report – 2022. Retrieved November 2022.

Head Start Center-based, Family Child Care and Home-based (or home visiting) program options so more detailed information on the homebased option is not readily available. Further examination of the data must be done to determine whether Home-Based participants were identified as experiencing homelessness at enrollment or during the program year, or whether they received emergency services or housing assistance from their Early Head Start program.

There are additional home visiting programs in the Commonwealth that are supported through federal, health, local government, foundation, and other funding and organizational structures. Unfortunately, there is currently no central source of data and information for all home visiting programs and whether policies and accommodations are being implemented or how families of infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness are tracked. And although an MCHB letter to grantees dated November 13, 2015, MCHB prioritize families experiencing homelessness for enrollment[32], it is unclear that the McKinney-Vento definition is being used to identify families. It would be especially helpful to further explore the role of MIECHV in supporting infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness and, again, because the home visiting service model can tailor services to support the needs of families experiencing homelessness in ways that center-based programs cannot, it would be helpful to enhance efforts to coordinate home visiting capacity across service models and ensure priority access to families experiencing homelessness through efforts such as staff training on identifying homelessness, collaboration to strengthen local networks of supports for families, and sharing of data to gauge progress in engaging this high need vulnerable population.

Child Care in Pennsylvania

Child care policies promote access for children experiencing homelessness. Monthly reports contain data on family homeless status and quality rating of care used. Table 11 shows enrollment data for children 0-3 eligible for and enrolled in Child Care Works for FY 2015

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[32] Willis, D. (November 30, 2015). Letter to Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood home Visiting Program Grantees. Rockville, MD. US DHHS, Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

through FY 2022. Data suggest that children experiencing homelessness are about as likely as are all children to receive quality care.

Table 11. Subsidized Child Care (Child Care Works) in Pennsylvania[33]

	FY 2015 (14-15)	FY 2016 (15-16)	FY 2017 (16-17)	FY 2018 (17-18)	FY 2019 (18-19)	FY 2020 (19-20)	FY 2021 (20-21)	FY 2022 (21-22)
Children 0-3 eligible for Child Care Works	179,213	179,352	179,332	176,999	173,592	168,955	164,470	157,123
Number of all children 0-3 in Child Care Works	27,944	29,328	26,087	28,455	27,720	25,036	18,099	21,426
Number of children 0-3 experiencing homelessness in Child Care Works	99	106	109	148	167	144	99	147
Percent of children 0-3 enrolled in quality settings (STARS 3 & 4)	23.79%	26.13%	29.75%	31.96%	34.66%	33.66%	40.81%	38.90%
Percent of children 0-3 experiencing homelessness enrolled in quality settings (STARS 3 & 4)	27.27%	27.36%	22.02%	16.22%	31.14%	34.72%	46.46%	35.37%

What the Data Says About the Participation of Children Birth to 3 Experiencing Homelessness in Early Childhood Programs in Pennsylvania

Table 12 contains the number of children 0-3 estimated to experience homelessness from 2015-2016 to 2021-2022 and the enrollment data displayed earlier in Table 4 for children 0-3 identified as experiencing homelessness through ECYEH and/or enrolled in Early Head Start,

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[33] Data source: PA OCDEL: Child Care Works eligibility based on number of children 0-3 x percent of children 0-6 < 200% FPL using American Community Survey 5-year estimates; Child Care Works data (PELICAN data system) represents a point in time at the end of June each year and includes all infants, young toddlers, and older toddler enrolments.

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Early Intervention, Home Visiting, and Child Care. General estimates are also provided for the number of children 0-3 that remain unidentified or unserved.

Table 12. Number of children 0-3 experiencing homelessness participating in early childhood programs in Pennsylvania[34]

	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Estimate of the number of children 0-3 experiencing homelessness[35]	12,787	12,749	12,636	12,519	12,343	12,276	11,974
Number identified through ECYEH	2,461	3,096	3,450	4,636	3,803	2,814	3,378
Number participating in Early Head Start	651	881	903	659	NA	659	654
Number participating in Early Intervention	215	213	716	623	219	108	90
Number participating in MIECHV Home Visiting	NA	NA	NA	230	212	193	199
Number participating in Child Care Works	106	109	148	167	144	99	147
General estimate of the number of children 0-3 unidentified/unserved[36]	9,350	7,950	7,500	6,600	8,100	8,400	7,600

In Table 13, earlier data are displayed by the percentage of total enrollment that children 0-3 experiencing homelessness represent in the various early childhood programs. From an equity perspective it is critical to consider that infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness are likely experiencing multiple risk factors, including extreme poverty, thus they will have high need for the supports and benefits of participation in early childhood programs designed to mitigate the adverse impact of risk. If the national estimate of the rate of homelessness experienced by children 0-3 is used – 3% of all children 0-3 – then Early Head Start is the only program that serves at least as many infants and toddlers identified as experiencing

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homelessness as children experiencing other and perhaps fewer risk factors or no risks at all. Again, caution must be taken in interpreting data since, as pointed out earlier, early childhood programs have varied levels of

Table 13. Percentage of children 0-3 participating in early childhood programs in Pennsylvania identified as experiencing homelessness.[37]

	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Est. # children 0-3 experiencing homelessness[38]	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Percent of EHS participants	8.5%	8.3%	7.6%	9.3%	9.6%	NA	7.8%	7.4%
Percent of EI participants	NA	0.6%	0.5%	1.7%	1.4%	0.5%	0.3%	0.2%
Percent of HV participants	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.0%	1.8%	1.7%
Percent of Child Care participants	0.35%	0.36%	0.42%	0.52%	0.60%	0.58%	0.55%	0.69%

expertise in identifying and tracking family homeless status. While ECYEH and Head Start have invested significantly in educating key staff on identification, implemented numerous initiatives to engage and ensure ongoing participation of children and families experiencing homelessness, and systematically track data, other programs like Early Intervention, Home Visiting and Child Care, both in Pennsylvania and nationally, remain in the process of building their capacity. Data in Tables 12 and 13 can provide a baseline for setting goals and measuring progress going forward.

Where Do We Go From Here?

It would be important to **clarify data reported by ECYEH**. As it is unclear the extent to which data may duplicate data collected through other early childhood programs, further clarification is needed. However, since this is the single most consistent identification and tracking system in the Commonwealth, it can inform state systems regarding service needs and trends.

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[37] Data sources: Drawn or calculated from data in Tables 6, 8, 10 and 11.
[38] SchoolHouse Connection. (November 2022) *Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness.* Washington, DC: SchoolHouse Connection. https://schoolhouseconnection.org/infant-and-toddler-homelessness/

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There are **no known sources of state-level compilation of data** related to young children experiencing homelessness across sectors in Pennsylvania. National resources for aggregate data are currently lacking. Though annual national and state early childhood profiles were published through a collaboration of the US Department of Education and the US Department of Health and Human Services with states through the 2018-2019 school year as part of the national and state profiles for all children birth through high school, this resource is no longer available. It will be important to find alternative resources for compiling state data in ways that preserve the level of expertise in data recording and analysis offered through HHS/ACF and such that data can still be contextualized through comparisons with national and other state profiles.

The accuracy is uncertain of both the estimates of the number of children 0-3 experiencing homelessness and those identified and served by programs. However, notable is the **large number of children who appear to be untracked and unknown**. A small number of these children and families may participate in programs but not be identified, but data suggest the vast majority of children 0-3 experiencing homelessness remain unidentified and unserved.

Although there are policies that encourage that IDEA, MIECHV and CCDF Child Care to remove barriers to engagement, identification, and participation, and to systematically report data regarding children and families experiencing homelessness being served, there continues to be a **wide variation in the way these policies are implemented** making it difficult to understand the needs of children and families, the needs of staff, programs, and communities, and any progress being in made in providing services and enhancing supports. Any **guidance that can set targets for equitable levels of enrollment and participation** of infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness, increase training and technical assistance opportunities for staff and programs, enhance data accuracy and sharing, and coordinate resources would be helpful.

Concluding Comments

There are several areas for which additional discussion can be valuable. Further analysis of intersectionality of economic data and homelessness will help to refine efforts to connect those most in need to the compensatory benefits of quality early childhood program interventions. It appears that while the economic supports during the COVID pandemic lifted many families out of poverty, the number of families remaining in extreme poverty appears to have risen, and it would be important to consider any disproportionate impacts due to the age of children and parents, race and ethnicity, single-parenting, disability, and other factors which often accompany homelessness. Understanding each of these factors and their interaction, and connecting systems that can address such factors, can help focus policies and practice and maximize support and protective factors for children and families.

It is especially important that efforts to increase collaboration among the early childhood and housing sectors continue and to add into such collaborations those housing supports offered through domestic violence, recovery, and child welfare systems. There has been limited engagement across these systems related to homelessness even though each of these systems serves families of infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness. The expertise that early childhood programs can offer to adult service systems to ensure they, too, incorporate services focused on parenting of infants and toddlers and on infant and toddler developmental needs will strengthen adult interventions and result in the coordinated services that families need. Partnering to assess collective needs, align policies, share resources, and gather and report data using a unified reporting strategy can inform and guide future efforts.

Understanding the Data

Gaps exist in eligibility determination, access, and reporting of data.

In the early childhood sector, although the McKinney-Vento definition is required, staff who determine eligibility or record data may be unfamiliar with it, creating inaccuracies. Parts of the early childhood sector do not participate currently in efforts to identify, engage, and report on this population.

Within the housing sector, where the HUD definition is used, children meeting the McKinney-Vento definition remain invisible. Since reporting centers on "families with children" and the needs the of adults, data for infants and toddlers, or children birth to 5, are often unavailable. Parts of the housing sector are omitted from HUD tracking efforts, e.g., domestic violence programs, and HUD reports for veterans do not break out children.

Discussions of housing more broadly, versus 'homelessness' create additional confusion. For example, HUD defines frequent moves as "2 or more times within the last 60 days" while National Survey of Children's Health is used by Zero to Three to describe frequent moves as "more than 3 moves in the first 3 years."

Data can reflect different time periods, some for just one point-in-time, one month, or for program, school, or fiscal year. The pandemic interrupted data collection and data are missing or have been influenced by the inability to fully track activities. Several methodologies have changed over time, especially due to challenges posed by the COVID pandemic.

There has been a notable and unfortunate change in collection and reporting at the federal level. There will no longer be a process for the regular collection and reporting of data nationally and for states and territories, ending the capacity for extensive analysis and comparison. In the past, invaluable estimates of the number of young children experiencing homelessness and accounts of their participation in early childhood programs have come from a collaboration between the US Department of Education's Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program and US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start. Though focused least on children ages 0-3 and relying primarily on Early Head Start PIR data for infant toddler data, they were the only effort to produce systematic and rigorous information for young children. The final State Profiles were released in May 2021 reflecting data for the 2018-2019 school year. SchoolHouse Connection began compiling data for 2020-2021 in 2022 for children 0-3 for only 20 states, including Pennsylvania, also using extensive data from the Early Head Start PIR for infant toddler participation rates in early childhood programs.

In addition to these big system challenges, there are limitations within the Commonwealth that suggest caution in understanding available data. For instance, yet to be clarified is whether the large numbers of children identified in ECYEH reports result from duplicate data for Head Start programs that report their data on the Head Start PIR and for their local ECYEH liaison or other early childhood programs funded by OCDEL but administered by school districts.

These challenges influence understanding the experience of homelessness for infants and toddlers and their families, and our ability to inform systems and ensure equitable access to high quality services for young children and their families.

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