



Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Maine's Strategic Plan

January 28, 2023

Section 1: Approach

1. *The approach you have taken towards strategic planning.*

Maine's ECCS Strategic Plan will present a roadmap to strengthen an existing strategic plan with greater alignment with and integration of ECCS goals – specifically the Maine *Children's Cabinet Plan for Young Children*.

The Maine Children's Cabinet is the most visible evidence that early childhood system collaboration and leadership is of central importance at the highest level of state government. In her inaugural address in 2019, Governor Mills announced that she would reinstate the Children's Cabinet after an eight-year hiatus. By statute, Maine's Children's Cabinet members include the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Labor, Public Safety, and Corrections. Currently, Maine Department of Health and Human Services Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew serves as chair of the Children's Cabinet. The Children's Cabinet is coordinated by staff from the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) with support from key staff from each participating agency.

The *Children's Cabinet Plan for Young Children* was developed in the fall of 2019, guided by the findings from the comprehensive needs assessment conducted by the Maine Department of Education (Maine DOE) and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (Maine DHHS) as part of Maine's 2019 Preschool Development Planning Grant (PDG).

The Plan outlines key strategies to promote the healthy development of all young children in Maine and ensure that all children grow up in healthy, safe, and supportive environments. Key areas of focus include:

- Access: increase access to affordable early care and education, preventative and early intervention services for young children and their families.
- Quality: raise the quality of our early care and education system and support families to access quality programming.
- Workforce: recruit, prepare and retain workforce.

Each area of focus included short-term (2020-2021), intermediate (2020-2023) and long-term (2020-2025) strategies to advance Maine's vision that All Maine Children Enter Kindergarten Prepared to Succeed. Many of the strategies included in the plan have been successfully implemented over the past three years and new early childhood priorities have been identified as a result of the ECCS Systems Asset and Gap Analysis (SAGA) process. As a result, the Children's Cabinet is planning to update the Plan. This update provides an opportunity to add a

perinatal-to-year 1 focus, strengthen integration with the healthcare system, and integrate other ECCS goals.

2. *The top three contributions/changes the ECCS Strategic Plan will bring to an existing state plan or your state's early childhood system.*

Through the ECCS strategic planning process, Maine will enhance the *Children's Cabinet Plan for Young Children* to include strategies focused on perinatal systems of care, equity, and family engagement. The SAGA process highlighted these three areas that, while included in existing statewide plans, need greater emphasis and detail in terms of how to strengthen and focus them for Maine's early childhood system.

Perinatal Systems of Care – Build on and strengthen linkages between the state's early childhood system and the health sector, particularly in the areas of perinatal systems of care and early intervention services for children 0-3: Currently, there is no central oversight of the perinatal system (P-1) in Maine and despite overlapping partners with the early intervention system, there is a lack of continuity between the systems. Since 2020, the Perinatal System of Care (PSOC) Workgroup has brought medical and public health partners together to discuss how to strengthen the system of care and reduce infant mortality rates. Maine's ECCS Strategic Plan will include strategies to strengthen linkages between Maine's early childhood system and perinatal systems of care. Proposed strategies – developed by the PSOC Workgroup with input from the Children's Cabinet staff in January 2023 – include:

1. Infrastructure: Continue to build infrastructure to strengthen the Perinatal System of Care in Maine (preconception to 1-year post-partum) that includes family leadership, family engagement, family voice, and diverse representation.
2. Quality: Ensure access to high quality perinatal care, including behavioral health, for pregnant people and infants in Maine at the appropriate Level of Care (LOC) by improving data collection and care review by the Maternal, Fetal, Infant Mortality Review Panel (MFIMR) to inform quality improvement and policy and encouraging all birth hospitals to participate in the Perinatal Quality Collaborative for Maine and implement perinatal patient safety bundles.
3. Access: Maintain access to high-quality perinatal care in Maine by expanding post-partum coverage to 12 months for pregnant people, building linkages between early intervention and medical systems to better serve diverse and underserved populations, and improving the connections to perinatal consultation by building/expanding the obstetric telehealth network to all birthing hospitals.
4. Workforce: Support perinatal health by assessing the current capacity of the perinatal workforce in Maine, improving perinatal training and education opportunities for

students and current providers, and exploring the use of community healthcare workers to support maternal and child health.

These strategies are not final but provide a working draft for the PSOC Workgroup, Children’s Cabinet staff, and ECCS project staff to review, revise as needed, and integrate into the updated *Children’s Cabinet Plan*.

Equity - Address inequities in Maine P-3 system and improve access to and coordination of P-3 services and programs for underserved populations: Maine recognizes that work needs to be done to build commitment and capacity in the state’s P-3 system to address factors that contribute to the early developmental, family, and maternal health disparities and drive equity progress. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the inequities in health care, particularly for racial and ethnic groups in Maine. It also highlighted the need to re-examine Maine’s early childhood infrastructure to address these issues. The disparate impacts of the virus upon Maine populations were not, however, all caused by the pandemic. Achieving health equity for Mainers will require a focus on communities that have traditionally been underserved.

The state currently has several projects centered around equity and healthy disparities, and the ECCS Strategic Plan provides an opportunity to connect those activities within the perinatal and early childhood systems. The ECCS Family Leadership Liaison is currently participating in a statewide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Community of Practice to help strengthen these connections. Developing the ECCS Strategic plan and updating the *Children’s Cabinet Plan* provides an opportunity to focus on this work and develop targeted strategies to address health disparities based on geographic region, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Family Engagement - Enhance family leadership, family engagement, and family voice: While there are opportunities for families to engage in and participate as leaders in Maine’s early childhood system, this is an area for growth and a focus of Maine’s ECCS program. In Maine’s SAGA focus groups, parent participants reported that they often feel uncomfortable being the lone parent voice “at the table” and feel that they are being put in a position of speaking for all families when lived experience is so varied from family to family. Families also report that they like to get feedback on how their input was used but they feel that does not occur routinely.

To address this concern, the ECCS Advisory Council – referred to as the Collaborating Partners Advisory Group (CPAG) – was deliberately designed to increase family participation. Of the nearly 40 participants on the CPAG, half are family representatives or represent family-serving organizations including the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council, Maine Parent Federation, Autism Society of Maine, Educare Central Maine, Parent Ambassador Program, Maine

Children's Alliance, New Mainer's Public Health Initiative, Tribal organizations, G.E.A.R Parent Network, and others. As a result, the CPAG has provided valuable information for the ECCS SAGA and Strategic Plan in areas such as awareness of and access to programs and services, staffing challenges, quality, equity, family engagement, and the impact of COVID-19.

Maine's ECCS program includes a Family Leadership Liaison (FLL) to lead efforts to ensure authentic, diverse, and active engagement of family leaders in Maine's early childhood system. The FLL is responsible for developing strategies that ensure continuity of family involvement, diversity of representation, and authentic participation at multiple levels of leadership throughout the ECCS program. She will lead the process for identifying, defining, and developing strategies for family engagement, leadership, and voice to be included in the ECCS Strategic Plan and the updated *Children's Cabinet Plan*. Updating the Plan provides an opportunity to expand and enhance family leadership opportunities but also better understand and improve how families with young children are engaged – or could/should be engaged – in Maine's ECCS system.

Maine has taken steps to invest in programming to strengthen meaningful family engagement and expand the inclusion of family voice in decision-making. For example, using ARPA Child Care Development Fund discretionary funding, the ECCS FLL is working with Educare Central Maine to offer its Parent Ambassador Program (PAP) trainings to parents outside of Head Start who are engaged in other early childhood system programs. PAP is a year-long leadership program to develop parent leaders. The program works to build parents' confidence and the skills needed to advocate for their children and themselves. Language and cultural barriers have made it challenging to successfully engage Maine's immigrant and refugee parents in PAP. Through the PDG Renewal grant, Maine will contract with immigrant and refugee serving organizations to expand the PAP leadership training specifically support New Mainer families with young children. This work will be reflected in the final ECCS Strategic Plan.

To further strengthen meaningful family engagement, the FLL and ECCS Project Manager will facilitate a meeting on February 16, 2023, with Maternal and Child Health Domain Leads and Partners to start brainstorming definitions around Family Voice, Family Leadership, and Family Engagement. From that brainstorming sessions, the Maine ECCS team will move forward and facilitate different brainstorming sessions with different stakeholder groups, family organizations and families to agree on definitions that can be used across programming and initiatives. This will provide a baseline from which to measure the progress we are making in increasing family engagement and leadership in our programs throughout the state.

3. *How diverse family and community partners (including the Advisory Council) have been engaged in the development of the ECCS Strategic Plan. How healthcare partners and providers have been engaged.*

Diverse family and community partners: The CPAG provided guidance and input from key perinatal-to-three system stakeholders throughout the SAGA process and will continue to advise the development of the Strategic Plan. In addition to representatives from state-level programs and departments, the CPAG includes family representatives and representatives from family-serving organizations as well as health care sector partners. The CPAG brings together stakeholders who are working with underserved P-3 populations and can identify systemic factors that contribute to health disparities and links them to state leaders who can impact policy and practice barriers. The CPAG includes parent and family representatives who are recipients of P-3 services and provide a perspective from lived experience.

The final SAGA was shared with the CPAG in November 2022 at the Advisory Council's quarterly meeting. Common themes and key findings from the SAGA process were shared with CPAG members as well as an update on the strategic planning process. The top three changes/contributions that the ECCS Strategic Plan will bring to the *Children's Cabinet Plan* – perinatal systems of care, equity, and family engagement – were shared with the CPAG at this meeting and participants helped identify priorities, strategies, and best practices in each of these areas that ECCS staff should include or build on in the Strategic Plan. As new strategies are developed to integrate into the updated *Children's Cabinet Plan*, the ECCS staff will get feedback on the proposed strategies through an in-person roundtable discussion with CPAG members and other stakeholders including those with diverse backgrounds and lived experience. Stakeholders will also work with ECCS staff to break down each strategy and create action steps to be included in the detailed ECCS workplan.

Healthcare partners: Healthcare partners were actively involved in the SAGA process and will continue to be engaged in the development of the ECCS Strategic Plan. In addition to representation on the CPAG, healthcare partners serve on the Early Intervention Work Group – a subcommittee of the Children's Cabinet focused on ensuring that young children receive necessary screenings, evaluations, and services to support their healthy development – and the PSOC Workgroup. The PSOC Workgroup is taking the lead to draft the perinatal system of care strategies that will be included in the updated *Children's Cabinet Plan*. Led by Maine's Chief Child Health Officer out of the DHHS Commissioner's Office, and comprised of representatives from state agencies, health systems and birth hospitals, Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMS-C), MaineCare, Public Health Nursing, the Perinatal Quality Collaborative for ME (PQC4ME), and the Maine CDC Maternal and Child Health Program, including MCH

Epidemiologists, the goal of the PSOC Workgroup is to develop an overarching, cohesive perinatal system of care in Maine that ensures access, coordination, and quality care across the different systems, including public health, medical care, and social service organizations.

4. *How the learnings from the System Asset and Gap Analysis have been or will be integrated into the ECCS Strategic Plan.*

Key learnings from the System Asset and Gap Analysis include:

1. There is a need for better awareness of and access to perinatal and early childhood services.
2. There is a need to strengthen family and provider engagement and shared decision making.
3. Care coordination across providers, programs, and services should be strengthened.
4. Families need help to navigate the developmental screening and referral process.
5. Workforce challenges (hiring, retention, professional development) make it difficult for families to access care when and where they need it.
6. Maine must ensure equitable systems that meet the needs of the State's vulnerable and underserved populations including children and families living in poverty, families in rural areas, children with special healthcare needs, tribal families, and immigrant and refugee families.
7. COVID-19 has led to isolation, cancelled, or postponed appointments, staffing challenges, and stress across all systems of care and continues to have systemic impacts.

As the ECCS team works to draft the ECCS Strategic Plan and develop a detailed implementation workplan, they will ensure that these findings are addressed and integrated into the revised goals, strategies and action steps. Strategies to address many of these learnings are included in existing State plans. However, those plans tend to focus on specific aspects of Maine's early childhood system not a more comprehensive early childhood system that integrates and aligns healthcare and early childhood programs, services, provides and partners.

5. *If a final plan is not completed at the time of this submission, or if you are in the process of enhancing an existing plan, please provide an update on the timeline you envision.*

Maine has many new programs and initiatives underway that focus on perinatal systems of care and early childhood. Therefore, this is not considered a final draft but a broader overview of the topics we have identified as a state and so discussions can be had to incorporate this work into more initiative at the State Level.

The Maine ECCS team will facilitate brainstorming sessions both virtually and in person to determine some action steps and how our work can align and be integrated into the Children's Cabinet Plan.

This work will be ongoing, and the strategies, goals and objectives will continue to be developed over the next year.

Section 2: Implementation of ECCS HIP-3 Strategic Plan

1. *How equity is addressed in the ECCS Strategic Plan, and/or how the plan expands equity-focused goals and the priorities in your state (including family engagement and leadership)*

As discussed above, equity is one of Maine's top three priorities for the ECCS Strategic Plan. As the ECCS team and Children's Cabinet staff work to update the *Children's Cabinet Plan*, health equity and addressing the needs of underserved populations will be included across multiple focus areas. State-level efforts to address equity including the re-establishment of the Office of Population Health Equity at DHHS, the addition of a Manager of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at DHHS, the development of a *Strategic Plan to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* at DHHS, and the Perinatal Quality Collaborative for Maine (PQC4ME) *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Framework*, all provide a foundation on which to develop and integrate equity-focused goals and priorities throughout the ECCS Strategic Plan.

2. *How policy and financing are addressed in the ECCS Strategic Plan, and/or how the plan expands existing goals and priorities in your state.*

Policy: Under the leadership of Governor Janet Mills (elected for a second term in November 2022), Maine's early childhood system continues to be a focus and priority for state leadership. Maine has made significant efforts over the past three years to invest in and change state-level policies to improve, expand, and enhance services for Maine's P-3 population. Many of these policy changes are the direct result of early childhood system strategic planning efforts and reflect recommendations included in the *Children's Cabinet's Plan for Young Children*, the *PDG Strategic Plan*, the Perinatal System of Care framework, and Maine's ECCS grant proposal. For example, the 2019 PDG Needs Assessment highlighted parents' struggles to navigate and access early childhood programs and services. To strengthen Maine's coordination services, in 2021 the legislature passed, and the Governor signed LD 1712 An Act to Support Children's Healthy

Development and School Success, which establishes and provides funding for Help Me Grow and the First 4 ME Early Care and Education Program.

The ECCS Strategic Plan will build on these policy changes and incorporate recommendations included in the SAGA, the 2023 PDG Needs Assessment, the Perinatal Health Disparities Needs Assessment, and the Perinatal Systems of Care Roadmap. The development of the ECCS Strategic Plan will be led by ECCS staff at Maine DHHS, in collaboration with Children’s Cabinet staff, which ensures alignment with Governor Mills’ policy priorities.

Financing: The ECCS Strategic plan will reflect opportunities to braid or blend funding whenever possible and reduce duplication of effort in order to maximize the fund supporting Maine’s early childhood system. State early childhood system leaders also expect project and program managers to conduct long-term sustainability planning for any grant-funded programs. The Strategic Plan will also align strategies and priorities with federal and state funding resources including Maternal and Child Health Title V funds, federal Head Start resources, MaineCare, American Rescue Plan funding, Maine General Fund dollars, and discretionary grant programs. For example, over the last six months, Maine organizations has been awarded over \$10 million over the next five years to support a number of projects to address risk and health issues related to pregnancy and childbirth, and to improve the State’s perinatal system of care. The ECCS Strategic Plan will reflect the activities funded through these perinatal projects.

- 3. An overall approach towards ensuring follow-through on implementation. Please describe the key partners or leads for the objectives and activities noted in the ECCS Strategic Plan and their roles. You may also add a detailed workplan to your submission to address this question.*

The ECCS team will work together to update the workplan originally submitted with the ECCS grant proposal to reflect the ECCS Strategic Plan. The workplan will provide a timeline that aligns the completion of ECCS goals, identifies responsible staff, partners, and/or members of the CPAG and will include all objectives and activities that are included in the ECCS Strategic Plan.

- 4. Any areas of the ECCS Strategic Plan that may require further modifications this upcoming year (e.g. are there any new statewide priorities or changes that should be considered or any goals that you would like to further flesh out?) This may also include areas of the strategic plan that are still a work in progress.*

Additional statewide projects that will inform the final strategies in the ECCS Strategic Plan include:

- *Perinatal Health Disparities Needs Assessment*: The Maine CDC has hired a consultant as part of the Maine CDC COVID Disparity funding to conduct a needs assessment process to assess the State’s perinatal services and access to maternity care with a particular focus on disparities in racial and ethnic populations, Rural Populations, and those that have been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting workforce challenges. The assessment is scheduled to be completed by December 2023. Findings from the assessment – which includes focus groups and key informant interviews with participants from rural and diverse populations – as likely to influence the final goals and strategies included in the ECCS Strategic Plan related to perinatal systems of care.
- *Perinatal Systems of Care Roadmap*: The Maine Medical Association’s Center for Quality Improvement is working to inventory and organize the growing portfolio of perinatal-related initiatives in Maine’s public and private sectors into a “Perinatal Systems of Care Roadmap.” The Roadmap is expected to: 1.) increase awareness and understanding of new and expanded perinatal initiatives; 2.) depict relationships, alignment and synergy among the initiatives; and 3.) reveal gaps for future opportunities. The overall goal of the Roadmap is to increase collaboration, communication, and efficient use of resources thereby strengthening Maine’s perinatal systems of care. The Roadmap will inform and align with the final perinatal system of care strategies included in the ECCS Strategic Plan.
- *PDG (B-5) Renewal Grant*: In December 2022, the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) at the Maine DHHS was awarded a PDG (B-5) Renewal Grant. The Renewal Grant will build needed infrastructure and capacity to create a more coordinated, efficient, and high-quality mixed delivery system for children ages birth to five and their families. *Strengthening Parent Leadership and Engagement* is one of the key focus areas of the project. In the first year of the grant, OCFS will update Maine’s Statewide B-5 Needs Assessment. The initial Needs Assessment, completed in the fall of 2019, informed the priorities, goals, and strategies included in the original *Children’s Cabinet Plan for Young Children*. Findings from the updated Needs Assessment will inform the ECCS Strategic Plan, including strategies related to family engagement, leadership, and voice.
- *Perinatal Quality Care for Maine Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (PQC4ME DEIB) Workgroup*: The workgroup was formed to develop policies and tools with which to address inequities at the inception of quality improvement projects. This group has

produced a toolkit including definitions and principles, assessment tools, and a racial equity healthcare checklist to address diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging across projects. Moving forward, the plan is to roll out the toolkit and provide technical assistance around its implementation and to strengthen and expand the membership of the workgroup to reflect the populations we serve more accurately.

- *Help Me Grow*: Launched in November 2022, Help Me Grow is a national model national model that provides a comprehensive, statewide, coordinated system of early identification, referral, and follow-up for ALL children from prenatal care up to 8 years and their families. The goals for Maine’s Help Me Grow initiative include: 1.) Helping families effectively utilize existing programs and services by increasing access to early periodic screening, diagnosis, and treatment services and increasing access and referrals to early intervention services; 2.) Facilitating long-range planning by identifying gaps in services; and 3.) Collaborating with community partners in early childhood and child health fields as Maine moves implementation forward.

5. *Any support or TA you anticipate you may need in furthering the state-level goals and priorities identified in the ECCS Strategic Plan.*

Currently, we do not anticipate the need for any TA in moving this work forward at the state-level.

Section 3: ECCS HIP-3 Strategic Plan

1. *Attach the most up to date version of the strategic plan you are developing or enhancing.*

Please see the current working copy of the Maine Children’s Cabinet Plan. This Plan is currently being reviewed and edits are being made. The Maine ECCS Strategic Plan goals/objectives will be integrated into this plan when we are able to narrow those down with regards to Family Engagement and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. As noted you will see that the Perinatal I Systems of Care strategies have been added already.

Maine Children’s Cabinet Strategic Plan

Goal: All Maine Children Enter Kindergarten Prepared to Succeed

The Children’s Cabinet will implement key strategies to promote the healthy development of all young children in Maine and ensure that all children grow up in healthy, safe and supportive environments. The Cabinet will strive to engage the voice of parents and caregivers in a culturally and linguistically accessible way as we further develop and implement our strategies.

Areas of Focus

The Children’s Cabinet will implement strategies that will:

1. Increase access to affordable early care & education, preventive and early intervention services for young children and their families.
2. Raise the quality of our early care and education system and support families to access quality programming.
3. Recruit, prepare and retain a diverse early childhood workforce.

Short term strategies: 2023

- Provide infrastructure grants to existing or new child care programs to create new slots, particularly in underserved areas.
- Continue to offer weekly stipends of \$100 to infant caregivers receiving CCSP to recognize the high cost of providing infant care and increase the quality bump to child care programs on the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) serving infants and toddlers.
- Provide scholarships to help students with low and moderate income attain associates and bachelor’s degrees in early childhood education.
- Implement the early childhood mental health consultation statewide to help parents and educators support the social and emotional development of young children, particularly children with special needs. (Updated)
- Implement a tiered child care salary supplement program to increase wages for early childhood educators and recognize experience. (updated)
- Continue strengthening the Perinatal System of Care infrastructure (preconception to 1 year post-partum) including family leadership, parental engagement, and diverse representation. (New)

Intermediate strategies: 2023 – 2025

- Provide grants to child care programs to improve quality and rating on the QRIS. (updated)
- Expand professional learning opportunities that support inclusive and trauma informed practices in early care and education settings.
- Offer a professional learning series on early childhood education to school administrators, particularly for those with ECE programs.

- Fund start-up infrastructure grants to expand the number public pre-K slots for 4 year olds.
- Provide grant funding to support new public pre-K partnerships between schools and community partners to overcome barriers to expanding public pre-K in certain communities.
- Align quality programming across state child care assistance programs. (new)
- Implement key models such as First 10 Schools and Communities and First4ME to provide professional development, tools and supports to improve and strengthen coordination and alignment across the birth through early elementary years in communities to ensure smooth transitions into kindergarten for children and families, quality care and education for young children, and greater access to needed resources for families. (new)
- Build a robust Help Me Grow program to provide a comprehensive, statewide, coordinated system of early identification, referral, and follow-up for children from prenatal care up to 8 years and their families. (updated and consolidated)
- Develop and conduct a field test of a valid and reliable Kindergarten Entry Inventory to help educators and policymakers assess children’s progress along developmental progressions to inform instruction in the kindergarten year and policymaking. (new)

Long-term strategies: 2023 – 2027

- Maintain access to high quality perinatal care in Maine by expanding post-partum coverage to 12 months for pregnant people, building linkages between early intervention and medical systems to better serve diverse and underserved populations, and improving the connection to perinatal consultation by expanding the obstetric telehealth network to all birthing hospitals. (new)
- Support perinatal health by assessing the current capacity of the perinatal workforce in Maine, improving perinatal training and education opportunities for students and current providers, and exploring the use of community healthcare workers to support maternal and child health. (new)
- Ensure access to high-quality perinatal care, including behavioral health, for all pregnant women, pregnant people, and infants in Maine at the appropriate Level of Care (LOC) by improving data collection and case reviews to inform quality improvement and policy and encouraging all birth hospitals to participate in the Perinatal Quality Collaborative for Maine and implement perinatal patient safety bundles. (new)
- Increase access to, expand and strengthen early childhood programming at Career and Technical schools.
- Develop clear opportunities and pathways for individuals interested in entering the field of early care and education to support them to access ECE training and education. (new)
- Increase professional development and coaching opportunities for early childhood educators in center-based, family childcare programs and the early elementary years in public schools. (updated)
- Establish an Early Childhood Integrated Data System to track progress on early childhood goals and to analyze impact of policy decisions.