

# 2021 Hampton Roads Early Childhood COVID-19 Response/Recovery Agenda



Hampton Roads' young children (birth to 5) and their families have faced challenges from the COVID-19 Pandemic impacting family access to basic needs; mental and physical health; and early learning and child care. Given the timing of the pandemic and the critical developmental years for these children, these challenges may impact children throughout their lifetimes. Responsively and equitably addressing the needs arising from COVID-19, strategizing for recovery, and building a stronger early childhood system for our region are actions we must take today. Community, city, state and federal policymakers all have a role to play in this important work so that all children in Hampton Roads are healthy, thriving and ready to learn. EVMS Minus 9 to 5, along with over 160 diverse, regional stakeholders and organizations, collectively advocate for programs, services, and policies that positively impact Hampton Roads' youngest residents.

## EVMS MINUS 9 TO 5 SEEKS TO:

### Advance the physical and social-emotional health and well-being of children and their families

The impacts of the pandemic on young children are not yet understood; however, children and parents are experiencing trauma in ways never before felt. Ensuring access to and support for the physical and mental health needs of our young children is critical. *We support:*

- ❑ Meeting parent and family mental health needs through expansion of services including community based mental health, Medicaid coverage and reimbursement for all Virginians, home visiting, and doula care.
- ❑ Improving coordination of services and strategic leveraging of funding streams for regional referral intake, universal prenatal or at-birth screening, and existing home visiting programs in our region.
- ❑ Educating families about the importance of on-time, well-child visits and immunizations including Covid-19 vaccines.
- ❑ Deepening understanding of health disparities caused by structural and systemic barriers within the maternal/infant/child healthcare setting.
- ❑ Implementing a statewide early childhood mental health consultation model with regional infrastructure to support mentally healthy and well-developed children.

### Increase availability and access to resources and programs that ensure families have stable housing

Hampton Roads cities have among the highest eviction rates in the nation and COVID-19 has placed thousands more households at risk of eviction. Eviction has a significant, negative impact on a child's mental and physical health, early development and educational advancement. *We support:*

- ❑ Extending the ban on evictions, allowing families time to access eviction prevention services (rent assistance, landlord mediation, tenant/landlord rights education and fair housing laws).
- ❑ Promoting funding and legislation for affordable housing retention and new development.

### Expand access to food and increase food security for young children and their families

In 2020, over 81,000 children in Hampton Roads experienced food insecurity, a 48% increase from 2018. Federal and state programs provide assistance but families are often unable to utilize these programs due to systemic barriers. *We support:*

- ❑ Including children under 6 in the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) benefits for children eligible for free and reduced-cost school meals.
- ❑ Expanding state options for online ordering, transaction and delivery for SNAP, P-EBT, and WIC purchases.
- ❑ Using broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) to lift the SNAP income and/or asset test and allow more low-income households to qualify for SNAP while simplifying SNAP administration.

### Increase access and availability of high-quality early care and education opportunities for all children

The child care industry across the Commonwealth has been significantly impacted by COVID-19. In late 2020, one-third of child care programs in the state remained closed. Working on very slim financial margins, early care models of all types require efforts to stabilize and strengthen their business practices to ensure high-quality and affordable opportunities for all children. *We support:*

- ❑ The Bold Goal for VA for access to quality, affordable early learning for all families by 2030 through the [VA Promise Partnership](#).
- ❑ Stabilizing and strengthening the business models of early care and education programs through opportunities like Ready Network and local shared services alliances.
- ❑ Prioritizing early childhood workforce development and wage increases to ensure centers have a strong workforce available, including early educator incentives.
- ❑ Exploring options for philanthropic, business and other community supports for childcare systems and "family friendly" practices.