

Transforming Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health

A LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIC PLAN FOR KING COUNTY

 King County

Best Starts for
KIDS



SECTION 1: Community Summary

This Community Summary is available in the following languages:

- اللغة العربية / Arabic
- 简体中文 / Simplified Chinese
- AfSoomaali / Somali
- 한국인 / Korean
- Français / French
- Español / Spanish
- Tiếng Việt / Vietnamese
- አማርኛ / Amharic
- Kiswahili / Swahili

Highlights From “Transforming Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health”

Relationships are at the heart of human development and thriving

For infants, toddlers, and young children, all development occurs within relationships. Relationships between babies and their caregivers provide the social and emotional foundation children need to learn and thrive throughout their lives.¹ The relatively young field of **Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health** holds many keys to ensuring that children are thriving in each and every family across King County.

This community summary is a snapshot of our longer report [Transforming Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health: A Landscape Analysis and Strategic Plan for King County](#).

In 2017, Best Starts for Kids started a *landscape analysis* to learn about the strengths, opportunities, and challenges with Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health services across King County. This analysis led to a community **strategic plan** to support improving social and emotional outcomes for children and families. By implementing the strategic plan, we aim to strengthen Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health services in King County.

From Our Overview

Vision and values

The vision of Best Starts for Kids is to support every baby born or child raised in King County to reach adulthood happy, healthy, safe, and thriving. As a starting point, community members began by developing a shared vision and values to guide our analysis and planning process.

We envision a King County that values the efforts of families to provide caring environments for children.

Toward this goal, King County is increasing its commitment to prioritizing the social and emotional health of all infants, toddlers, and young children (prenatal to age 5) and their families.

This project’s core values and commitments include **equity, responsibility and trust, human-centered services, collaboration, and inclusiveness.**

Our process

This project used an approach called “community action research.” From January 2019 through June 2021, we collected stories from a diverse group of families, providers, and community partners. With these stories in mind, we worked with families and community partners on making meaning, setting priorities, planning, and reviewing this report. We worked locally with King County partners and with a similar statewide project.

Many King County families were involved in this project, including:



7 focus groups of families to center the voices of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Congolese, and Vietnamese families.



a **12-member Community Council** of parents and providers from throughout King County to share photos and stories from their own lives and experiences with Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health.

What Is Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health?

At the heart of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health are young children’s abilities. We want to strengthen their ability to:

- experience, express, and manage their emotions;
- form close relationships with other children and caregivers; and
- explore and learn within their family, community, and culture.²

Families and health care providers, as well as neighborhoods, social circles, early learning programs, and the larger community—the people and places in children’s lives all make a difference in their social and emotional development and well-being.

All families need support to give children a strong social and emotional foundation

The experience of raising children can be joyful and rewarding, as well as stressful and challenging. Family relationships begin before a baby arrives and continue for the rest of their lives.

“Continuum of care” includes many settings

Promotion

Promoting awareness includes supports such as sharing information, developmental screenings, and resources to support strong child–caregiver relationships, healthy development, and early learning. All children and families need access to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health promotion.

Prevention

Includes services that help address and reduce possible concerns about social and emotional development and that build on the strengths of young children and their families.

Treatment

Includes clinical services that address the root causes of trauma or disruptions to social and emotional well-being. Reducing distress and increasing resilience and repair can help young children and their families return to healthy development.

From Our Landscape Analysis



Be Present ... SELAM’S STORY

“While we were walking side-by-side to his practice area, Josiah turned to me and said, ‘I love you mommy.’ It’s heart melting to me because there were many things I was worrying about and that was when I had to concentrate on what is important: being present and spending quality time with my son.

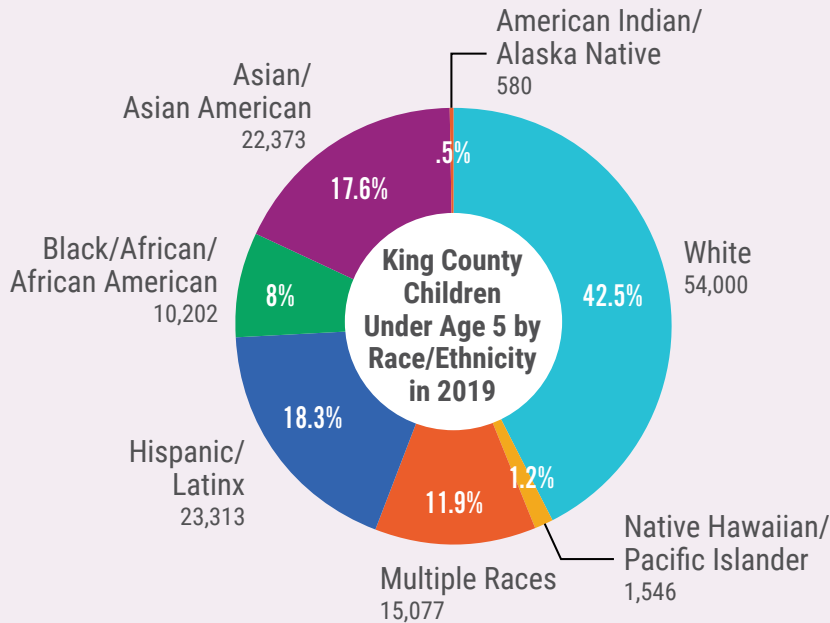
As a working single mom, there are many things I fear doing wrong: not spending time with him, giving him what he needs, or that he is missing out on. I know I’m not alone. Through my job I hear similar things with the moms I work with. There is a common fear of what trauma they have experienced and how that might have long-term effect. Moments like this are important to focus on.”

—King County parent

Who are the young children and families in King County?

- Nearly **130,000 children** under the age of 5 live in King County.³
- **Over the last 10 years**, the racial diversity of King County’s young children has increased.
- **Over 20% of the population** of King County are immigrant or migrant families.⁴
- **Over 18,000 children** under the age of 5 (14.6%) in King County are living in poverty.⁵
- **More than 1 in 4 pregnant people** in King County experience perinatal depression.³

Research shows that mental illness, both during and after pregnancy, is common in birthing people and can result from physical and hormonal changes as well as the emotional toll of this significant life change.⁶



“We strive to continue our legacy by sharing our beautiful culture with our children even when society tries to tell us otherwise.”
—King County parent

Families in King County have many strengths for supporting their young children, including:

- Knowledge of child development.
- Reading, singing, and sharing learning opportunities with their children.⁷
- Having someone to turn to for emotional support with parenting or raising children.⁸

Yet there are challenges with access to services for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, such as:

- The family and service providers do not always know where to go for information or services.
- Not all services are quality, culturally relevant, or available in the family’s preferred language.
- There are not enough services available to meet the family’s needs countywide.
- Transportation, inconvenient hours, long wait times, and processes create barriers.
- Services need to be better coordinated to meet the needs of children and their families.

Historically, some children and families have had more challenges with access to services for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health. Within current systems, Black, Indigenous, families of color, immigrant, non-English speakers, and families in rural communities might all have more challenges with getting their needs met.

From Our Strategic Plan

Many families and community partners helped to make meaning and set priorities from the learnings from the focus groups. The five resulting priorities are rooted in their vision and values. Each priority has several strategies and action steps outlined in the longer strategic plan. From this starting point, we hope to create the changes needed in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health.



PRIORITY 1: Promote social and emotional well-being for all children and families.



PRIORITY 2: Connect more families with services for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, including promotion, prevention, and treatment.



PRIORITY 3: Provide high-quality, culturally relevant services that meet the needs of families.



PRIORITY 4: Support all direct service providers across the continuum of care.



PRIORITY 5: Build and strengthen a network of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health services countywide.

Transforming Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health: A Landscape Analysis and Strategic Plan for King County

This project has been a multiyear effort to listen, learn, and set priorities. Proposed strategies center children and families and will lead to deep, sustained change over time. We have great hope that our work ahead will resonate with families, service providers, and community partners. Many champions in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health are needed to respond to these calls for action.