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In 1994, the federal Early Head Start program was created to address the comprehensive needs of low-income children under age 3 and pregnant women. Since 1965, the Head Start program has served low-income 3- and 4-year-old children and their families with comprehensive early education and support services. Programs provide services focused on the “whole child,” including early education addressing cognitive, developmental, and socio-emotional needs; medical and dental screenings and referrals; nutritional services; parental involvement activities and referrals to social service providers for the entire family; and mental health services.

All Head Start programs are required to complete the Program Information Report (PIR) on an annual basis.¹ Based on information reported through the PIR, this fact sheet describes the characteristics of Early Head Start children and families and the services provided to them during the 2008-2009 program year.²

In 2009, the Early Head Start program served 83,682 children under age 3 and 9,605 pregnant women through 727 grantees/delegates throughout the country.³ Eight percent of all funded Head Start

slots were in Early Head Start. Nationally, less than 3 percent of eligible children were served by Early Head Start.⁴ Key findings from the 2009 PIR include:

Participants

- Most children (88 percent) received a medical screening as required by the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Twelve percent required follow-up treatment, and of those children, nearly all (96 percent) received that treatment.
- By the end of the program year, 97 percent of children had a medical home for ongoing care, and 72 percent had a source for ongoing dental care.
- Thirteen percent of enrolled children had a disability, 53 percent of whom were diagnosed prior to their year in Early Head Start (EHS) and 47 percent of whom were diagnosed during the program year.
- Ninety percent of pregnant women received prenatal and postnatal health care while enrolled in EHS. Additionally, 91 percent of pregnant women had health insurance, 42 percent received a dental examination, and 38 percent accessed mental health interventions and follow-up services.
- Among participants enrolled in EHS, 43 percent were white, and 25 percent were African-American. Thirty-two percent were of Hispanic origin, regardless of race.
- The age breakdown for children participating in EHS was relatively even: 29 percent of children were under age 1; 31 percent were age 1; and 34 percent were age 2.



Programs

- About half (52 percent) of Early Head Start slots were center-based, while 41 percent were in home-based programs, which included weekly home visits and group socialization programs. Early Head Start children also received the program in combination programs (4 percent), family child care settings (2 percent), and locally designed programs (1 percent) in 2009.
- The total number of funded EHS slots reported by the PIR was 61,148. The federal government funded 59,778 slots, and states and other sources funded 1,370 slots.
- Fifty-nine percent of families included two parents, and 41 percent had a single parent.
- Most EHS families (65 percent) included at least one working parent, and 22 percent of families included at least one parent in school or job training.
- One of every five families (20 percent) received cash assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in 2009. Nearly four of every five families (79 percent) received the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Families

- Early Head Start served a linguistically diverse group of families. One-quarter (25 percent) of participants were from homes where English was not the primary language. Among these, 84 percent were from Spanish-speaking homes. Other languages each accounted for less than 1 percent of the total EHS population.
- A greater proportion of EHS families accessed support services as compared to families in the Head Start preschool program; in 2009, 84 percent of EHS families accessed at least one support service, compared to 73 percent of families with children enrolled in the Head Start preschool program.



Staff

- More than half (55 percent) of Early Head Start teachers and 66 percent of EHS home visitors had at least an Associate's Degree (A.A.) in early childhood education or a related field. In addition, 24 percent of teachers and 44 percent of home visitors had a Bachelor's Degree (B.A.) or higher in early childhood education or a related field.
- Overall, EHS teachers earned an average of \$24,613 and EHS home visitors earned an average of \$29,965 in 2009.

¹ For more information on Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR), visit <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Program%20Design%20and%20Management/Head%20Start%20Requirements/Program%20Information%20Report>.

² For more information on the Head Start preschool program, see CLASP's fact sheet, [Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2009](#).

³ The PIR collects data on all children and pregnant women who participate in Head Start at any point during the program year, including those who do not complete the year.

⁴ National Women's Law Center calculations based on data from the Office of Head Start on number of enrolled children and Census Bureau data on children in poverty by single year of age.