



# Building Comprehensive State Systems for Vulnerable Babies

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## *A Resource for State Leaders*

### About This Tool

CLASP has developed this resource to help state leaders strategize how to create or improve early childhood systems to meet the needs of vulnerable babies and toddlers, their families, and pregnant women. Every state has the pieces of a comprehensive early childhood system in place. This tool will help state leaders locate and build them into a system that meets the needs of children and families, by helping them identify: 1) the essential components of state systems to support vulnerable babies and their families, and 2) action steps to design and implement a comprehensive infant/toddler system.

#### **Assistance:**

Assistance in using this tool and planning for comprehensive early childhood systems is available from CLASP.

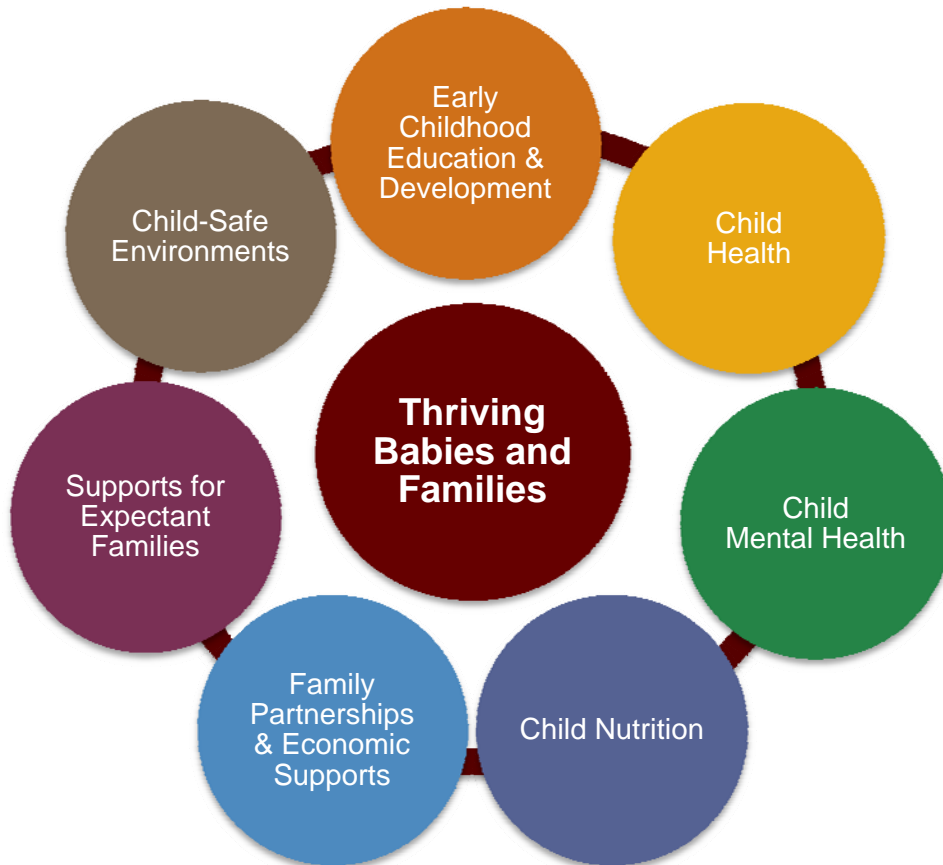
### Essential Components of State Systems for Vulnerable Babies

Quality early childhood programs address the full range of child development needs through provision or referral to a set of services, which include health and nutrition, family support, early intervention, and other comprehensive services. The federal Early Head Start (EHS) program coordinates early learning, parent engagement, and health and mental health into a comprehensive approach to serving pregnant women, infants and toddlers, and their families. EHS was designed to help minimize the disparities caused by poverty by supporting the healthy development of poor infants and toddlers in partnership with their families and communities. Some states, interested in expanding the reach of early childhood services for vulnerable babies, have built on and expanded access to federal EHS through state-funded EHS programs. Other states lack the resources to make investments in state EHS initiatives. States, however, have the ability to move forward with the provision of comprehensive and coordinated services for vulnerable infants and toddlers based on the EHS model, because many of the model's components already exist in states.

### Drawing on Existing Resources

Using the approach of Early Head Start as a model, each state can create a coordinated infant/toddler system that draws on relevant existing resources to systematically deliver a high-quality package of supports to vulnerable babies and toddlers, their families, and pregnant women. The federal Head Start Program Performance Standards lay out the essential components of EHS, all of which already exist in states as multiple agencies, programs, and funding streams. These components include: early education and development, child health, child mental health, child nutrition, family partnerships and economic supports, supports for expectant families, and child-safe environments. States can link the essential components together by encouraging connections across programs, services, and funding streams to create a comprehensive and coordinated system that supports babies and families (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**  
**System Components to Promote**  
**Thriving Babies and Families**



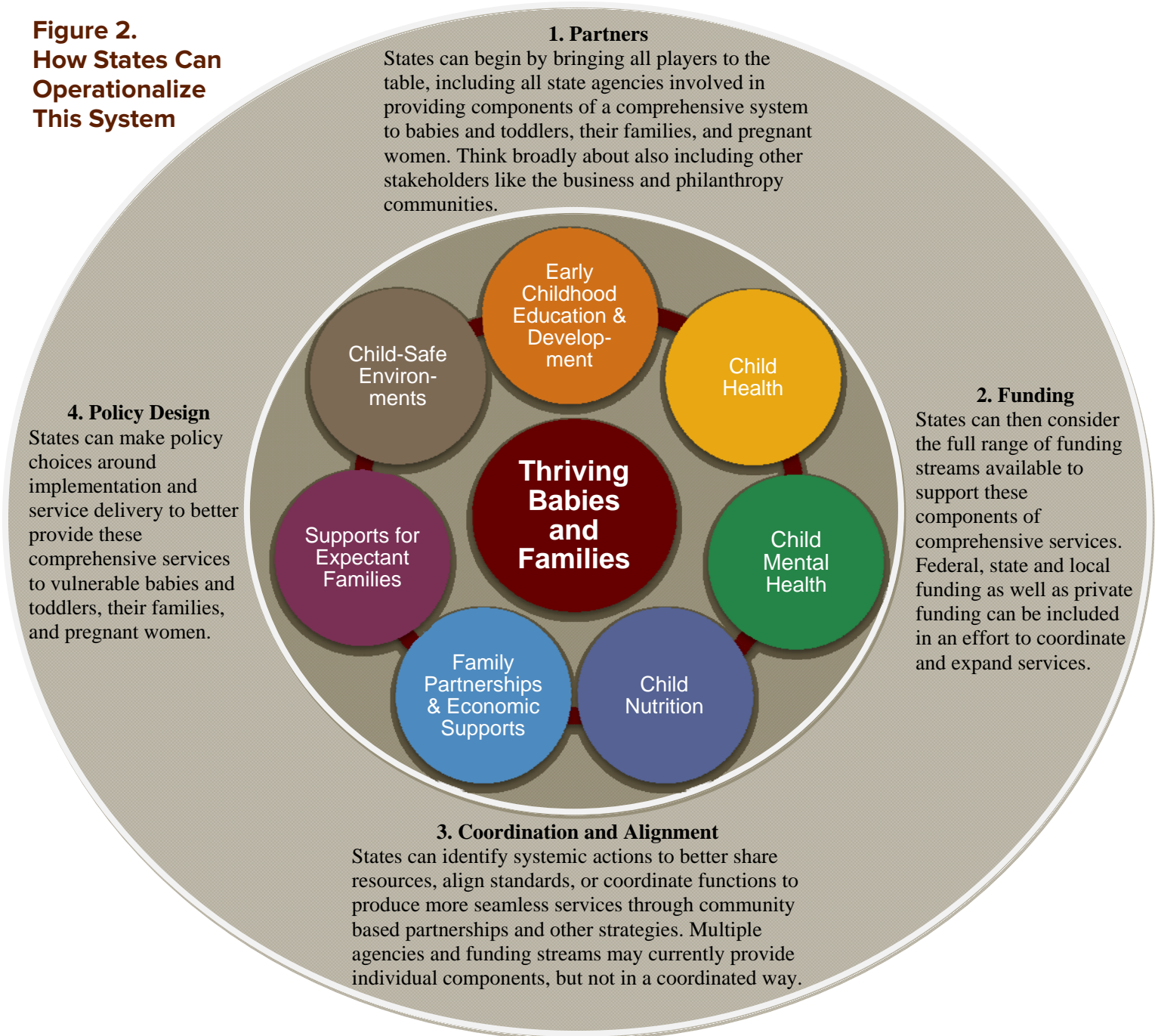
### **State Can Mobilize Existing Systems to Support Babies and Families**

- The role of the state is to **engage and coordinate all components** that can improve the lives of vulnerable infant/toddlers, their families, and pregnant women.
- States can review existing policy goals for supporting a comprehensive and coordinated system. **Ongoing evaluation** will ensure that all system components are working toward a common goal.
- State actions can include **short- and long-term activities** to move toward a coordinated system.

## Action Steps to Design and Implement a Comprehensive System

The role of the state is to engage and coordinate system components. To design and implement a comprehensive system, states will need to identify and convene partners; review funding availability and requirements; coordinate and align services, standards and funding; and review policy design to enhance implementation of a coordinated system (see Figure 2). Ongoing evaluation will ensure that all system components are working toward a common goal.

**Figure 2.**  
**How States Can Operationalize This System**



As states work to implement a comprehensive system for vulnerable babies and their families, it may be helpful to consider short- and long-term action steps. Shorter-term actions may include connecting across state agencies and supporting local partnerships. In the longer-term, states may work to expand available services and then systematize all the components. At all points in system development, states can continually work to connect, partner, and expand services.

Please contact Danielle Ewen, at [dewen@clasp.org](mailto:dewen@clasp.org) or (202) 906-8004, for assistance with this tool.