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Early Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2006

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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 2005-2006 program year.²

In 2006, the Early Head Start program served 85,831 children under age 3 and 10,825 pregnant women through 745 grantees throughout the country.³ Seven percent of all funded Head Start slots were in Early Head Start. Nationally, just 2.4 percent of eligible children were served by Early Head Start.⁴ Key findings from the 2006 PIR include:

Participants

- Most children (83 percent) received a medical screening as required by the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Twenty percent required follow-up treatment, and of those children, nearly all (95 percent) received that treatment.
- By the end of the program year, 95 percent of children had a medical home for ongoing care, and 65 percent had a source for ongoing dental care.
- Thirteen percent of enrolled children had a disability, 56 percent of whom were diagnosed prior to their year in Early Head Start (EHS) and 44 percent of whom were diagnosed during the program year. Among those children diagnosed with a disability, 93 percent received special education and related services.
- Ninety-two percent of women received prenatal and postnatal health care while enrolled in EHS. Additionally, 91 percent of pregnant women had health insurance, 39 percent received a dental examination, and 36 percent accessed mental health interventions and follow-up services.
- Among participants enrolled in EHS, 42 percent were white, and 25 percent were African-American. Thirty 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; 30 percent were age 1; and 33 percent were age 2.

Programs

- About half (51 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 participants also received the program in family child care settings (3 percent), locally designed programs (2 percent), and combination programs (4 percent) in 2006.
- The number of total funded EHS slots reported by the PIR was 62,023. The federal government funded about 56,000 slots, and states and other sources funded about 6,000.

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, 81 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 2006, 84 percent of EHS families accessed at least one support service, compared to 71 percent of families with children enrolled in the preschool program.
- Fifty-eight percent of families included two parents, and 42 percent had a single parent.
- Most EHS families (66 percent) included at least one working parent, and 24 percent of families included at least one parent in school or job training.
- Among families who needed full-day, full-year child care outside the EHS program for their children, most children (57 percent) received care at home or at another home with a relative or unrelated adult. Twelve percent received care at a family child care home, and 29 percent went to a child care center.
- Nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of families received cash assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in 2006. The percentage of families receiving the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) was 74 percent.

Staff

- Over half (52 percent) of Early Head Start teachers and 65 percent of EHS home visitors had at least an Associate's Degree (A.A.) in early childhood education or a related field. In addition, 23 percent of teachers and 45 percent of home visitors had a Bachelor's Degree (B.A.) or higher in early childhood education or a related field.
- Salaries for EHS teachers were about 10 percent less than Head Start preschool teachers in 2006. Overall, EHS teachers earned an average of \$23,070 and EHS home visitors earned an average of \$26,790. EHS teachers with a B.A. earned \$26,960 on average.

¹ For more information on Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR), visit www.pirweb.net.

² For more in-depth analysis on Early Head Start 2006 PIR data, see the policy brief *Supporting Families, Nurturing Young Children: Early Head Start Programs in 2006*, at www.clasp.org/publications/ehs_brief9.pdf. See also "Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2006," at www.clasp.org/publications/hs_pir_2006.pdf.

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 U.S. Office of Head Start on number of enrolled children in 2006 and Census Bureau data on children in poverty by single year of age in 2006.