

Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in North Carolina

Smart Start Conference
May 6, 2026

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AGENDA

Introductions

The Impact of Homelessness on Early Child
Development

An Estimate of Children Experiencing Homelessness in
NC

Home Visiting – serving children experiencing
homelessness

Taking Action

Q&A

Objectives

Effects of Homelessness on Children

- Impact by Age Group
- Physical Health
- Developmental and Cognitive Delays
- Emotional and Behavioral Health
- Social and Long-Term Consequences

Impact by Age Group

Infants

- High risk of low-birth-weight
- Malnutrition
- Developmental delays.

Toddlers

- Significant developmental delays (especially in fine motor skills) become more pronounced after 18 months.

Preschoolers

- High rates of emotional, behavioral, and social-emotional problems.

Physical Health

Health Issues

- High rates of respiratory infections
- Nutritional problems
- Injuries.

Infant Health

- Increased risk of low-birth-weight
- Higher mortality rates.

Access to Care

- Lack of essential immunizations
- Limited access to healthcare.



Developmental and Cognitive Delays

Developmental Delays

- Fine motor Delays
- Gross Motor Delays

Educational Impact

Children often enter school behind their peers in

- Language
- Literacy
- Social-emotional development.

Long-term Effects

These early gaps often persist, leading to

- Lower academic performance in elementary school
- Lower graduation rates.

Emotional & Behavioral Health

Behavioral Issues

- Higher rates of behavioral challenges
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Difficulties with self-regulation.

Trauma Exposure

- Increased risk of witnessing violence
- Experiencing severe stress, impacting mental health.

Attachment Issues

Frequent moves and chaotic environments can disrupt essential parent-child bonding.



Social & Long-Term Consequences

Social Skills

- Lower classroom engagement
- Difficulty cooperating with peers and teachers

Lifelong Impact

The trauma of early homelessness can lead to

- Continued instability
- Lower educational attainment
- Higher risk of substance abuse
- Future homelessness as adults.

Early Childhood & Brain Development




The earliest years of life are the most critical period for

- Brain development
- Shaping long-term health
- Learning
- Well-being.

Stable, nurturing relationships between caregivers and children are foundational to

- Healthy development
- Lifelong outcomes.

Early relationships need strengthening by

- Coaching parents on responsive caregiving
 - Attachment
 - Positive parent-child interaction.
- 

Hidden Homeless:

An Estimate of Young Children
Experiencing Homelessness in North
Carolina
School Year 2024-25

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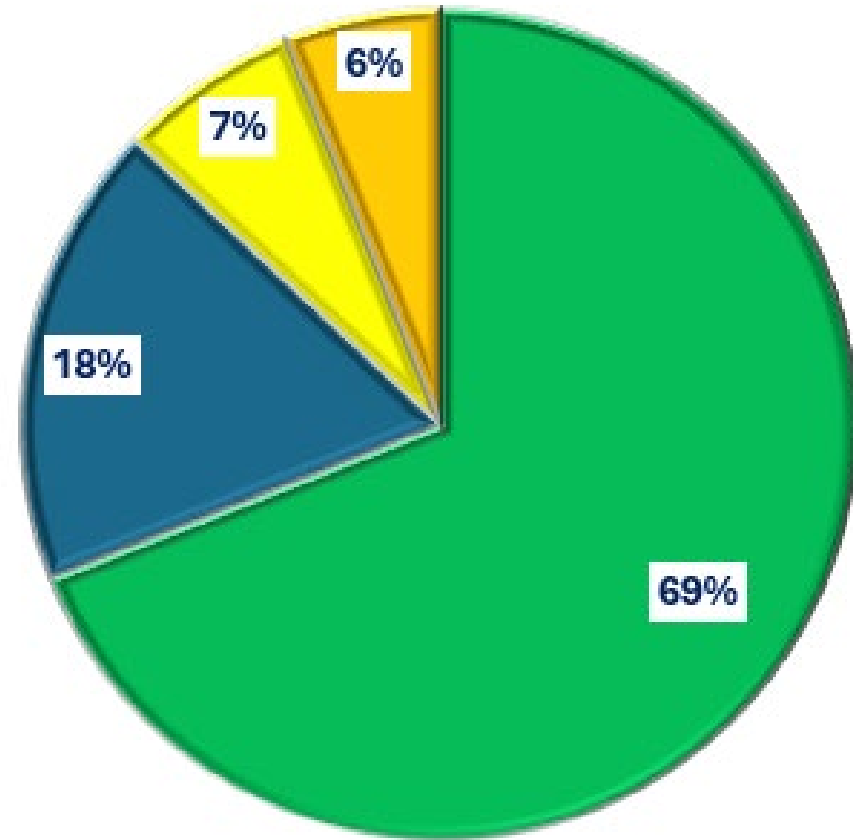
Smart Start Conference

May 7, 2026

Nighttime Residence

87% would not be likely to be identified in the HUD Point-in-Time Study

- 69% percent of families share housing/double-up with other households due to economic hardship.
- 18% are living in motels and hotels.
- 7% report living in shelters and transitional housing.
- 6% percent are estimated to be unsheltered.



ESTIMATE

The actual number of children experiencing homelessness is unknown

The data in this report is an ESTIMATE based on a methodology

It is not a count of young children experiencing homelessness

It is not a count of children receiving services

Methodology

University of
Michigan/SchoolHouse
Connection Methodology

Children experiencing homelessness in 1st grade public schools by county (DPI, Office of Homeless Education)

Children in 1st grade public schools by county (DPI enrollment)

Calculate the % homeless =
 $\frac{\text{\# homeless}}{\text{total \# children by county}}$

Apply the percent to children aged
<1, 1, 2, 3, and 4 (Office of the State Demographer)

Alternatives and Limitation of Selected Methodology

Alternatives considered

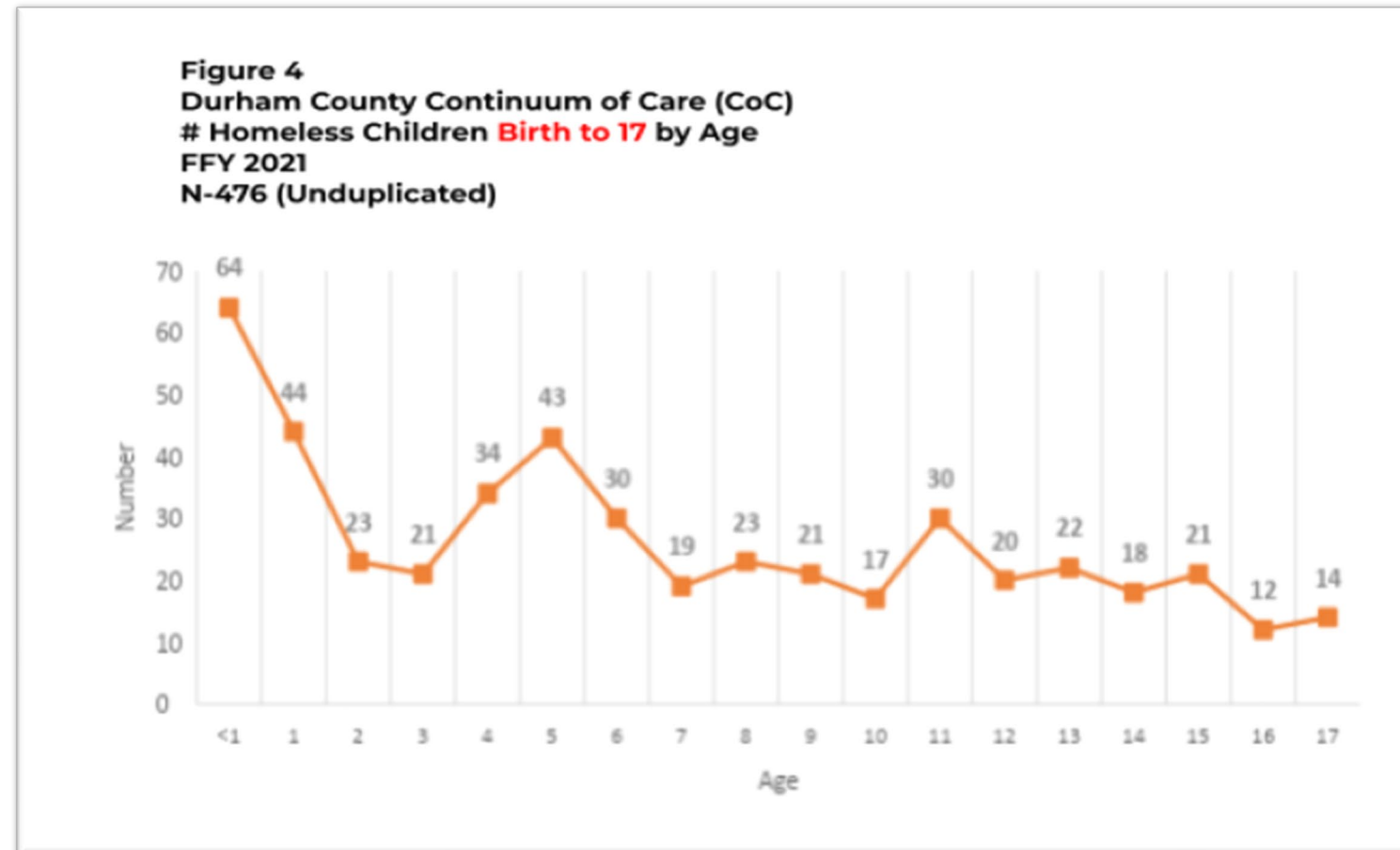
HUD Homeless Management
Information System (HMIS)

DPI Office of
Homeless Education

Drawback to UM/SHC is that the same percent is applied to children aged <1, 1, 2, 3, and 4 which likely leads to an undercount of infants and toddlers

Durham County Continuum of Care (CoC) 2021, over one year, by age birth to 17

(Source: Kotz, Rosalind (2021), *Homelessness among infants, toddlers, and pre-school age children*)



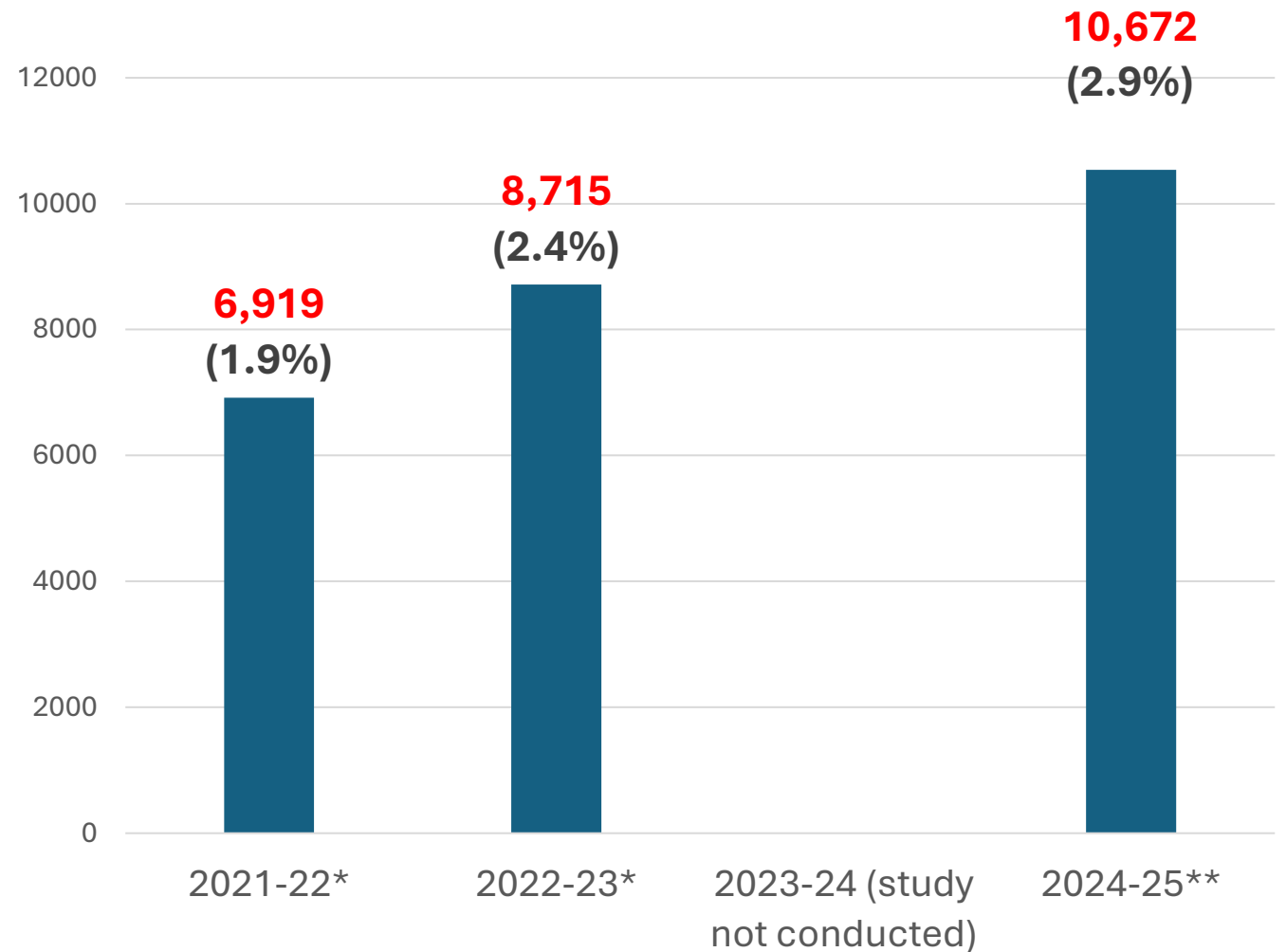
*This report uses the Zero to Three organization definition of infant and toddler as beginning at birth ending at 36 mos. <https://www.zerotothree.org>

Estimate of homelessness age birth to four in North Carolina 2024-25

	Age Group	#/%
Infant & Toddler *	Age birth-2 (inclusive of 2's)	10,672
Pre-School (not in K)	Age 3-4 (inclusive of 4's)	7,082
Age Birth-4 (not in K)	Age birth-4 (inclusive of 4's)	17,754
Age Birth-4 (inclusive of 4's)	Percent homeless age birth-4 (inclusive of 4's)	2.9%

Infant and Toddler* Homelessness increased significantly over three years

*This report uses the Zero to Three organization definition of infant and toddler as beginning at birth ending at 36 mos. <https://www.zerotothree.org>



Urban and Rural Counties

Evenly split between urban and rural/small-town counties.

- Five large population urban counties (48%)
- 95 rural and small-town counties (52%)

	Homeless Infants & Toddlers 0-2	Homeless Pre-School Age 3-4	Homeless Children Age 0-4	% Percent Homeless Age 0-4
Mecklenburg	1,860	1,246	3,106	4.2%
Wake	1,465	981	2,447	3.7%
Guilford	652	435	1,087	3.7%
Durham	548	371	919	4.5%
Buncombe	544	363	907	7.5%
Top 5 counties	5,070	3,396	8,466	4.2%
95 rural and small-town counties	5,602	3,686	9,288	2.3%
North Carolina	10,672	7,082	17,754	2.9%

Wide variation between counties

Counties with >5% estimated to be experiencing homelessness

County (sorted by %)	Infants and Toddlers Birth-2	Pre-school age 3-4	Homeless Children Age 0-4 (including 4's)	% Percent Homeless
Rutherford	206	129	335	10.3%
Montgomery	77	48	125	9.4%
Avery	39	25	64	9.2%
Ashe	55	38	93	8.9%
McDowell	101	66	168	8.4%
Perquimans	26	18	45	7.9%
Buncombe	544	363	907	7.5%
Yancey	38	25	63	7.0%
Wilkes	131	83	214	6.2%
Halifax	86	60	147	5.8%
Haywood	94	61	155	5.8%
Warren	28	19	47	5.5%
Greene	32	20	52	5.1%
North Carolina	10,672	7,082	17,754	2.9%

Appendix A

County Estimates

APPENDIX A

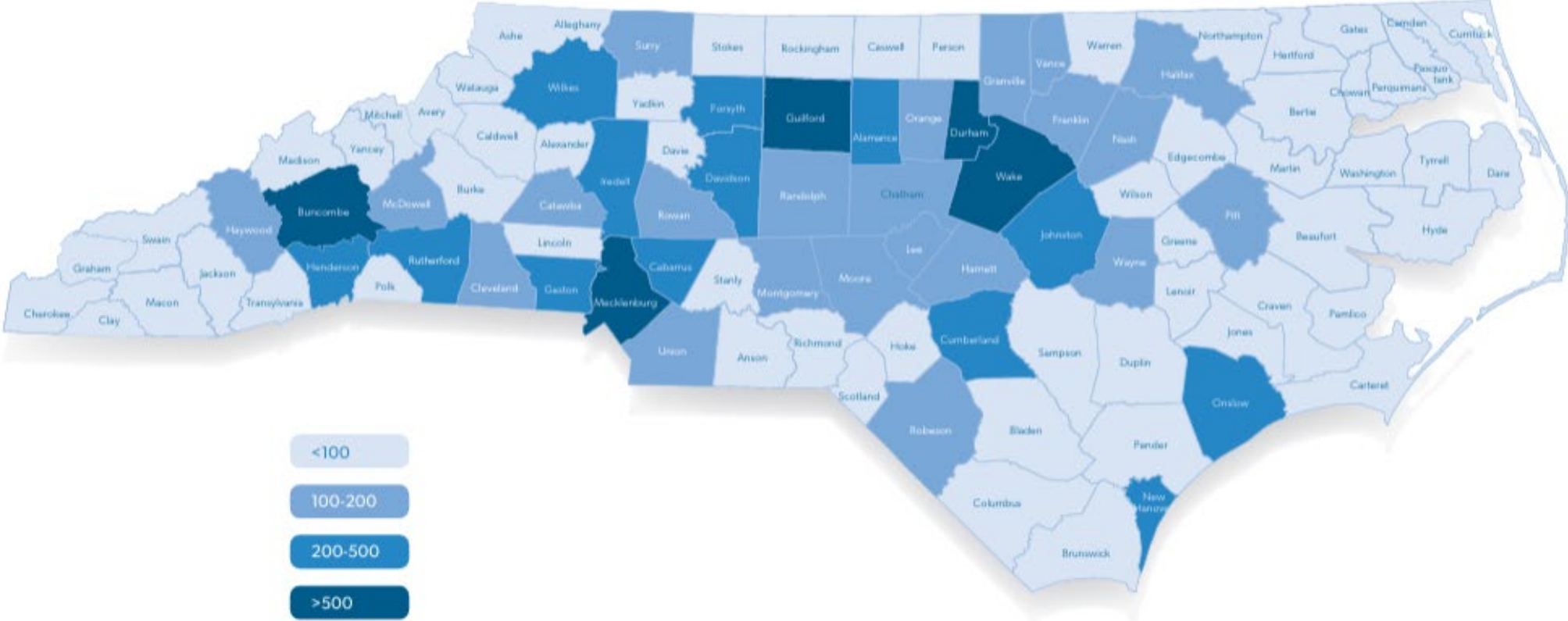
Estimate of Children Experiencing Homelessness in North Carolina School Year 2024-25

Counties - Alphabetical

*Note: This is an estimate of need, it is not a count, and it is not the number of children being served.
Counties with an * indicate the estimate has been withheld to assure confidentiality.*

County	Homeless Infants & Toddlers 0-2	Homeless Pre-School Age 3-4	Homeless Children Age 0-4	% Percent Homeless Age 0-4
Alamance	153	102	255	2.6%
Alexander	12	*	21	1.2%
Alleghany	11	*	19	3.5%
Anson	14	*	23	1.8%
Ashe	55	38	93	8.9%
Avery	39	25	64	9.2%
Beaufort	16	11	27	1.3%
Bertie	*	*	14	1.8%
Bladen	33	21	54	3.1%
Brunswick	45	29	74	1.3%
Buncombe	544	363	907	7.5%

Estimated Number of Children Experiencing Homelessness in North Carolina Counties, 2024-25



Appendix B

Service Delivery Areas

Data Tables
with link to map

Smart Start Local Partnerships

Head Start/Early Head Start

Home Visiting

Continuums of Care (CoC's)

Additional data and research

This report is the first step in improving data

Additional data will help us better understand the needs of young children experiencing homelessness, identify gaps in services, and guide more effective interventions.

County change in homelessness over time

Early Care and Education access and utilization

Housing and Homeless Services access and utilization

Infant and Toddler Undercount

Pregnancy and Postpartum Needs

How to serve Doubled Up and Motel/Hotel

Homeless Prevention

Strategies for Rural counties

Objectives

Home Visiting in North Carolina

- What is Home Visiting
- Supporting Parents & Families
- Improving Maternal & Child Health
- Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect
- Strengthening Family Stability
- Promoting School Readiness & Long-Term Success
- Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV)
- Home Visiting in North Carolina


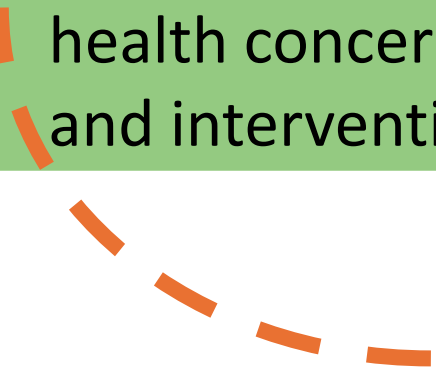
What is Home Visiting

Definition:

Home visiting is a voluntary, evidence-based early childhood service delivery strategy that matches expectant parents and caregivers of young children with trained support professionals—such as nurses, social workers, or child development specialists—to provide guidance throughout the early stages of raising a family while meeting the family **in their own environment**.

Supporting Parents & Families

- Many families begin parenthood without the support or resources they need.
- Trained professionals provide education, skill-building, and guidance.
- Services are voluntary, family-centered, and grounded in respect for family voice, culture, and choice.


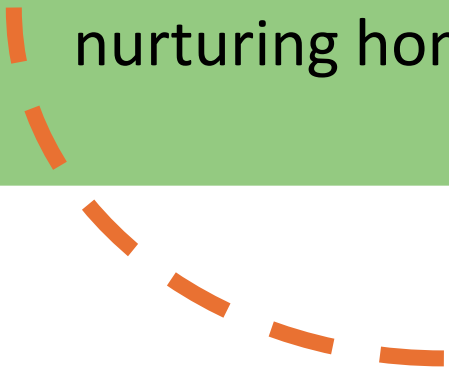
- 
- Home visiting promotes healthy pregnancies and births through education on prenatal care, safe sleep, breastfeeding, and maternal wellness.
 - Families receive support around developmental milestones, nutrition, immunizations, and injury prevention.
 - Early identification of developmental or health concerns allows for timely referrals and intervention.
- 



Improving Maternal & Child Health

Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect

- By reducing stress, isolation, and crisis, home visiting addresses key risk factors associated with maltreatment.
- Families are connected to concrete supports and community resources that strengthen stability.
- Research shows home visiting can reduce abuse and neglect and improve overall child safety.

- 
- Home visitors help families access job training, education, childcare, and financial resources.
 - Programs screen for and address social drivers of health such as housing instability and food insecurity.
 - These supports contribute to safer, more nurturing home environments.
- 



Strengthening Family Stability

Promoting School Readiness & Long-Term Success

- Parents gain tools to support early language, literacy, and social-emotional development.
- Activities like shared reading and play build the foundation for kindergarten readiness.
- Early support helps close opportunity gaps before children enter school.

What is the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program

The [Health Resources and Services Administration \(HRSA\) MIECHV Program](#) funds states and territories to develop and implement evidence-based home visiting (EBHV), voluntary programs that best meet the needs of their communities.

MIECHV connects pregnant women and families to the necessary resources and skills to raise physically, socially, and emotionally healthy children ready to succeed.

MIECHV resources include referrals to services in the community such as WIC, Medicaid, employment and educational resources, housing support, parenting support classes, and smoking cessation support.

Through MIECHV programs, families learn skills and concepts related to breastfeeding, safe sleep, nutrition, early literacy, and positive parenting through parent-child interaction.

MIECHV- Benchmarks (6) and Performance Measures (19)

I. Maternal and Newborn Health

- 1. Preterm Birth
- 2. Breastfeeding
- 3. Depression Screening
- 4. Well Child Visit
- 5. Postpartum Care
- 6. Tobacco Cessation Referrals

II. Child Injuries, Maltreatment, and ED Visits

- 7. Safe Sleep
- 8. Child Injury
- 9. Child Maltreatment

III. School Readiness and Achievement

- 10. Parent-Child Interaction
- 11. Early Language and Literacy Activities
- 12. Developmental Screening
- 13. Behavioral Concern Inquiries

IV. Crime or Domestic Violence

- 14. Intimate Partner Violence Screening

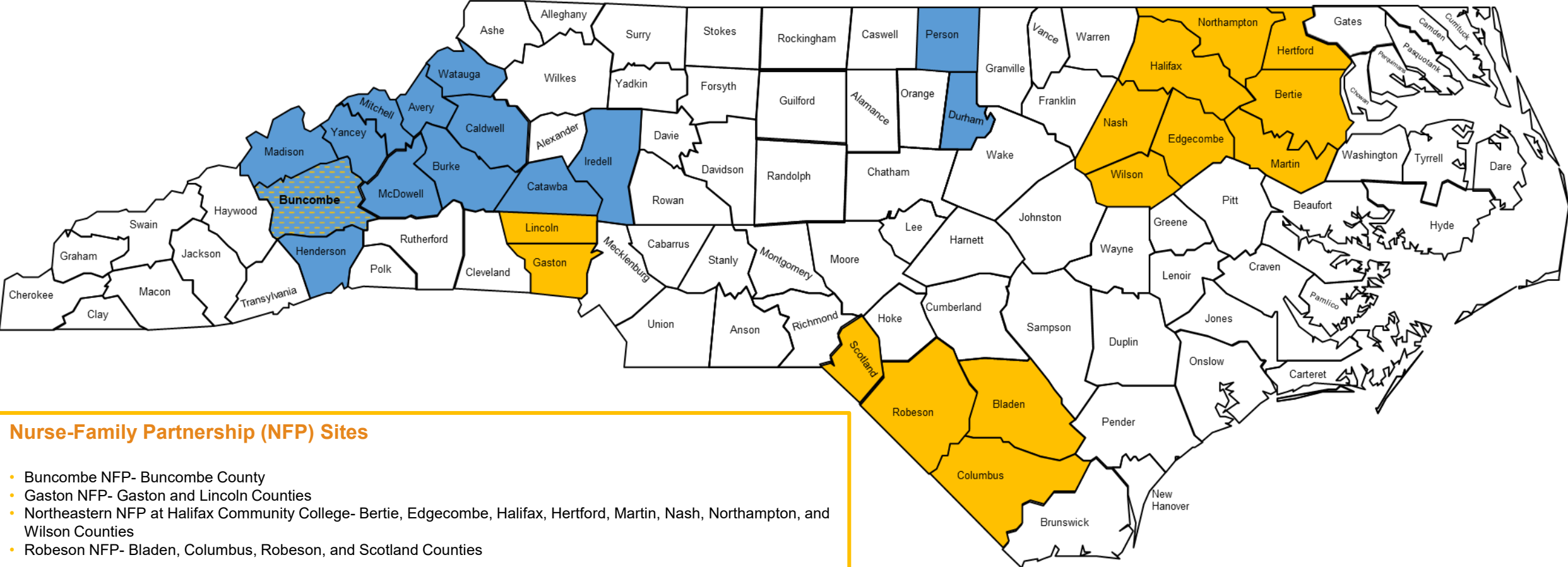
V. Family Economic Self Sufficiency

- 15. Primary Caregiver Education
- 16. Continuity of Insurance Coverage

VI. Coordination and Referrals

- 17. Completed Depression Referrals
- 18. Completed Developmental Referrals
- 19. Intimate Partner Violence Referrals
- Optional Measure 1. Substance Use Screening*
- Optional Measure 2. Completed Substance Use Referrals*

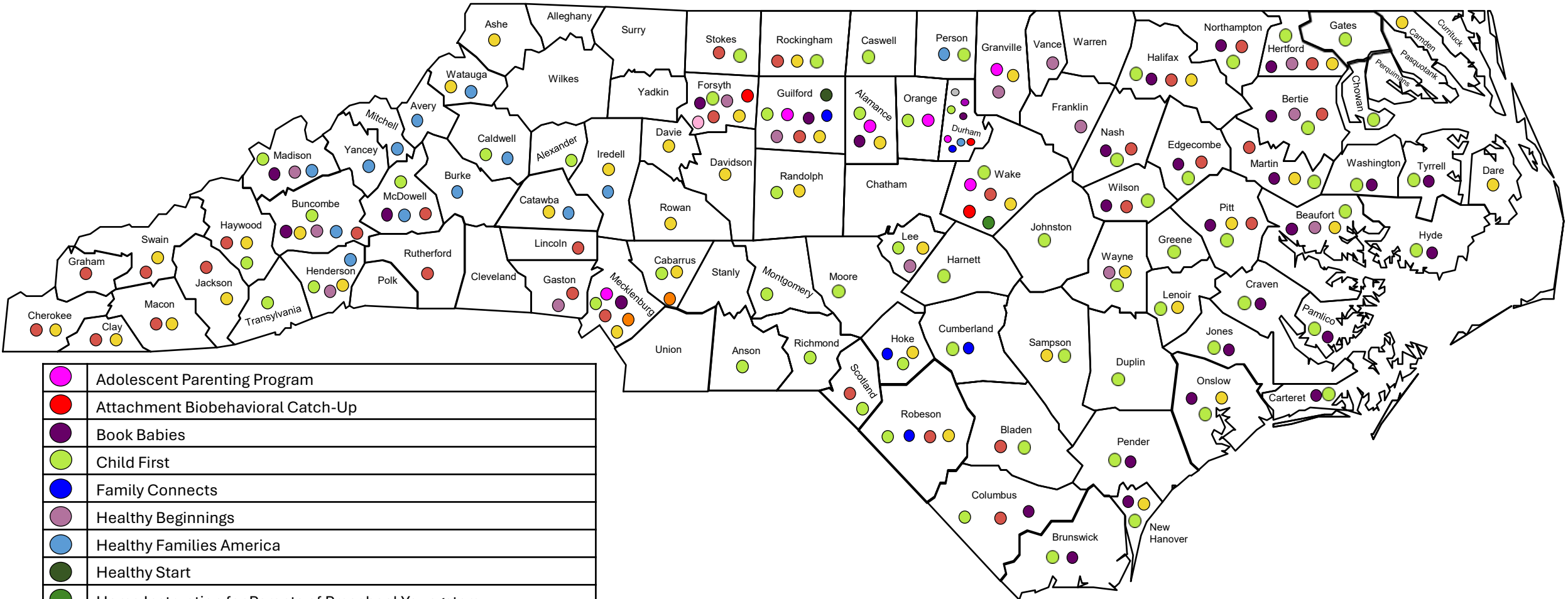
North Carolina MIECHV Map


















- Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) Sites**
- Buncombe NFP- Buncombe County
 - Gaston NFP- Gaston and Lincoln Counties
 - Northeastern NFP at Halifax Community College- Bertie, Edgecombe, Halifax, Hertford, Martin, Nash, Northampton, and Wilson Counties
 - Robeson NFP- Bladen, Columbus, Robeson, and Scotland Counties

- Healthy Families America Sites**
- Blue Ridge Healthy Families- Avery, Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, Mitchell, Yancey, and Watauga Counties
 - Catawba Valley Healthy Families- Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Iredell, and McDowell Counties
 - Healthy Families Durham- Durham and Person Counties

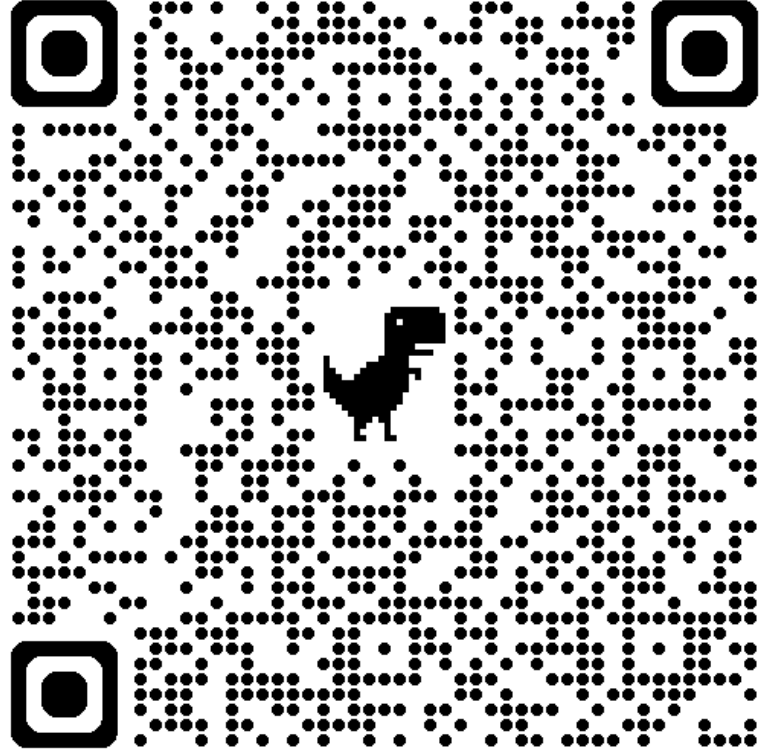
Home Visiting in North Carolina

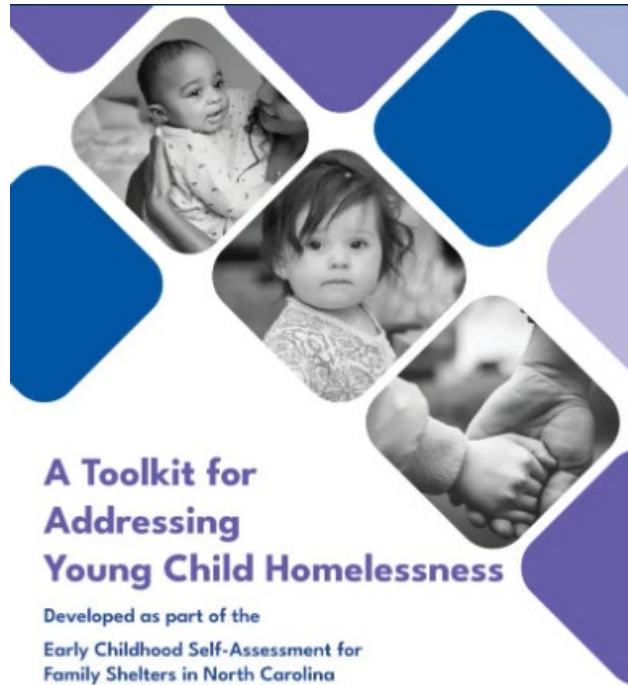


	Adolescent Parenting Program
	Attachment Biobehavioral Catch-Up
	Book Babies
	Child First
	Family Connects
	Healthy Beginnings
	Healthy Families America
	Healthy Start
	Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters
	Imprints Cares
	Improving Community Outcomes for Maternal & Child Health
	Nurse-Family Partnership
	ParentChild+
	Parents as Teachers
	SafeCare

To learn more about the NC Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program click [here](#)

The webpage includes the 2025 NC MIECHV Needs Assessment, MIECHV Fact Sheet, NC Home Visiting Maps, NC Home Visiting Programs (non-MIECHV funded) Fact Sheets and Model Contact Information, Reports, and other resources.



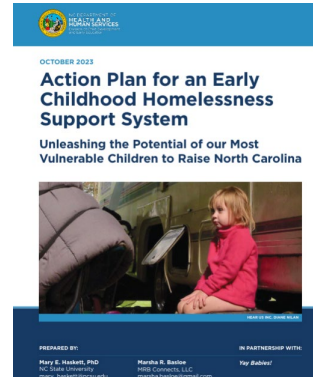


A Toolkit for Addressing Young Child Homelessness

Developed as part of the Early Childhood Self-Assessment for Family Shelters in North Carolina Technical Assistance Program



Funding for this project is from the US DHHS CFDA# 91.434, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Preschool Development Grants Birth-Five, NC Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina State University and Child Core Services Association



Taking Action – North Carolina

NC Action Plan for an Early Childhood Homelessness Support System

Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Shelters

Self-Assessment Tool for Early Childhood Programs Serving Families Experiencing Homelessness

The Learning Module (course for implementing the Self-Assessment tool for providers)

A Toolkit for Addressing Young Child Homelessness, Partners for Impact

All documents can be found on Early Years website <https://www.earlyyearsnc.org/program/early-childhood-homelessness>





Taking Action – National

SchoolHouse Connection

- [50-state report on infant and toddlers experiencing homelessness](#)
- Training for organizations that provide assistance to young children experiencing homelessness through on-going webinars.
- Hosts a national family shelter community of practice
- Recently added a new focus area on data and research
- Starting a new project

Thrive from the Start

- Communications – lead by “Housing Is”
- State Policy – lead by Zero to Three
- Federal Policy – lead by SchoolHouse Connection
- Research and Data – lead by Prevent Child Abuse America
- Anyone who is interested can join the work groups. More information on Thrive from the Start and how to volunteer for the work groups can be found at <https://thrivefromthestart.org/>.



Contacts

The NC Partnership for Children and Local Smart Start Organizations

<https://www.smartstart.org/in-your-community>

Head Start/Early Head Start Collaboration Office <https://headstartnc.org/state-collaboration/>
and <https://buildthefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Head-Start-Map-12.19.pdf>

Home Visiting <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/child-and-family-well-being/whole-child-health-section/child-and-family-wellness/home-visiting-programs>

Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC's) NC Coalition to End Homelessness <https://ncceh.org>
and <https://www.milvets.nc.gov/documents/files/housing/open>

Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) – Balance of State <https://ncceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/nc-bos-coc-map-new-rcs-with-numbers-6-14-18.pdf>

Early Years <https://www.earlyyearsnc.org/>

Partners for Impact <http://www.partnersforimpact.com> and Newsletter [Sign up](#)

Yay Babies! Laura Hewitt, NC DHHS, Division of Child Development and Early Education, laura.hewitt@dhhs.nc.gov or Angela Lewis, NC Partnership for Children, alewis@smartstart.org.

Hidden Homelessness: An Estimate of Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in North Carolina, School Year 2024-25, on Early Years website <https://www.earlyyearsnc.org/program/early-childhood-homelessness> and Rosalind Kotz, Ph.D. Community Research Consultant kotzr1@gmail.com

DPI Office of Homeless Education, <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/federal-program-monitoring/consolidated/title-i-part-improving-academic-achievement-disadvantaged/homeless-education-and-mckinney-vento-programs>

SchoolHouse Connection <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/article/infant-and-toddler-homelessness>

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<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/child-and-family-well-being/whole-child-health-section/child-and-family-wellness/home-visiting-programs>

Questions?







Review this session!



Review the conference!

