

Request for Applications

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health
Financing Policy Project
Cohort 4



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Building a Robust Continuum of Mental Health Supports and Services for Infants, Young Children, and Families

The ZERO TO THREE (ZTT) Policy Center is pleased to announce that we will be expanding our Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Financing Policy Project (FPP) to welcome a fourth cohort of states to our learning community. In January 2025, we will kick off the fourth cycle of our FPP, which will include comprehensive technical assistance (TA) for up to ten new state teams. We will support teams to develop financing strategies to advance state policy that better meets the mental and relational health needs of infants, young children, and their caregivers. We will help teams to address the disparities that exist between groups in their state to ensure that all children's needs are met across a continuum of supports and services.

Why the Financing Policy Project?

In the first five years of life, children develop more rapidly than at any other period during the lifespan. During this time, safe environments and nurturing relationships provide a solid foundation for child health and wellbeing, while unstable or adverse environments can undermine healthy development. The science is clear: the earliest years provide both opportunity and risk, and when we support infants, young children, and the caregivers and families that raise them, children are significantly more likely to grow up happy and healthy.

As policy makers look for ways to ensure that all young children have what they need to thrive, our job at ZTT is to highlight IECMH as an essential component of early childhood development and, thus, the early childhood system. The FPP seeks to bring together multi-disciplinary teams within and between states to problem-solve, share successes and challenges, and test innovative financing policy strategies. Each team will receive support from ZTT staff, national IECMH experts, and their FPP peers in developing and financing a robust array of IECMH supports and services.

Description of the Opportunity

This opportunity includes a minimum of one year of TA from the ZTT IECMH Policy Team and partners and continued access to the 40-state learning community.

Project offerings will include:

- Informational Q & A session on **October 2, 2024 from 2-3pm ET** (Register [here](#) and you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting);
- Virtual kick-off meeting on **January 14, 2025, 1-2:30pm ET**;
- Monthly team calls with TA provider;
- Access to additional TA support from subject matter experts;
- In-person convening **March 17-19, 2025** in Minneapolis, MN with state representatives from Cohorts 1-4, national partners, subject matter experts, and ZTT staff; and

- A series of virtual peer learning opportunities.

Project Period: Active TA will run from January 2025 to December 2025. Project offerings will continue through 2026, contingent on each state's progress and needs.

Goals: To identify and implement state strategies for aligning financing policy with IECMH best practice initiatives across the promotion-to-treatment continuum. States will share their expertise and explore possible solutions to current policy and program challenges. The ZTT team, partners, and state teams will work together to:

1. Develop and share strategies for financing a robust continuum of IECMH supports and services by identifying key policy levers and funding opportunities;
2. Develop and share strategies for communicating IECMH messages and engaging Medicaid and other policymakers;
3. Identify and imbed strategies to advance equity through IECMH policy change; and
4. Promote peer-to-peer learning by building relationships and creating opportunities for cross-state connections.

Expectations:

ZTT will:

- Plan and host a virtual kick-off meeting, a series of virtual learning and sharing sessions, and an in-person national convening;
- Deliver individualized TA to support teams in developing and implementing a financing and policy action plan;
- Facilitate additional peer meetings and be available for one-on-one meetings with team leads upon request;
- Support teams' capacities to engage families and providers with lived experience in IECMH systems, and to create opportunities for those with lived experience to shape the FPP work;
- Organize resource materials and expert contributions to support team activities, including the expertise of those with lived experience; and
- Gather and disseminate information about state successes and lessons learned.

Selected state teams will:

- Select one member to serve as Team Lead and main point of contact to communicate with ZTT team;
- Participate in project elements outlined in Opportunity Description, including monthly state team meetings, and the virtual peer learning series;
- Attend the in-person convening March 17-19, 2025 in Minneapolis, MN;
- Gather state-specific information about availability of and gaps in IECMH services along the promotion-to-treatment continuum, and related systems, financing structures, strengths, and challenges (guidance to be provided by ZTT);
- Create and implement an action plan based on assessment of current challenges, gaps, priorities, and opportunities to address disparities in IECMH outcomes; and
- Participate in the online platform Basecamp, posting questions and answers and sharing resources among the learning community.

Team Leads will:

- Be responsible for scheduling and coordinating team meetings, including recurring monthly TA meetings;

- Guide the team in initial discussions about processes for decision-making, identifying additional team members and connecting to other state EC teams/coalitions, and establishing norms and structures that accommodate all team members;
- Attend the in-person convening March 17-19, 2025 in Minneapolis, MN;
- Participate in our cross-state monthly/bi-monthly Team Lead meetings;
- Track progress on the creation and implementation of the action plan; and
- Provide progress updates every other month to assigned ZTT contact.

Application Process

Eligibility:

All states that have **not already** been a part of the project are eligible to apply.

Cohort 1 (AK, CO, IL, IN, LA, MA, NC, OK, OR, VA),

Cohort 2 (AL, DC, MD, NV, NH, NM, NY, SC, TN, WA), or

Cohort 3 (CT, GA, HI, IA, KA, MS, MO, NJ, UT)

States should assemble a core public-private sector team of a minimum of five people (see membership guidelines below). States must submit a single application on behalf of the team for consideration. Applications must identify a lead contact person who represents a public or private sector state-level entity, such as a state agency or advocacy organization, who works on the state's IECMH policy and service delivery system.

Core Team Composition:

States must identify a minimum of five individuals (a Core Team) who will commit to maintain a consistent level of participation through 2026.

Core Teams must include representation from:

1. The state's Medicaid Director (or high-level designee of the state Medicaid office); and
2. A licensed IECMH clinician directly involved in the provision of mental health services to infants, young children, and families (via direct services or clinical/program supervision and management).

Based on state priorities, structure, and current capacity to advance policy, states may fill remaining positions with other decision makers such as representatives from:

- Mental health authority (e.g. children's mental health director, behavioral health director);
- Other state agencies (e.g. Part C, public health, child welfare, early childhood education etc.);
- State leadership for Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics;
- Family leadership organizations or advisory bodies;
- State Infant Mental Health Association;
- Tribal Nations;
- Governor's Office;
- Legislative champion;
- Advocacy organization focusing on children and/or mental health;
- Institutes of Higher Education;
- State chapters of provider organizations (e.g. American Academy of Pediatrics);
- Health insurance provider (Managed care organizations, private insurers); and
- Philanthropic foundations.

Chosen members must be able to commit to attendance at monthly TA meetings and prioritize attendance at other FPP offerings. In some states this work may be completed most effectively through existing councils/advisory groups or through the convening of a larger team. In these cases, FPP teams may involve a broader team beyond the individuals identified as Core Team.

If your state is interested in the project but concerned about specific project requirements or goodness of fit, please reach out to Alex Busuito at abusuito@zerotothree.org. Our team is happy to discuss any questions or concerns.

Key Considerations for Teams:

We strongly encourage applicants to consider leaders who identify as Black, Indigenous and/or People of Color, and other established and emerging leaders with identities and perspectives typically underrepresented in the policymaking space. Please consider the FPP, and similar projects, as an opportunity to center and amplify the wisdom they bring via skill and lived experience. Teams with intentional integration of family voice and a clear vision for how family perspectives will be centered in IECMH policy work in their state will be particularly competitive for this offering. We consider a lack of meaningful family engagement in IECMH policymaking a loss for states and those who state leaders seek to serve. We know that families need to play an integral role in determining the direction of all policy and systems change and progress. We understand that states may draw on existing or new teams/groups/relationships for this project, and that states may have varying existing avenues for family voice and leadership in their policy and financing work to date. Through this application process and the subsequent work with ZTT, we would like states to assess the current extent to which families play a meaningful role in informing priorities and decisions in mental health and early childhood policy and, as needed, identify ways to increase this capacity. We understand that states may be coming to this project with varying levels of existing capacity and infrastructure, so we will ask for initial exploration through the application questions (see below) and further exploration and progress through TA.

Submitting an Application:

States should identify the lead contact person for this application and, together, provide brief, specific answers to the following questions:

1. Who will serve as your core state team (minimum 5 members)? For each member, please describe:
 - a. Their sphere of influence, and
 - b. What would your team be missing (including personal and/or professional perspectives) if this person was not a part of the project?
2. Who will serve as your team lead? Please describe:
 - a. How this person is suited to be team lead, include project management skills, IECMH policy experience, and experience working with teams that include Black, Indigenous and People of Color in leadership and authoritative positions; and
 - b. How they will prioritize time to attend all FPP activities.
3. What does your state team hope to accomplish through participation in this opportunity? Are there financing and/or systems-building issues or challenges you would be particularly eager to work on in this setting? Please be as specific as possible (i.e. not just learn best practices from other states, but what specifically would you like to learn from other states?).
4. To what extent has your state included a focus on IECMH within mental health, early childhood, or other system-building efforts to date?

5. Please discuss your team’s readiness and capacity to engage in self-assessment and action planning focused on how well current IECMH financing policies support all families, regardless of race, income, geographic location, language spoken at home, etc.
6. How will this opportunity be used to build on historical and current efforts and contribute to long-term sustainability?
7. In what way(s) is your state uniquely well-positioned to take advantage of this opportunity?
8. Please share the extent to which families are involved in IECMH policy work in your state, if at all. If you have family leadership in place, please tell us about it. If this is an area for growth, please describe the extent to which you have existing capacity (infrastructure, financial resources, staff capacity) or goals related to family engagement and describe how you envision making progress in this area through the TA experience. What would you need from ZTT or other partners?
9. Why is this particular combination of partners (your proposed Core Team) capable of meaningfully advancing IECMH financing policy in your state?
10. If you anticipate involving additional partners, groups, or coalitions beyond your core team, who are they and why?

Responses should not exceed 6 pages and are due no later than
5:00pmPT/6:00pmMT/7:00pmCT/8:00 pm ET on Wednesday October 30, 2024

Important Dates:

- October 2, 2024, 2-3:00 pm ET - virtual informational Q & A session. [Register here.](#)
- Wednesday Oct 30, 2024 - application due
- Mid-November - respond to applicants with decision
- Tuesday January 14, 1-2:30 pm ET – virtual Kick Off event
- March 17-19, 2025 - in-person convening in Minneapolis, MN