



Oregon is home to 269,534 children, from birth-to-kindergarten-entry age. This young-child population is racially and ethnically diverse and is becoming more so — 44 percent of young children five and below in Oregon are children of color. Overwhelming evidence tells us that investing in young children and their families has a lasting, positive impact throughout their lifetime.

The first five years of a child's life represent the most consequential period in human development. While these years represent a remarkable period of opportunity, they are also a period of intense vulnerability. Adverse conditions, such as inadequate nutrition and housing, poor maternal health, or a lack of positive early experiences and nurturing relationships have a lasting detrimental effect on the developing brain, even if a child's circumstances are improved later in childhood. Racial inequities are present for young children from day one, shaped by historical policies and systems that have underrepresented, marginalized, and excluded people of color. In addition, rural and remote populations experience some of the highest poverty rates and associated complications of programs having less capacity to implement requirements with larger geographic reach. Addressing these conditions requires a comprehensive, cross-sector approach to supporting young children and their families.

Through *Raise Up Oregon*, Oregon's state agencies have recognized that the early childhood system must include supports that young children and their families need to grow and thrive. These supports include the areas of physical and mental health, housing, social services, early learning and care, and workforce development. Because a comprehensive early childhood system must address all these domains and do so in a way that respects and empowers families, *Raise Up Oregon* calls out the specific and collaborative contributions that multiple state agencies must commit to building this system.

The most important work of building a comprehensive early childhood system happens in communities and with community-based organizations and families themselves. Beginning operations in 2015, the Early Learning Hubs were founded in 2013 to play a critical role in advancing Oregon's early childhood system by centering the voices of families and communities more fully as designers of the regional early childhood system. The vision and goals of the Hubs informed *Raise Up Oregon's* first edition in 2018.

They have examined what it means to be effective Hubs and significant contributors to an effective early childhood system:

- **Effective Early Learning Hubs:** One common systems-building approach is the creation of collaborative partnerships that include people and organizations across multiple sectors working together to achieve shared goals. These partnerships can engage in multiple activities

Oregon's Early Childhood System

The goal is to build an early childhood system that includes the full set of supports that young children and their families need to grow and thrive.

These supports include the areas of physical and mental health, housing, social services, early learning and care, and workforce development working in concert to coordinate policies, programs, and services; create infrastructure; improve integration; and achieve scale.

such as needs assessments, strategic planning, community organizing, policy advocacy, and the launching of a range of systems-change strategies. These partnerships range greatly in their effectiveness, with even seasoned partnerships often experiencing significant barriers to their success. Partnerships like Oregon's Early Learning Hubs are characterized by several elements that enable them to effectively pursue systems building. These include shared vision, engaged cross-sector and community partners, systems-focused problem-solving and action, continuous learning and improvement, and strategic convening.

- **Effective Multi-Sector Early Childhood System:** Most communities have evolved a complex and disorganized array of early childhood programs and supports that are difficult for families to navigate and use. In response, there has been a growing movement to build early childhood systems to provide more aligned, coordinated, and family-centered services, support, and opportunities. Effective early childhood systems integrate a diverse array of accessible, high-quality services and support across multiple sectors and ensure policies and practices are aligned with goals for equitable early childhood development. These system changes are needed to bring about early family outcomes and the ultimate impact of children thriving in early childhood and beyond.

Vision

The Early Learning Hubs believe that when children and families thrive, Oregon thrives. The Early Learning Hubs share the same vision as Raise Up Oregon (2024-2028):

Oregon's young children, prenatal to age five, experience an early start that results in positive health, education, and life outcomes regardless of zip code, race, and family income.

The early childhood system goals of Raise Up Oregon:

Goal 1: The early childhood system is equitable: integrated, accessible, inclusive, anti-racist, and family centered.

Goal 2: All families with young children are supported to ensure their well-being. **Goal 3:** All children are thriving in early childhood and beyond.

Mission

The primary purpose of the Early Learning Hubs is to advance the regional early childhood system in support of the statewide goals through their three core functions as convening, connecting, and building the capacity with:

- Families
- Cross-sector partners included in Raise Up Oregon: early learning and care, health, human services, housing, public education, higher education, and workforce development.
- Community partners, such as libraries and museums, culturally specific organizations, city and county government, advocates
- Private partners, such as business and philanthropy

The Early Learning Hubs' secondary purpose is to work with the Department of Early Learning and Care and support the development and progress of regional early learning and care services and programs that meet the needs of families.

Purpose 1: Advancing the Regional Early Childhood System

The Early Learning Hubs advance the regional early childhood system through three interrelated core functions:

Convener: Hubs convene families, cross-sector partners, community partners, and others to support all families with young children to ensure their well-being. As conveners, they build the relationships and trust that allow a system to grow and develop. Purposes for convening include but are not limited to setting the direction of a shared strategic vision for the region, identifying opportunities for investment of time and resources, addressing gaps in services and supports, reducing duplication of effort, and strategizing how the alignment of funding can address and remove system barriers.

Connector: Hubs ensure that families and community partners are empowered to more fully participate in the design of services and supports for families with young children.

They are connected to and inform the enhancement or expansion of those services and supports. Early Learning Hubs build relationships and develop regional priorities as part of the community. They bridge sectors, bringing problem solvers together to balance the priorities of the state, communities, and Hub governance councils.

Capacity-Builder: Systems tend to evolve over time to become complex and fragmented. Hubs are working to expand the capacity of the early childhood system to be effective, coordinated, and coherent while serving all children under six and their families and embedding racial, economic, and geographic equity and inclusion. The capacity problems facing Oregon's early childhood system are deeply rooted and will take a variety of solutions from many sectors to solve. Hubs support families and communities to advocate for the change they want and need. Strategies include professional development, training, educational opportunities, addressing gaps, and coordinating investments.

Hub Core Functions and Corresponding Roles

Convener Roles

- Partner with families and community organizations from the six sectors in Raise Up Oregon to develop and implement a shared strategic vision and work plan toward the early childhood system goals.
- Build community support for the shared vision and facilitate opportunities for partners to integrate that vision into their own work plans.
- Identify and prioritize barriers that children and families experience in attempting to access support to achieve positive outcomes, and work to remove prioritized barriers.
- Create and promote opportunities for family leadership and advocacy to ensure the regional early childhood system is family centered.
- Convene and lead regional implementation of statewide early childhood initiatives.

- Establish and sustain innovative regional partnerships and initiatives that promote access to high-quality, culturally responsive, child-ready programs.
- Increase coordination and collaboration of services across the sectors that impact families with young children, including early learning and care, health, human services, housing, public education, higher education, and workforce development to help build family-informed, child-ready communities.
- Partner with the Early Learning Council in building a statewide early childhood system.

Connector Roles:

- Conduct outreach to raise awareness, disseminate information, and identify local needs and preferences within communities and families to promote continuous feedback loops among the six state agencies in Raise Up Oregon, regional partners, and families.
- In partnership with six sector partners, use data to help direct community resources to address the needs of priority populations.
- In partnership with other sectors, blend, braid, and leverage existing funding streams from state, federal, regional, and partner entities, including KPI, family support, and family stability dollars.
- Coordinate early childhood strategies to promote smooth transitions and develop referral pathways between programs.

Capacity-Builder Roles:

- Elevate family voice, ensuring it is the center of the shared vision for the regional early childhood system.
- Incorporate family leadership from focus populations in Hub governance, planning, and activities.
- Aggregate, interpret, and communicate available data to identify focus populations, track the well-being of children and families, guide the continuous quality improvement process, and facilitate collaboration across sectors and partners.
- Catalyze local action and investments for early childhood supports and services by hosting or participating in initiatives, committees, workgroups, etc.
- Support growth of culturally and linguistically responsive programming and providers that meet the needs of locally identified priority populations.
- Advocate for statewide, regional, and local infrastructure and capacity, educating policymakers, employers, and partners.

Purpose 2: Advancing the Regional Early Learning and Care Sector

The Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) has purview over a significant portion of the programming and infrastructure of the early learning and care sector. DELIC's mission is to foster coordinated, culturally appropriate, and family-centered services that recognize and respect the strengths and needs of all children, families, and early learning and care professionals. DELIC's core

programs are designed to support family access to early learning and care providers. DELC's core programs include:

- Baby Promise
- Preschool Promise
- Relief Nurseries
- Healthy Families Oregon (HFO)
- Early Childhood Equity Fund
- Employment Related Day Care (ERDC)
- Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK)

Other programs in the early learning and care sector include Parenting Education in conjunction with the Department of Human Services, home visiting with the Department of Human Services and the Oregon Health Authority, and Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) with the Department of Education.

DELC's foundational services provide critical backbone and infrastructure support for early learning and care programs and providers. These include the following:

- Child Care Licensing
- Child Care Resource and Referral
- Child Care Substitutes of Oregon
- Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion Prevention Program
- Early Learning Hubs
- Inclusive Partners
- Oregon Registry
- Spark

DELC partners with two regional structures to support early learning and care programs and providers - Child Care Resource & Referral and Early Learning Hubs. DELC partners with the Early Learning Hubs to create systems that increase access to high-quality early care and education opportunities and that are easier for families to navigate.

Hub Roles

Early Learning Hubs have the following roles in advancing the regional early learning and care sector in a manner that addresses their region's unique challenges and needs through their relationship with DELC:

1. Use and discuss relevant data with families and community partners to understand the region, inform the planning and implementation of state and regional initiatives, and identify priority populations related to early learning and care.
2. Partner with Child Care Resource & Referrals (CCR&R) to increase the availability of child care and preschool, support professional development, and engage families in early learning and care.
3. Leverage resources in regional strategies, services, and programs in collaboration with families and community partners that support all children thriving.
4. Partner with state initiatives to involve families, providers, and community partners in the development, alignment, and implementation of a regional coordinated system of supports for inclusion and social-emotional well-being in early learning and care.