

With increasingly limited resources, it is critical that Florida prioritize funding for programs and services that yield the greatest possible return for our economic future. Healthy Families Florida is a wise investment for today's children and families and tomorrow's economic security.

## **The prosperity of our state depends on the strength of our communities and the success of our families.**

- 90 percent of brain development occurs during the first five years of life, which is the very time when abuse and neglect are most likely to occur.
- In the state fiscal year 2008-2009, 110,795 children were abused or neglected in Florida. Of those children, 51.36% were five years of age or younger.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Florida Child Abuse Death Review Committee found that 93% of the 198 children who died from child abuse or neglect in 2008 were five years of age and under.<sup>2</sup>
- Parents play a critical role in providing the safe, stable, stimulating and nurturing experiences that promote optimal development during these early years.
- Dollars spent on a child before age five produce a higher economic benefit than if the same amount were spent when the child is older.<sup>3</sup>
- Skills and capacities that begin developing in early childhood become the basis of a prosperous and sustainable society – from positive school achievement to work force skills to cooperative and lawful behavior.
- When young children experience child abuse or neglect, it impedes their early development.
- Child abuse and neglect disrupts a child's brain architecture, damaging the developing brain and leading to problems in learning and behavior and increased susceptibility to physical and mental illness over time.<sup>4</sup> It may also perpetuate a generational cycle of abuse.

**There is a proven solution! Healthy Families Florida prevents child abuse and neglect, saving lives and saving money.**

## **Healthy Families Florida prevents child abuse and neglect, improves self-sufficiency, stimulates early brain development and promotes maternal and child health.**

- Healthy Families Florida is a nationally accredited, evidence-based voluntary home visiting program improving early childhood outcomes by preventing child abuse and neglect before it ever happens.
- An independent five-year evaluation concluded that Healthy Families Florida has a significant impact on preventing child abuse and neglect in Florida's highest-risk families. Evaluators also concluded that Healthy Families' services improve maternal and child health, parent-child interaction and family self-sufficiency.
- Last year alone, more than 20,500 children were free from abuse and neglect because of Healthy Families Florida. This program keeps children safe at home and out of the child welfare system.
  - 98% of children served by Healthy Families are free from abuse and neglect.

<sup>1</sup> Florida Department of Child and Families. (2009). Counts of unduplicated findings of maltreatment by age group.

<sup>2</sup> Florida Child Abuse Death Review Committee. (2009). Death Review, Annual Report.

<sup>3</sup> Heckman, J.J. (2007). The economics, technology, and neuroscience of human capability formation.

<sup>4</sup> Anda RF, Felitti VJ, Walker J, Whitfield, CL, Bremner JD, Perry BD, Dube SR, Giles WH. (2006). The Enduring Effects of Abuse and Related Adverse Experiences in Childhood: A Convergence of Evidence from Neurobiology and Epidemiology. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, 2006; 56(3):174-86.

- Healthy Families Florida contributes to workforce development by promoting personal responsibility and self sufficiency.
  - 72% of Healthy Families program participants who were unemployed at enrollment are employed when they leave the program.
- According to the latest research on brain development, literacy skills begin at birth. Healthy Families Florida promotes positive parent child interactions, which play a powerful role in preparing young children for future school success.
  - 91% of Healthy Families program participants read to their child on a regular basis.
- Healthy Families Florida connects families and their children to primary healthcare for basic medical care, reducing reliance on emergency rooms.
  - 99% of participants and their children are connected to a primary healthcare provider.
  - 92% of children served by Healthy Families are fully immunized by age 2.
- Healthy Families Florida provides information on the importance of timing subsequent pregnancies far enough apart to decrease the risk of pregnancy complications or giving birth to low-birth-weight or premature babies.
  - 98% of mothers participating in Healthy Families do not have a subsequent pregnancy within two years.
- Healthy Families screens for developmental delays. Early detection allows for early treatment and reduces the likelihood that more serious and costly problems will develop.
  - 93% of children receive age appropriate developmental screening at scheduled intervals.

**Healthy Families Florida equips parents to provide the safe, stable, stimulating and nurturing experiences that lay the foundation for success in school, in the community and in the workforce.**

- Research has demonstrated that during times of economic distress, child abuse and neglect increases due to the added stress experienced by low income families and families already at high risk of child abuse and neglect. “Economically-distressed parents tend to use harsh or inconsistent discipline even when they recognize and feel guilty about its effects.”<sup>5</sup> The families served by Healthy Families Florida are at high risk of abuse and neglect and are the very families that are disproportionately affected in times of economic distress.
- Research and experience indicate that it can cost Florida taxpayers \$64,377 a year to care for an abused or neglected child.<sup>6</sup> This estimate is conservative and includes only costs for child welfare services, hospitalization, special education and juvenile justice. Healthy Families prevents child abuse and neglect for \$1,671 a year per child, saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

**For additional information about Healthy Families Florida, contact Carol McNally at [cmcnally@ounce.org](mailto:cmcnally@ounce.org) or (850) 488-1752 ext. 129.**

*Sponsored by the Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida and the Florida Department of Children and Families*

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<sup>5</sup> Adrian, V. and Coontz, S.( 2010). The Long-Range Impact of the Recession on Families: A Report Prepared for the 13th Annual Conference of the Council on Contemporary Families. Augustana College.

<sup>6</sup> This estimate is based on research and a methodology developed by Prevent Child Abuse America (2007) to determine a national cost associated with child maltreatment. The Ounce of Prevention Fund used Florida costs to estimate the cost of child maltreatment in Florida and adjusted all dollar amounts to 2008 values. For more detailed information, contact Dr. Terry Rhodes at (850) 921-446, ext. 138.