



## Funding History

Healthy Families Florida was created in 1998 under the leadership of President Toni Jennings and Speaker Daniel Webster in response to a string of horrific child deaths, increasing rates of child abuse and neglect and lack of a statewide effort to prevent child abuse and neglect before it happens. The program is funded by the Legislature through the Department of Children and Families, which partners with the Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida to administer the program. The Ounce of Prevention Fund contracts with 33 community-based organizations to deliver the services.

The initial \$10 million dollar investment to serve 26 counties in FY 1998-1999 showed significant results, so the investment in the program steadily increased to \$30 million dollars to serve all 67 counties. However, despite proven results, economic pressures resulted in a devastating 36% or \$10 million dollar cut during the 2010 Legislative session, which eliminated the program in 12 counties and forced drastic reductions in services in the remaining 55 counties. Twelve counties lost the program entirely. With state funding and local contributions, Healthy Families went from serving 12,099 high-risk parents and their 20,919 children in all 67 counties in FY 2009-2010 to a projected 8,130 high-risk parents and their 13,000+ children in 55 counties this year.

## Program Overview

Healthy Families Florida is a nationally accredited community-based home visiting program that contributes to the economic prosperity of this state by preventing child abuse and neglect, promoting healthy child development and improving family self-sufficiency. A rigorous five-year independent evaluation and follow-up study prove the program prevents child abuse and neglect. Healthy Families has consistently produced outstanding results since its inception since 1998. The most recent annual performance report shows:

- 98% of children in families served by Healthy Families are free from abuse and neglect
- 92% of children in Healthy Families are fully immunized by age 2, exceeding state and national outcomes
- 72% of Healthy Families participants who were unemployed at enrollment were employed when they left the program, empowering parents to accept personal responsibility for themselves and their children
- 99% of Healthy Families participants and their children were connected to a primary health care provider, reducing the use of emergency rooms for non-emergency care
- 93% of children received age appropriate developmental screenings at prescribed intervals which allows for early treatment and reduces the likelihood that more serious and costly problems will develop
- 98% of mothers in Healthy Families do not have a subsequent pregnancy within two years, reducing the likelihood of pregnancy-related complications and the likelihood of low-birth-weight and premature babies

**Healthy Families begins early, during pregnancy or shortly after the birth of a baby** – Ninety percent of brain development occurs in the first five years of life, the period when most abuse and neglect occurs. Research shows that the key to preventing child abuse and neglect is intervening early when parents are eager to learn and can gain the knowledge and skills they need to navigate the challenges of parenting right from the start, before negative patterns of behavior develop.

**High-risk parents voluntarily participate** – Parents volunteer for an assessment to determine if they are eligible to participate in Healthy Families. Eligible parents volunteer to participate in Healthy Families because, although they want to be good parents, they recognize that they don't have the basic knowledge and skills needed to handle the toughest job they will ever have. Participants share multiple factors that research indicates place their children at high-risk for abusive and neglectful behavior.

- 89% have incomes at 200% below poverty
- 84% are single parents
- 80% have limited awareness of positive discipline options
- 50% have no GED or high school diploma
- 46% experienced abuse as a child
- 46% have multiple children under the age of five
- 38% experience mental health problems
- 34% were raised by an alcoholic or drug-addicted parent
- 32% have prior Child Protective Service involvement

**Services are intensive** – Families receive weekly home visits that decrease in frequency and duration as families' progress toward providing a safe, healthy, stable environment for their children. During visits, family support workers:

- Educate parents on how to recognize and respond to their babies needs at every developmental stage
- Educate them on the importance of immunizations and well-child checks
- Serve as mentors and model positive parent child interaction that promotes bonding
- Teach parents positive discipline techniques, how to cope in healthy ways to the day-to-day stress of parenting and how to problem solve when crises arise
- Instill confidence and empower parents and caregivers to accept personal responsibility for themselves and their children by setting goals that lead to family self-sufficiency
- Help them recognize and address potential safety hazards in and around their homes
- Provide information on prevention topics including safe sleep to prevent infant suffocation and reduce the risk of SIDS, water safety to prevent drowning and ways to cope with crying to prevent shaken baby syndrome
- Connect them to community resources and a support network of family, friends, neighbors and faith-based organizations

## **Dollars and Sense**

**Healthy Families spares children from the trauma of abuse, saves lives and saves tax payer's dollars.** When a child is maltreated, the brain architecture is affected leading to learning and behavioral problems which impedes future success in school and life.

Research and experience indicate that it can cost Florida taxpayers \$64,377 a year to care for an abused or neglected child and the consequences of that trauma. This estimate is conservative and only includes costs for child welfare services, hospitalization, special education and juvenile justice. At a cost of only \$1,671 per child, Healthy Families Florida is a wise investment of the state's scarce resources and a critical upfront component of the Child Welfare system that keeps families from entering the costly deep end of the system.