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Public Policy Memo

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## Pre-Preschool Support

### Definition

With Washington State implementing a ten-year plan for universal preschool starting at age three, these services should eventually be extended to children as young as newborns.

### Facts

In the proposal for universal preschool<sup>1</sup>, researchers cite the benefits of preschool such as finer motor skills, higher cognitive and emotional development, and higher independence in children compared to their non-preschool counterparts. But further research<sup>2</sup> shows that earlier childcare is equally important. The first five years of life impact long-term social, cognitive, emotional, and physical development.<sup>3</sup> Currently, most estimates of health risks related to low-income childhoods are currently underestimated.<sup>4</sup>

The ten-year proposal also describes early childhood job opportunities, training, and subsidiaries for private preschools. With K-3 educators having higher turnover and less investment than K-12 educators, this plan will create more equitable pay between the two sectors as well as increase alternative pathways to credentialing than traditional school. A more robust K-3 teaching force will also unify state K-3 standards of education and health.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://edpolicy.umich.edu/sites/epi/files/2021-11/FINAL\\_Washington\\_Preschool\\_for\\_All\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_November\\_2021.pdf](https://edpolicy.umich.edu/sites/epi/files/2021-11/FINAL_Washington_Preschool_for_All_Policy_Brief_November_2021.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2941232/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/early-childhood-development-and-education>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5881401/>

## Recommendation

As the ten-year proposal is implemented, extending services to younger children will alleviate the financial burden on already low-income families. This leaves more resources to address low-income risk factors such as housing insecurity, affordable and nutritious food, and other resources required for a responsive home life. Earlier investment in childcare reduces the cost of adult healthcare.<sup>3</sup> In turn, this will also leave more resources for society to invest in other social services and infrastructure. In fact, these children are more likely to attend college as current childcare costs are comparable to in-state tuition.<sup>5</sup>

We will also be able to more accurately estimate the health risks we are currently underestimating. As universal childcare is implemented, researchers will be able to analyze and recommend more stage-appropriate childcare for infants, toddlers, and preschool children to reduce these health risks. This will return more than what is estimated for universal childcare investment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/childcare-cost-washington-average-more-expensive-uw-tuition/281-2ba2c06e-8f2b-448b-8314-bb014386d4dc>