

April 10, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Advancing Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health in 2023

Dear Governor Newsom:

The organizations listed below are writing to express our appreciation of the Administration's General Fund appropriation to improve the health and well-being of California's children and youth through the Children & Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI). We have been especially pleased to see the mental health needs of California's infants and toddlers prioritized within two of the Evidence-Based and Community Defined Practices (EBP/CDP) grant rounds for Parent and Caregiver Supports and Early Childhood Wraparound services.

### **Addressing ACEs Requires Prioritization of Resources**

While we applaud the movement toward greater mental health equity for young children in this workstream, we also want to continue to emphasize the ongoing and remaining unmet need to allocate additional dedicated funding to true upstream prevention and early intervention across the mental health system of care. We believe that **in order to meet the State's goal of reducing ACEs and toxic stress by half within one generation and to advance the Governor's commitment to improving the mental health of our state's children and youth, an additional one-time \$100 million General Fund appropriation to support infant and early childhood mental health services and provider training** would significantly move our state to greater mental health equity for California's infants and toddlers, especially those from communities of color that have been historically marginalized and hit hardest by the last three years.

As the state continues to move forward in historically transforming and expanding children's mental health services through the CYBHI and through the broader Master Plan for Children's Mental Health, it is imperative we place California's infant and early childhood mental health landscape in the forefront. Conditions created and exacerbated by the pandemic, such as poor and declining health, inequitable health care access, isolation, economic stress, and community and racial/ethnic trauma, are all proven to negatively impact a child's ability to thrive, especially in low-income and communities of color hit hardest by the pandemic.

### **California Must Fund Early Childhood Mental Health**

As the state's first Surgeon General, Nadine Burke-Harris, laid the groundwork for, it is especially critical to address trauma, mental, and behavioral health concerns in early childhood when 90% of a child's brain development occurs before age 5. Intervening early will allow us to interrupt these Adverse Childhood Experiences and provide children and families the support they need before they have the opportunity to calcify into Toxic Stress.

The State must include additional funding to support the social emotional health and resilience of children ages 0 to 5 with an upstream, multi-systems, whole-child, whole-family approach to child, family, and community-wellbeing. **While we applaud and thank DHCS specifically for its prioritization of early childhood programming within its own workstreams, we believe that an additional \$100 million investment dedicated exclusively to infants and toddlers is necessary to ensure our mental health system of care is prepared to meet the needs of all children and youth in California. We urge the Administration to consider including this investment in its May Revision to the proposed 2023-24 Budget.**

We look forward to working with you, the Legislature, partners and families across the state to ensure children - from birth to 26 - are prioritized. We thank you for your continued leadership and your dedication to supporting the mental health of all Californians.

