



Reflections on "State Leadership and Policy Action to Advance Early Relational Health" Report

In October 2023 Nurture Connection released the "[State Leadership and Policy Action to Advance Early Relational Health](#)" report. Based upon the review of state-level policy action and interviews with key state leaders, policy and systems developments in six states—New Jersey, Oregon, Washington, California, Michigan, and Vermont—this report advances policies and systemic changes that support Early Relational Health (ERH) and family well-being.

We also hosted a [January webinar](#) presenting the report, an overview of the [ERH policy agenda](#), and summary of recent state policy actions. The webinar also included a panel discussion on how ERH policy priorities fit with federal and state policy advocacy in the coming year, which featured panelists Elisabeth Wright Burak of Georgetown University, Karen Howard of Crossover Partners, Kay Johnson of Johnson Policy Consulting, Geoff Nagle of Tulane University, and David W. Willis of the Center for the Study of Social Policy and founder of Nurture Connection.

Below you will find further commentary on the "State Leadership" report's impact from three different perspectives within our national impact network.

Christine Cole, LICSW, IMH-E® - Infant-Early Childhood Mental Health Program Manager, Washington State Health Care Authority

I look forward to thinking about which aspects [of this report] align with our goals to support young children and their caregivers in my own work.

Resources like this are incredibly powerful tools for supporting policy and system partners in envisioning opportunities to take action to support ERH. Often it is difficult to know where to start or how to make a concept a reality. The examples of ways states have implemented policies to support the ERH goals provides a blueprint for areas to explore in one's own context and community. I look forward to thinking about which aspects align with our goals to support young children and their caregivers in my own work. The policy goals visual has already come up in spaces as an example for how to consider the relationships across the multifaceted, cross-sector system impacting families with young ones.

Cynthia Osborne - Executive Director, Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, Vanderbilt University

Shaping our systems to support early relational health will not only support families and communities, but will strengthen our institutions and systems as well.

This report is a useful guide to state advocates and policy leaders as they navigate how to ensure all children thrive from the start. The report extends beyond the evidence-based

policies of our Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap, and provides concrete strategies for states to really focus on enhancing ERH, which is the crux of healthy early development. The examples of states that are effectively implementing ERH principles and policies into their early childhood system of care are extremely helpful for state leaders to understand not only what is needed, but what is possible. Shaping our systems to support ERH will not only support families and communities, but will strengthen our institutions and systems as well.

Lisa Reynolds, MD - State Representative and Chair, Oregon House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services; Pediatrician

I'm grateful to Nurture Connection for their work on this report. As it demonstrates, Oregon is a national leader in Early Relational Health—but we still have so far to go.

The health and well-being of our youngest constituents and their parents are central to so much of what we do in state government. Having a solid foundation and investing in ERH sets up Oregon's kids for a bright future and reduces child welfare involvement, emergency room visits, and future justice system, health, and human services expenditures. Focusing our attention upstream pays huge dividends downstream.

I'm grateful to Nurture Connection for their work on this report. As it demonstrates, Oregon is a national leader in ERH—but we still have so far to go. In 2023, we passed Oregon's first-ever Child Tax Credit, our Paid Family and Medical Leave Act went into effect, and our new state agency, the Department of Early Learning and Care, came online—but work remains to change the culture and address systemic inequities. We need to ensure that programs approved by the legislature, like medicaid coverage for doulas and universal home visiting, are being implemented effectively. We need to stop treating babies and new parents as an afterthought in the state budget process, and start centering our policies and fiscal decisions around them.

Parent Perspective



Question: Why are you involved in the Family Network Collaborative?

Tish MacInnis - Strengthening Families and Parent Leader in Southern Families, Alabama: "I feel whatever I can do to help accomplish a good relationship with their children is the most important work I do. I had a great relationship with my parents and want the same for all Alabama children."

To learn more about the Family Network Collaborative at Nurture Connection, visit our website [here](#).

Explore More



What is Early Relational Health?

[Early Relational Health](#) is



Putting the Needs of the Next Generation Front and Center

In [David Willis' blog for Nurture Connection](#), he explores how ERH can bolster a pro-child/pro-family agenda at the local, state, and national level in response to New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof's opinion piece, "We Americans Neglect Our Children."

Read Here



ERH in Action with the Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries: The Best-Kept Secret There Is for Early Relational Health

This [blog on Pediatrics Supporting Parents \(PSP\) in Durham, North Carolina](#) is part of Nurture Connection's "ERH in Action" series of listening and learning sessions designed to highlight and uplift bright spots in the movement. Discover the transformative work of the Durham Collaborative Network for ERH which utilizes well-child visits as an opportunity for healthcare professionals and parents to work together to support a child's social and emotional well-being.

Read Here

the state of emotional well-being that grows from emotional connection between babies and toddlers and their parents and caregivers when they experience strong, positive, and nurturing relationships with each other.

ERH is foundational to children's healthy growth and development and parents' and caregivers' sense of competence, connection, and overall well-being. These strong and enduring relationships also help to protect the family from the harmful effects of stress.

Core ERH Resources

Frameworks Institute. [Building Relationships: Framing Early Relational Health](#). Prepared in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Social Policy. May 2020.

Willis D, Chavez S, Lee J, Hampton P, Fine A. [Early Relational Health National Survey: What We're Learning from the Field](#). Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2020.

Willis D, Sege R, Johnson K. [Changing the Mindset: Foundational Relationships Counter Adversity with HOPE](#). (Blog) Center for the Study of Social Policy. May 2020.

Perspectives on ERH Video Series. [Perspectives on Early Relational Health Series](#). Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2022.

Center of the Study of Social Policy and Health+ Studio. [How to Communicate Effectively About Early Relational Health: What It Is and Why It Matters](#). 2022.

Find additional resources on our [website](#).



Putting Principles into Action: Building an Early Relational Health Ecosystem

Strengthening Families Networking Webinar
March 14, 2024



Strengthening Families Webinar: Building an Early Relational Health Ecosystem

Learn how your practice with children and families can contribute to building an ERH ecosystem in your community in the March [Strengthening Families webinar](#). Speakers Charlyn Harper Browne, Junlei Li, Cailin O'Connor, Jenna Russo, and David Willis highlight principles from our "[ERH Ecosystem](#)" report and how you can apply them in your work.

[Watch the Recording](#)

What We're Reading

- Nehls, S., et al. (February 2024). Time-sensitive changes in the maternal brain and their influence on mother-child attachment. *Translational Psychiatry*. [Read here.](#)
- E. Hutchful. Culture is Healing: Removing barriers facing providers of culturally responsive services. *Center for the Study of Social Policy* (2024). [Read here.](#)
- Paternina-Die, M., et al. (January 2024), Women's neuroplasticity during gestation, childbirth and postpartum. *Nature Neuroscience*. [Read here.](#)
- **If your organization is interested in taking part in the second cohort of RAPID Community Voices Survey Project, please respond to the instructions [outlined here](#) by April 19th at 5 pm PT / 8 pm ET.**

If this newsletter was forwarded to you by a colleague and you would like to subscribe, click [here](#).

Contact

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[The Center for the Study of Social Policy \(CSSP\)](#), which conceived Nurture Connection, is a national, non-profit policy organization that connects community action, public system reform, and policy change to create a fair and just society in which all children and families thrive. We work to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children and families thrive. To do this, we translate ideas into action, promote public policies grounded in equity, support strong and inclusive communities, and advocate with and for all children and families marginalized by public policies and institutional practices.



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