



# 4 COUNTIES FOR KIDS

Early Childhood Iowa Area

## Early Childhood Iowa Area Comprehensive Community Plan February 2024

Board Approval \_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_



# Foreword

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**The first two thousand days make up the most critical stage of the human lifecycle.** These first five years will impact a child’s chances for success for the rest of their lives. Early Childhood Iowa is a statewide initiative housed within the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, uniting public and private agencies, organizations, and stakeholders under one common vision:

*“Every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.”<sup>1</sup>*

A community plan is required by Iowa Law to be completed by local Early Childhood Iowa Areas. The purpose of the plan is to serve as a “roadmap” for the Early Childhood Area Board in their decision making and endeavor to improve the well-being of children prenatal through five years of age and their families. The **4 Counties For Kids (4CFK)** Comprehensive Community Plan is a document of the 4 Counties For Kids Board. This plan covers Appanoose, Davis, Lucas, and Monroe Counties, in South Central Iowa.

This plan and related documents will be hosted at [4cfk.weebly.com](http://4cfk.weebly.com) or can be obtained by contacting:

**4 Counties For Kids**

Gaylyn Mercer, ECI Area Director  
221 S. Clinton St, Albia, IA 52531  
303-518-5707

This Community Plan is implemented through the collaborative work of programs, agencies and organizations serving children and families in the region. The following organizations are part of our local system, have provided input into the planning process, and/or support the on-going work to meet the goals of this plan.

- American Home Finding Association
- Appanoose County Auditor
- Child Care Resource & Referral of Central Iowa, Orchard Place
- Circle of Security International
- Davis County Public Schools
- Head Start
- Kid’s World Daycare & Preschool
- MATURA Action Corporation
- Monroe County Public Health
- Parents as Teachers
- SIEDA Community Action
- South Central Iowa Community Action Program

<sup>1</sup> Early Childhood Iowa | Health & Human Services

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## SECTION I. Introduction and Overview

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### ➤ Overview of Early Childhood Iowa

Iowa's Community Empowerment was established during the 1998 Legislative session to create a partnership between communities and State government with an emphasis to improve the well-being of families with young children. Within local empowerment areas, local citizens can lead collaborative efforts involving education, health, and human service programs.

The 2010 legislative session brought about some changes in Iowa's early childhood structure. Prior to this legislative session, Iowa's youngest children were supported through a partnership between Community Empowerment and the Early Childhood Iowa Stakeholder's Council (ECI). Both groups had served as leading advocates for young children and their families for several years.

To work toward a common vision of a comprehensive early care, health, and education system, the Iowa Legislature established Senate File 2088, calling for a merger of Community Empowerment and Early Childhood Iowa into one inclusive structure. These efforts led to the **name change from Community Empowerment to Early Childhood Iowa (ECI)**.

The statewide system consists of three parts: state board, state advisory structure, and the local structure. All three entities are committed to achieving these results:

- Healthy Children
- Ready to Succeed in School
- Safe and Nurturing Families
- Safe and Supportive Communities
- Secure and Nurturing Early Learning Environments

The Early Childhood Iowa legislation established two specific funding programs: **School Ready** and **Early Childhood**. School Ready Grants provide comprehensive services for children prenatal through age five, including preschool services and childcare services, family support and other services. Early Childhood Grants enhance the quality and capacities of childcare services.



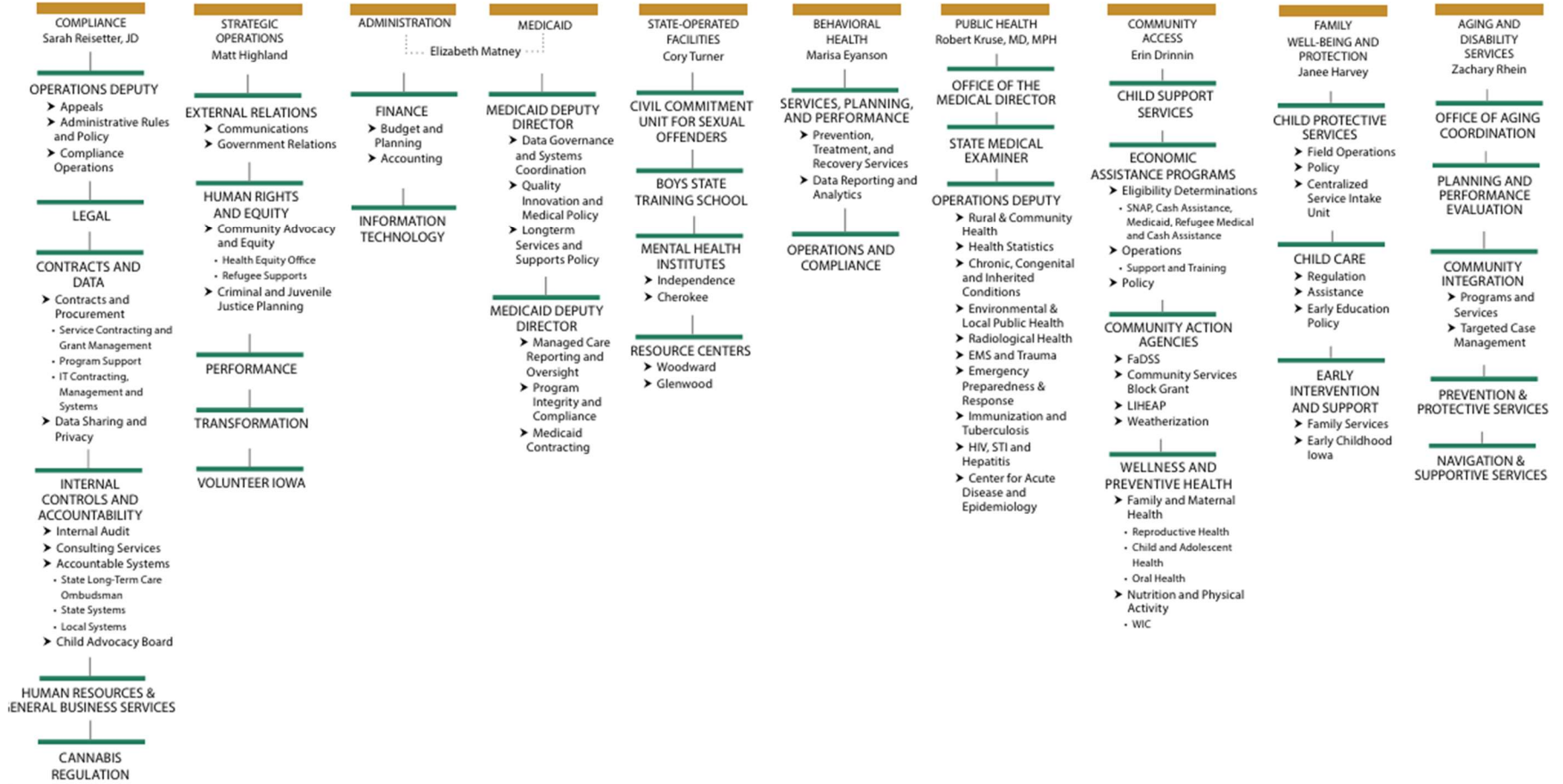
# HHS Table of Organization

Iowa Department of Health and Human Services

Council on Health and Human Services

Sarah Ekstrand  
Chief of Staff

Kelly Garcia  
Director

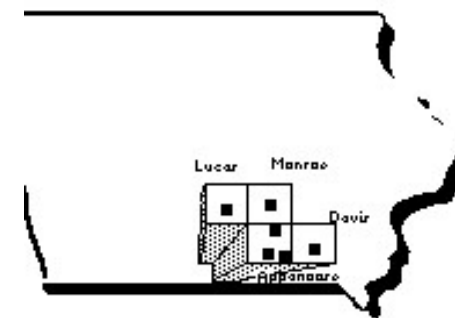


**The Early Childhood Iowa State Board** provides oversight of the 38 ECI Area Boards that cover all of Iowa's 99 counties. The ECI State Board includes citizen members appointed by the Governor, the agency directors of the Departments of Education, Economic Development Authority, Human Rights, Health and Human Services, and Workforce Development, and ex-officio legislators.

**The 38 ECI Area boards** are charged to reach the desired quality of life for young children and their families at a local level. These local boards consist of citizens, elected officials, and representatives of education, health, human services, faith, business, and consumers, and work together with other early childhood partners, including program and service providers and other early childhood funders.

### ➤ Identification of the Early Childhood Iowa Area

The **4 Counties For Kids** Early Childhood Iowa Area encompasses all of **Appanoose County, Davis County, Lucas County** and **Monroe County**. Headquartered within the borders of those four counties are six school districts: Centerville Community Schools, Moravia Community Schools and Moulton-Udell Community Schools in Appanoose County, Davis County Schools in Davis County, Chariton Schools in Lucas County and Albia Community Schools in Monroe County.



**4 Counties For Kids** Early Childhood Iowa Area Board of Directors is concerned that all children and families receive the services they need. It is recognized that programs funded by the Board may serve children and families that do not reside in the four-county area. The possibilities of this occurring are most prevalent in preschool and childcare programs and services. By working directly with the preschool programs and childcare facilities, the Board is ensuring that the services provided by those programs and facilities are available to all of the children and families they serve.

**The Board has chosen not to place residence restrictions on these types of services.** Similar policies are in effect for all programs and services where the absence of such restrictions is feasible. The only exception currently is the Family Support Home Visitation programs, which may serve families across county lines within the ECI Area, but typically would not serve families residing outside the ECI Area boundaries. These families are referred to appropriate programs and services provided by the ECI Area in which they reside.

## Vision Statement for 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area

*Every child in 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area  
will be healthy and reach their full potential.*

The vision statement was originally developed in 2008. The **4 Counties For Kids** Early Childhood Iowa Area Board of Directors, with input from a variety of Community Partners, searched for a statement that reflected their collective dream for all children. In 2008 the vision was that children would “be successful”. During the in-depth review of this Community Plan during 2011 and 2012, and again in 2019, the vision was examined word by word and phrase by phrase.

It was decided that helping children “reach their full potential” more accurately stated the Communities’ dream for its children. The Board and all of its Community Partners are dedicated to striving to ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach the highest limits of their own abilities. In order for a child to take advantage of those opportunities and realize their full potential it continues to be imperative that a child be healthy in all aspects.

## Mission Statement for 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area

*In order to provide opportunities for every child  
to be healthy and reach their full potential,  
4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area  
provides collaborative planning, development and financial support  
for programs and services benefiting children prenatal to age 5 and their families.*

➤ Demographic Profile of 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area

**4 Counties For Kids** Early Childhood Iowa Area is comprised of Appanoose County, Davis County, Lucas County and Monroe County, four rural counties in south central Iowa. According to Iowa’s 2022 State Health Assessment, which recognizes that **health equity is crucial to a vibrant state**, many communities and specific groups have experienced generations of isolation from opportunity. The data indicates many disparities across population-specific groups, in particular for people of color, people with disabilities, people who identify as LGBT, **and people who live in rural areas**. The entire 4CFK demographic falls into the latter group – while individual families and children may also be affected by additional factors resulting in disparity of service, opportunity, or care. Much of the cause can be attributed to unequal treatment, inequitable systems, and inadequate community and economic development.<sup>1</sup>

**Children in poverty are the most at risk.** Their opportunities to develop to their full potential are severely limited by their economic situation. **4 Counties For Kids** ECI Area Board recognizes poverty and its effects as major risk factors for children in the area. It therefore makes sense that those families and children should be the **target population for programs and services**.

POPULATION PROFILE <sup>2</sup>		Appanoose County	Davis County	Lucas County	Monroe County	ECI Area TOTAL
Total Population	2022	12094	9130	8689	7550	37463
	2017*	12352	8966	8534	7845	37697
Population 19 and under	2022	2946	2891	2116	1467	9420
	2017*	3011	2765	2172	2098	10046
Number of children age 0-4	2022	600	814	516	458	2388
	2017*	747	747	477	480	2451
Total Households		5,028	3,172	3,621	3,032	14,853
Percent of Children age 0-4		5.1 %	8.4 %	6.2 %	5.9 %	
Percent of Population age 65 and over		24.2 %	18.6 %	22.3 %	20.3 %	
Percent of White non-Hispanic		93.9 %	96.1 %	94.8 %	94.6 %	

\* 4 Counties For Kids Community Plan, 2019



<b>ECONOMIC PROFILE</b> <sup>3,4</sup>	<b>Appanoose County</b>	<b>Davis County</b>	<b>Lucas County</b>	<b>Monroe County</b>	<b>State of Iowa</b>
Median Household Income*	\$50,684	\$57,176	\$63,405	\$69,929	\$70,571
Median Gross Rent	\$757	\$835	\$773	\$723	\$914
Median Value of Owner-occupied Housing	\$113,900	\$140,300	\$111,000	\$128,000	\$181,600
Unemployment Rate <sup>2</sup>	3.2 %	2.2 %	1.8 %	2.6 %	2.7 %
Children living under the poverty level	19.7 %	17.2 %	21.4 %	15.1 %	14.2 %
Wage needed: Single parent /1 child under 6	\$19.41	\$16.62	\$19.18	\$17.95	\$21.16
Wage needed: Two parents /2 children under 6	\$14.84	\$14.39	\$15.18	\$14.83	\$16.11
Families with all parents working & children under 6	63 %	52 %	71 %	78 %	76 %
Children on Child Care Assistance or CCA Plus	65	20	17	34	
Annual cost of infant care	\$9,750	\$7,800	\$9,620	\$8,320	\$11,129

\*Data from US Census Bureau and County Public Health Assessments is significantly different. County data is used for Davis and Monroe.

<b>EDUCATION &amp; HEALTH PROFILE</b> <sup>3,5,6</sup>	<b>Appanoose County</b>	<b>Davis County</b>	<b>Lucas County</b>	<b>Monroe County</b>	<b>State of Iowa</b>
% of Births with No or Inadequate Pre-natal Care	21 %	38 %	30 %	12 %	16 %
% of Low-weight Births	4.7 %	5.3 %	8.1 %	8.6 %	6.8 %
% of Births to Mother >19 yrs w/o high school degree	18 %	54 %	14 %	9 %	9 %
% of Births to Mother 15-50 yrs with Bachelor's degree	11 %	29 %	15 %	45 %	25 %
Number of children who were victims of founded or confirmed child abuse or neglect	2017 *	90	18	25	15
	2022	47	13	26	24
Percent of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in preschool	37 %	64 %	60 %	39 %	46 %
% of Kindergartners meeting Fall Benchmark for literacy	69 %	69 %	49 %	59 %	67 %

\* 4 Counties For Kids Community Plan, 2019

## ➤ Use of the Community Plan

The Community Plan is intended as a blueprint for the design and implementation of programs and services to meet the needs of ECI Area families and children. **Resources are very limited in the four-county area**, which means that the Board must be purposeful in the use of available resources in the Area. When necessary, the Board may reach out to agencies outside the area to provide for the needed programs and services. Sharing the Community Plan is an effective way to communicate those needs.

The Board reviews its annual report program performance data and outcomes with provider agencies using the Community Plan as a guide. The dynamics in the four rural counties changes very slowly, but the Community Plan is viewed, as outlined in Tool NN, Early Childhood Area community plan template, **“as a living, breathing document that guides the work of the local Early Childhood Iowa Area (ECIA) board and community.”**

The Board uses the Community Plan to develop the Request for Application opportunities, which requires applicants to identify the priorities and the indicators their program will address. The Board also uses the plan to gauge the progress of funded programs.

As of 2020, nearly 1 in 4 of all Iowans were under age 18. Approximately one-third of those children are in the 0-5 population. It is this vulnerable group of young Iowans that our Community Plan addresses, using a rich array of data assessments and community input regarding the characteristics, challenges, and strategies for improving the health and well-being of this population.

As **4 Counties For Kids** Early Childhood Iowa Area is a publicly funded organization, all documents and files are available for viewing or distribution to the public. The Board’s Community Plan is no exception. Copies of the Community Plan are distributed to partners, and as with all documents, the public may request a copy of the Community Plan by contacting the ECI Area Director or by visiting the 4CFK website.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

<sup>2</sup> State Library of Iowa Data Center <http://www.iowadatacenter.org/>

<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau, 2018-2022 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>

<sup>4</sup> Common Good Iowa <https://www.commongoodiowa.org/>

<sup>5</sup> I2D2 Data Drive. [https://i2d2.shinyapps.io/I2D2\\_Dashboard/](https://i2d2.shinyapps.io/I2D2_Dashboard/)

<sup>6</sup> Iowa Department of Health & Human Services <http://hhs.iowa.gov/programs/CPS//child-abuse-statistics>

## SECTION II. Community Needs Assessment

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### ➤ Development of the Community Needs Assessment

#### SOURCES & PROCESS

The Community Plan was developed using a mixed assessment process that included reviewing **state and national databases** focused on families, education & health, as well the most recent **local assessments and completed plans from supporting organizations**. County Public Health agencies complete a Community Health Needs Assessment – Health Improvement Plan (CHNA-HIP) every 5 years. Other community partners also gather data using stakeholder meetings and surveys, to ensure broad community input.

Common themes and priorities were identified and used in conjunction with additional data to determine needs for young children and families in the region. The information and data presented in this plan is reviewed by the **4 Counties For Kids** ECI Area Board members and stakeholders as a basis for approving the 4 Counties For Kids community goals.

The following assessments, reports, and plans were primary data and indicator sources for the review and analysis process.

- Early Childhood Iowa Statewide Needs Assessment 2019
- We are ECI: Strategic Plan 2023-2026
- I2D2 – Iowa’s Integrated Data System for Decision-Making
- Community Health Needs Assessment & Health Improvement Plan: Appanoose County, 2022
- Community Health Needs Assessment & Health Improvement Plan: Davis County, 2021
- Community Health Needs Assessment & Health Improvement Plan: Lucas County, 2023
- Community Health Needs Assessment & Health Improvement Plan: Monroe County, 2023
- Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral FY23 Annual Report and County Data Sheets
- Common Good Iowa | The Annie E. Casey Foundation – Kids COUNT Data Center

## ❖ Early Childhood Iowa Statewide Needs Assessment

Data collection for the 2019 Needs Assessment included administrative data from health, education, and child welfare; family and provider surveys to gather statewide perspectives on access and barriers to care; family and provider focus groups to understand voices of our community and the systemic strengths and disconnects that need to be addressed; and statewide community listening sessions.

## ❖ We Are ECI: Strategic Plan

We Are ECI conducts a frequent assessment of strengths, needs, and outcomes, and uses those results to plan and implement services and systems that respond to Iowa's diverse population. Embracing on-going statewide feedback informs strategic planning.

## ❖ I2D2 – Early Childhood Iowa's Data Collection and Reporting Tool

Created in response to the ECI Statewide Needs Assessment and Strategic Planning in 2019, the **IA Data Drive is an interactive data dashboard** allowing users to view commonly used indicators to monitor progress across the five legislature-mandated results areas. The Annual Report tool summarizes data based on ECI local area or counties, with data collected annually. Each report details and visualizes area trend charts and data tables, with accurate descriptions of the indicators and data source summaries.

## ❖ Community Health Assessment (CHA) & Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)

CHA CHIP has more than a 30-year history in Iowa. At least every five years, local public health undertakes a community-wide process to identify the most important factors affecting health in the community and to plan strategies to build on strengths and work on gaps.

## ❖ Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral

Iowa CCR&R's roots go back to 1989, when 60% of working women were mothers to infants or toddlers. Iowa saw the need for an agency dedicated to addressing the needs of children in care. CCR&R collects and updates data on child care programs throughout the year.

## ❖ Common Good Iowa

Common Good Iowa is Iowa's grantee for the KIDS COUNT® initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT provides legislators, public officials and child advocates with reliable data, policy recommendations and tools to advance policies that benefit children.

# COMMUNITY HEALTH SNAPSHOT

The Community Health Snapshot summarizes data from the Community Health Needs Assessment conducted by each county Public Health Department between 2021-2023, as well as county and statewide data from community partners.

**Public Health** - The following snapshot is the summary of each county’s priorities as set forth in the Public Health improvement plans. Data source: <https://hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/lphs/cha-chip/assessments-and-plans/assessments-plans>.

COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH NEEDS – Ranked			
Appanoose County 2023	Davis County 2022	Lucas County 2023	Monroe County 2023
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Mental Health Care</b> (<i>diagnosis, treatment, aftercare, providers</i>)</li> <li>2. Substance Abuse</li> <li>3. Healthcare Staffing</li> <li>4. Poverty</li> <li>5. Obesity (Nutrition/Exercise)</li> <li>6. Awareness of Healthcare Services</li> <li>7. Vaccine Rates</li> <li>8. Family Planning</li> <li>9. Health Apathy</li> <li>10. Chronic Diseases</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Child Care Options</b></li> <li>2. Aging Support</li> <li>3. Substance Abuse</li> <li>4. Mental Health Care</li> <li>5. Obesity (Nutrition/Exercise)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Mental Health Care</b></li> <li>2. Insurance Gaps</li> <li>3. Transportation</li> <li>4. Skin Cancer</li> <li>5. Blood Pressure</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Obesity</b></li> <li>2. Mental Health Care</li> <li>3. Substance Abuse</li> <li>4. Reproductive Health</li> </ol>

**COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH  
GOALS**

Appanoose County 2023	Davis County 2022	Lucas County 2023	Monroe County 2023
<p>Continue mental health coalition meetings, increase access to mental health services. On-site mental health evaluations at ER.</p> <p>Increase community knowledge about substance abuse resources. Promote Safe Disposal of Medications.</p> <p>Distribute Iowa Medicaid and health insurance applications.</p> <p>Improve Housing and Safe Rental Accommodations. Connect residents with transportation.</p> <p>Promote the Iowa Youth Survey. Expand trail system. Work with AHFA on a resource guide.</p> <p>Address vaccine misinformation.</p> <p>Refer residents to family planning services. Offer free condoms. Encourage Annual Physicals. Promote local health classes.</p>	<p>The hospital needs community support to fund child care initiatives.</p> <p>Educate community members on Aging resources available. Keep Community Resource Guide current.</p> <p>Awareness of weekly AA meetings.</p> <p>Continue outpatient mental health program, and expand as able. Ensure providers are up-to-date on current resources. Assist with promotion.</p> <p>Expand local facilities hours. Offer monthly resources on dieting / support groups. Promote trail system. Promote diabetes prevention through diet, exercise and awareness as well as screenings.</p>	<p>Host 3 community education events each year focused on mental health.</p> <p>Decrease Lucas County's uninsured rate to 5% or below.</p> <p>Provide services to 100 individuals each year through free ride days and/or voucher program.</p> <p>Reduce skin cancer prevalence by 1% in male population.</p> <p>Reduce high blood pressure beneficiaries rate by 5% overall.</p>	<p>The obesity rate for Monroe County will be trending down from the current 38% adult rate by FY 2027.</p> <p>To decrease the stigma of mental health and substance use/abuse disorders and to increase the awareness of available supports and resources.</p> <p>STD/STI rates will be trending down along with teenage pregnancy rates by FY2027.</p>

**Child Care** - The following snapshot is the summary of the most current Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral county data sheets.

Data source: <https://iowaccrr.org/data/> and <https://stage.worklivesystems.com/iowa>

CHILD CARE RESOURCE & REFERRAL COUNTY DATA										
	Appanoose County		Davis County		Lucas County		Monroe County		4CFK Area	
	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019
Total Programs Listed with CCR&R	9	20	5	7	9	9	12	21	35	57
Loss of # Programs Listed 2019 to 2024	-11		-2		0		-9		-22	
Registered Child Development Homes	4	10	1	2	3	4	6	13	14	31
Child Care Homes	0	4	0	0	3	2	1	3	4	9
DOE Operated Preschools	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	6
HHS Licensed Center / Preschool	4	2	3	2	2	1	4	1	13	6
Spaces Listed with CCR&R	324	412	233	248	311	275	322	404	1190	1339
% Change in Spaces 2019 to 2024	-21 %		-.06 %		+13 %		-20 %		-11 %	
Registered Child Development Homes	48	112	12	24	36	48	68	136	164	320
Child Care Homes	0	40	0	0	18	10	6	15	24	65
DOE Operated Preschools	40	52	15	15	80	40	80	80	215	187
HHS Licensed Center / Preschool	236	168	206	173	177	42	168	40	787	423
% Income needed for Registered Home	11 %		9 %		9 %		9 %			Ideal income target 7 %
% Income needed for Licensed Center	19 %		9 %		14 %		12 %			
# of Families Referred by CCR&R	0		0		0		1		1	

**Dental Care** - The following snapshot is from the Iowa Department of Public Health Audit – State Summary.

Data source: <https://iowaccrr.org/data/> and <https://hhs.iowa.gov/media/7983/download?inline=>

COUNTY DENTAL SCREENINGS 2021-22 SCHOOL YEAR						
		Appanoose County	Davis County	Lucas County	Monroe County	4CFK Area
Valid Screening Certificates		186	175	106	172	639
No Obvious Problems		149	131	84	144	508
Needing Dental Care – Number		37	44	22	28	131
Percentage needing care	2023	20 %	25 %	21 %	16 %	21 %
	2019 *	13 %	13 %	10 %	6 %	11 %

\* 4 Counties For Kids Community Plan, 2019



**Community Survey** - The following snapshot is from the 4 Counties For Kids needs assessment survey conducted in 2017.

Data source: 4 Counties For Kids Community Plan, 2019

Several years ago, **4 Counties For Kids** Early Childhood Iowa Board of Directors reached out to the community in order to get a view of child development needs in the 4-county area from the community’s perspective. The Board developed and administered the survey, which is included below to add a longer view to the community needs picture, and to confirm how little has changed with respect to those needs.

4CFK NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY * – 2017 LIMITED RESPONSE	
UNMET NEEDS	
Parent & Caregiver	All Respondents
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access to <a href="#">quality child care</a> in the evening and weekend</li> <li>2. Behavior/<a href="#">mental health services</a> for young children</li> <li>3. Finding <a href="#">parent support</a> groups or activities</li> <li>4. Access to <a href="#">affordable child care</a></li> <li>5. Access to <a href="#">health insurance</a> for parents</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Behavior/<a href="#">mental health services</a> for young children</li> <li>2. Improving <a href="#">parenting skills</a></li> <li>3. Access to quality <a href="#">child care in the evening</a> and weekend</li> <li>4. Access to <a href="#">affordable child care</a></li> <li>5. Access to quality <a href="#">home-based child care</a></li> </ol>
COMMUNITY STRENGTHS	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access to basic medical services for children</li> <li>2. Access to quality preschools</li> <li>3. Access to home visiting programs for parenting support</li> <li>4. Access to prenatal care</li> <li>5. Access to health insurance for children</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access to quality preschools</li> <li>2. Access to basic medical services for children</li> <li>3. Access to affordable preschool</li> <li>4. Access to home visiting programs for parenting support</li> <li>5. Help with food (food pantries, meal sites, food vouchers)</li> </ol>

\* 4 Counties For Kids Community Plan, 2019

➤ **Analysis of the Needs Assessment Data Collected**

In the analysis of the preceding data snapshots across Appanoose, Davis, Lucas and Monroe counties, a picture emerged highlighting the primary early childhood needs and the commonalities across counties and respondents. These needs were then categorized based on their relevance to the five Early Childhood Iowa priorities.

The following table depicts the greatest needs identified and where they fit in the ECI Result Areas. Many of these needs relate to more than one area, and are shown in multiple columns. The needs *most closely associated* with the ECI Result Area (always debatable) **are bolded**.

PRIMARY NEEDS, categorized by EARLY CHILDHOOD IOWA – 5 RESULT AREAS				
Healthy Children	Ready to Succeed in School	Safe and Nurturing Families	Safe and Supportive Communities	Secure and Nurturing Early Learning Environments
Mental health <b>Substance Abuse</b> Healthcare Staffing Obesity <b>Awareness of Healthcare Services</b> <b>Vaccine Rates</b> <b>Reproductive Health</b> Dental Care	<b>Poverty</b> <b>Obesity</b> Child Care Options Reproductive Health	<b>Mental health</b> Substance Abuse Poverty Awareness Family Planning Reproductive Health	Substance Abuse <b>Healthcare Staffing</b> Awareness Vaccine <b>Family Planning</b> Child Care Transportation Reproductive Health	Poverty <b>Child Care Options</b> <b>Transportation</b>

As is the story with many small rural counties throughout the state, the overarching challenge in the 4-county area is the lack of local resources to support an abundance of local needs. These resources may include everything from jobs, to health care, to educational opportunities. The preceding snapshots show a realistic but grim picture of communities searching for multiple avenues of family support and struggling to find them, or afford them. Notably, **mental health care appeared on every county's top concerns.**

In the following sections, several key early childhood needs are summarized further.

### ❖ Mental and Physical Health Care

All four county public health agencies saw a need for improving overall access to health care and especially mental health services. This is in agreement expressed by the respondents of the ECI Area survey. Every age group has health and social needs that are unique to them. For example, strategies that focus on increasing breastfeeding rates, promoting vaccinations and developmental screenings, and encouraging safe sleep practices are key to improving infants' health. Children and adolescents who get stable and supportive care, screenings, early education, and who practice healthy behaviors are more likely to stay healthy and prevent many long-term problems.

Although not mentioned in any assessments, dental decay is the most common chronic illness among children and can cause difficulty learning, speaking and eating. Iowa Department of Public Health accumulates data concerning numbers of children entering kindergarten with valid health screenings. In the 2021-2022 school year 639 of those children had valid health screenings. Although it is unknown what percentage of the kindergarten classes that represents, we can find that 21% of those children need some dental care; percentages per county going as high as 25%.

### ❖ Substance Abuse

The intersection of **adult substance abuse** with the health, safety, and school-readiness of young children happens in both direct and indirect ways. Mothers using drugs put their babies' health at risk during pregnancy. After birth, either parent's substance abuse, whether drugs, alcohol or another form, impairs that parent's judgement, reactions, and ability to provide and interact with their child(ren) in a safe, predictable and caring manner. Substance abuse can lead to physical abuse.

## ❖ Poverty

Poverty and the effects of poverty have been **major challenges for the citizens of the four-county area for many years**. Current unemployment rates should indicate that poverty in this area is no more of a problem than elsewhere in the state. The unemployment rate, depressed wages, and low educational attainments in the four-county area make it difficult for families to climb out of the low-income bracket.

The latest Percentage of Children in Poverty appears to tell a poverty story that remains grim for children in the area. The average rate of Children in Poverty in the 4 Counties For Kids ECI Area as high as 21% versus the Iowa average of 14%. Although Monroe County shows the lowest child poverty rate @ 15%, the overall numbers indicate that the opportunities for economic success may not be very equitably spread across the state.

Social services professionals frequently point to poverty as a contributing factor in the abuse and neglect of children. The latest data showing the number of children involved in a founded or confirmed case do not appear on the surface to be large. However, the fact that 148 children in the 4-county area were found to be in danger because of the actions of their adult care-takers is very troubling.

Unfortunately, children in the 4-county community may be adversely affected by where they live. The four rural counties are considerable distance from a metropolitan area, which affects availability of a number of resources. Making services more easily accessible to families in the area involves considerable monetary cost either to the service provider agencies or to the family needing services. The Board will continue to assess if there are sufficient financial resources for it to build any effective additional collaborations in the future.

## ❖ Parenting

Success in parenting requires considerable maturity on the part of the parent that allows them to deal with the multitude of challenges they encounter in their family life. When children who are themselves still growing emotionally and physically suddenly become parents and face the responsibility of another completely dependent life, the results can be disastrous. The continual **high Rates of Teen Births** (mothers under the age of 20) in all of the counties can provide us with an indicator of the need for a variety of supports to help avoid those disasters. Supports to help that teenager grow in their own maturity and in their knowledge of the development of their child are particularly important.

The fact is, however, that those same supports can be of tremendous value to parents of all ages. Having some idea of what to expect and how to deal with the changes in a developing infant or toddler will make the “job” of parenting much easier and a great deal more successful.

## ❖ Child Care Options

Data available to the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area Board of Directors shows that as many children under age 6 in the 4-county area need some kind of regular child care. In the last four years measured, the 4-county region saw a dramatic **drop of nearly 40%** in the number of child care programs available. The loss of these agencies is likely pandemic-related, when people were not going to work and many businesses closed. While the total number of programs and spaces available in **Registered Child Development Homes has dropped significantly**, the four counties overall have seen a **rise in the number of DOE and HHS licensed preschools** and spaces. However, affordability of services, and transportation to the facilities, remains a frequent obstacle, and is one that the Board strives to relieve with properly-directed awards.

Parents are expressing a need for such quality child care that is available when they need it. Many of the jobs available in the area involve irregular and late-night hours. To support children in their early development, providing the highest quality child care and preschool experiences possible will prove very beneficial to children, families and the community. Non-standard hours for child care is a need expressed in other ECI Areas.

## ➤ Priorities of the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Board of Directors

As a result of steady and continued data-gathering, review, and input from local partners and early childhood service providers through the last four years, the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area Board **three (3) priority areas remain relevant and unchanged**. These three priority areas are actually a blending of four of the State Early Childhood Iowa result areas.

❖ *Children Ready for School*

❖ *Healthy, Secure and Nurturing Families*

❖ *Secure and Nurturing Early Learning Environments*






Priority	Rationale for Identification or Deletion of Priority
<i>Children Ready for School</i>	<p>The following statements convey the Board of Directors’ sense of the meaning of “<b>Children Ready for School</b>”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children will be healthy and well adjusted.</li> <li>• All children will have access to quality, healthy, developmentally appropriate preschool.</li> </ul> <p>The 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area Board of Directors Members vision states in part that “Every child...will...reach their full potential.” Reaching their full potential begins with the child doing as well as they are capable of doing in school. Kindergarten assessment data and community assessment data indicate that there is good availability of preschool opportunities in the area including those opportunities provided by the Board.</p> <p>Supporting parents in the task of preparing their children for school is an important community undertaking. This support cuts across the entire scope of services that the ECIA Board considers, including providing Scholarships and Transportation.</p> <p>The principal question to be answered when considering programs and services is “<b>How will this benefit children?</b>”.</p>

Priority	Rationale for Identification or Deletion of Priority
<p><i>Healthy, Secure and Nurturing Families</i></p>	<p>The following statements convey the Board of Directors’ sense of the meaning of “<b>Healthy, Secure and Nurturing Families</b>”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting practices in families will prepare children to be successful in their communities.</li> <li>• Increased health status of Children 0-5 (Emotional, Social, Physical and Intellectual)</li> <li>• Children will be safe at home.</li> <li>• Families will be able to support the development of children.</li> <li>• Children will receive appropriate health care at all stages of their life.</li> </ul> <p>A preponderance of the social and economic data available for the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Area Board of Directors review indicates that there are <b>numerous challenges facing area families</b>. Some of these challenges are beyond the scope of services that the Board can provide. The location and the rural character of the counties mean that <b>resources to support parents may not be readily available</b>.</p> <p>Working with the community to provide support for families and assist them in learning to access available resources and services can help them deal with those challenges. The scarcity of resources and services in the four small rural communities makes it necessary to work with the communities to develop resources that serve as many of the most challenged families as possible.</p> <p>Due to the reduction in available funds over the years of program implementation, and no expectation of funding increases from HHS, it continues to be necessary to collaborate with other community agencies and funders. Research into <b>public-private grant partnerships</b> is a funding arena worth exploring in the upcoming year.</p>

Priority	Rationale for Identification or Deletion of Priority
<p><i>Secure and Nurturing Early Learning Environments</i></p>	<p>The following statements convey the Board of Directors’ sense of the meaning of “<b>Secure and Nurturing Child Care Environments</b>”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development opportunities for child care providers and preschools.</li> <li>• Quality child care environments will be accessible to all families.</li> <li>• Quality child care environments will support the growth and development of children.</li> <li>• Children will be safe in child care.</li> <li>• Child care environments will be healthy.</li> </ul> <p>In order to allow their parents to work or take advantage of educational opportunities, many children spend a large amount of time, especially in their early years, in some kind of child care or preschool. With all parents often employed, child care is an essential part of a community's critical infrastructure. When children are cared for in a safe, nurturing setting, parents are able to give more attention to their jobs.</p> <p>Data available to the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area Board of Directors shows that as many as 78% of children under age 6 in the 4-county area need some kind of regular child care. In the last four years measured, the 4-county region saw a dramatic <b>drop of nearly 40%</b> in the number of child care programs available. The loss of these agencies is likely pandemic-related, when people were not going to work and many businesses closed. Affordability of services, and transportation to the facilities, remains a frequent obstacle, and is one that the Board strives to relieve with properly-directed awards.</p> <p>The need for non-standard hours of quality child care continues to surface anecdotally if not in data collection. Many of the jobs available in the area involve irregular and late-night hours. Non-standard hours for child care is a need expressed in other ECI Areas as well, reflecting the realities of the difficulty juggling work and child care and the need for support. Providing scholarship assists in this, but more creative solutions may be needed to make an impact.</p>



## ➤ Community-Wide Indicators

	<p><i>Kindergarten Pre-literacy Skills</i></p>	<p><b>We Are ECI</b> counted children served in multiple programs and unduplicated counts to document that 73% of children born in Iowa and enrolled in public schools attended a center-based preschool program the year before kindergarten.</p>
	<p><i>Preschool Participation</i></p>	<p><b>We Are ECI</b> data systems do not collect waiting lists, but learned from provider survey data that 68% of centers serving infants/toddlers and 49% of those serving preschool children had documented waiting lists comprising 40% and 70% of their enrollments, respectively.</p>
	<p><i>Risks at Birth</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <i>Poverty</i></li><li>➤ <i>Teen Births</i></li><li>➤ <i>Low Birth Weight</i></li><li>➤ <i>Inadequate Pre-natal Care</i></li></ul>	<p><b>I2D2</b> data revealed that nearly 60% of Iowa's kindergartners experienced at least 1 risk at birth that is known to significantly influence kindergarten outcomes (e.g., poverty, low maternal education, birth to a teen mother, birth to a single mother, inadequate prenatal care, preterm/low birth weight, or smoking during pregnancy). Rural and racial/ ethnic minority children experience more individual and cumulative birth risks compared to other children.</p>
	<p><i>Early Child Care Workforce Pay</i></p>	<p>In 2022, <b>We Are ECI</b> conducted a comprehensive early child care workforce study, including surveys of home and center providers. Survey results showed that 51.6% of all workers' household income from all sources was less than \$50,000 last year. However, this percentage was much higher for unmarried workers (81.6%). More than 17% had other paid jobs in addition to early care and education. This survey also identified a gap in benefits provided, with only 42% of workers reporting receiving health insurance, 34% receiving retirement benefits, and 27% receiving dental insurance.</p>
	<p><i>Early Child Care Workforce Education</i></p>	<p>According to the <b>2022 workforce survey</b>, many early care and education workers are interested in obtaining more education. 24% of the workforce currently has a high school diploma or less and ~28% has some college but no degree. While 47.2% of the early care and education workforce is interested, the cost of courses and times they are offered were identified as major barriers. Only 14% receive funding for education. Until the field is professionalized and increased education comes with appropriate and competitive pay, the system will struggle to increase the education of the early care and education workers</p>

Source: We Are ECI – IOWA Statewide Data

## Analysis of the Information Collected to Identify Indicators

Indicator	Rationale for Selection of Indicator
<b><i>Kindergarten Pre-literacy Skills</i></b>	The State of Iowa and Iowa school districts have researched a number of kindergarten readiness assessments. Literacy is the foundation of all other learning. The State of Iowa has adopted a series of pre-literacy assessments to be administered in the early months of kindergarten. Aggregated results data for 4 Counties For Kids ECI Area are tracked to determine the percent of children proficient in the preparedness assessment.
<b><i>Preschool Participation</i></b>	In conjunction with monitoring kindergarten pre-literacy assessment data, the Board also monitors the number of children that are reported enrolled in preschool. The Board continues to strive to make quality preschool experiences available to as many children as possible. The Board will monitor the indicator data and compare to program data to ensure that sufficient capacity exists and that available programming is being utilized. This will also allow the Board to make decisions about the quality of programming available in the area.
<b><i>Availability of Child Care</i></b>	The indicator compiled using the data from Child Care Resource & Referral compared to population data shows the effectiveness of programming designed to help meet families' need for child care. The Board is most interested in supporting the growth of regulated child care.
<b><i>Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect</i></b>	<p>Many of the critical factors that challenge parents, such as poverty, lack of parenting skills, mental health issues, substance abuse issues, etc., tend to manifest themselves in child abuse and neglect. Adverse early Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can cause a variety of behavioral and physical problems later in life. The four-county area has historically experienced high incidences of child abuse and neglect.</p> <p>Although many of the underlying factors are beyond the scope of Early Childhood Iowa programs and services, the effectiveness of some programming, especially Family Support and Parent Education services, has been shown by changes in this data. Mental health programs for parents and caregivers is a service the Board decided to support in 2023 to make further inroads in reducing child abuse and neglect.</p>

Indicator	Rationale for Selection of Indicator
<i>Teen Births</i>	Babies born to teen mothers are frequently less healthy at birth than babies born to older mothers. They often suffer from low birth weight and premature birth. In addition, immature mothers have difficulty caring for their babies. Incidences of child abuse and neglect may be more prevalent in these circumstances. Tracking teen birth data can help measure the need for and effectiveness of Early Childhood programs and services. Family Support and Parent Education services especially will be needed, resulting in better care for the children, and prevention of repeat teen pregnancies.
<i>Low Birth Weight</i>	Low birth weight can be an early indicator of future health problems and/or need for more health care early in the life of the child. Parent Education and Family Support services for at risk mothers early and often during pregnancy can help reduce the incidences of low birth weight and the resulting health problems. Tracking this measure will give some indication of the success of a number of preventive and intervention programs and services.
<i>Immunized Children</i>	Immunization against a variety of childhood diseases provides protection for the individual child, but is also a public health concern. Tracking the immunization of children at the community level, as well as through program data, shows the effectiveness of immunization programs and may give the Board some advance indication of the need for additional services.
<i>Kindergarten Youth Dental Health</i>	The dental health of children can have wide ranging effect on other areas of physical health and on the ability to succeed in school. The State of Iowa has established programming to help increase dental health in young children. Although the Board no longer funds Iowa's local I-Smile program, tracking this dental health screening data will show trends in the effectiveness of the Board support for collaborating programs.
<i>Early Child Care Workforce Education</i>	Providing support for acquiring education remains a need to help the workforce. Efforts to raise wages for this workforce are an indirect means which can encourage or enable early child care workers to pursue further education. In 2023, the Board awarded funding specifically targeted at improved pay for preschool workers.

## ADOPTED INDICATORS

### INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE / NEGLECT

<i>Total Count #</i>	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Appanoose	37	21	12	21	21
Davis	10	9	5	9	5
Lucas	12	19	11	24	20
Monroe	21	29	20	19	20

Goal - Annual downward trend in all categories of assessment findings. Year to year downward change will be equal to or greater than the State of Iowa.

Progress Update - The incidence of abuse and neglect continues to be quite erratic from year to year. There doesn't appear to be much success in sustained reduction.

### TEEN BIRTH RATE

<i>Percentages %</i>	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Appanoose	6.09	4.4	5.1	7.3	7.8
Davis					
Lucas					
Monroe		8.1	6.3	7.4	

Goal - Annual downward trend with the rate for all 4 counties equal to or less than the State of Iowa rate for 3 consecutive years.

Progress Update – The teen birth rate is going in the wrong direction in recent years.

## LOW BIRTH WEIGHT

<i>Percentages %</i>	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Appanoose	15.3	7.4	12.8	17.4	7.8
Davis	5.1	10.0	5.0	8.4	5.6
Lucas		8.9	8.3	8.7	12.6
Monroe	8.9	12.1	9.5	11.1	13,8

## IMMUNIZED CHILDREN

<i>Percentages %</i>	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Appanoose	67	74	62	67	65
Davis	77	67	45	45	46
Lucas	78	78	66	52	56
Monroe	71	66	76	72	75

Goal - Annual increasing percentage in area and each county.

Progress Update - Consistently maintain 100% in all counties. The fluctuating percentages are trending down for several counties.

## ➤ Strategies

The 4 counties served by the ECI Area are small rural counties. There are few resources locally available to serve the social needs of children and families. Funding provided by **4 Counties For Kids** Early Childhood Iowa Area Board of Directors has been the primary and, in some cases, the only source of funding for many of the programs in the area. Program monitoring and community assessment indicate that the funded programs are providing quality services and that the members of the community who are in the target audience are feeling a real benefit.

**Family Support** and **Parent Education** programs and services have been high on the list of strategies funded by the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area Board of Directors. As discussed earlier, many of the most serious challenges faced by families are beyond the scope of the services that the Board can provide. Helping parents be good parents and support the development of their children has been the goal. Some success has been evidenced by some declines in the Incidence of Child Abuse & Neglect community indicator.

However, the programs that are evidence-based and provide the best outcomes are high intensity and very expensive. Decreases in funding available to the ECI Area to support these programs has impacted the level of support the Board can provide. Without increases in funding levels or discovery of some previously unknown source of community collaboration, the programs and services currently provided face a very uncertain future. That means that the families and children they serve also face a very uncertain future. The Board is dedicated to work closely with all available resources to help improve opportunities for children and families in the area. The Board is dedicated to continue to fund the programs as long as the provider agencies can continue to offer them. A positive development would be the **creation of public-private partnerships** to assist with funding.

Development of and **support for quality preschool programming** are important contributions that the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Board of Directors continue to make to children in the 4-county community. The Board provided extensive funding to currently-funded preschools to purchase evidence-based curriculum and participate in training about incorporating the curriculum in their programs.

Providing assistance to parents **for the cost of sending their children to quality preschool** programs is high on list of priorities for the use of the ECI Area's funds. The continued low literacy skills data and low numbers of children reported enrolled in preschools is a cause for concern. Increasing the number of children that participate in a quality preschool experience can only reap positive benefits. The Board continues to work with preschool providers to help make their quality programs accessible to families. As with other programming funding has become an issue and the need to find the most effective way to support children's needs is essential.

Census and employment data continue to indicate a large unmet need for child care in the 4-county area. Numbers of licensed and registered providers and child care “slots” have decreased despite all efforts to maintain and increase those numbers. 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area Board continues to be dedicated to collaborating with Child Care Resource and Referral and Parent As Teachers Child Care Educator to grow the availability of quality child care in the area.

Although there are certainly a number of fine child care providers that choose not to be licensed or registered and/or participate in quality measurement systems, the only way for the Board to help ensure quality care is to work to encourage such participation. The Board continues to be dedicated to providing as much assistance as its funding allows.

In summary, the programs and services that the Board chooses to fund are designed to meet the needs of the children and families in our communities and make positive contributions to the priorities and goals that have been identified. **Direct contact with parents** through home visitation and group parent education programming is the primary strategy that the Board believes can have the most benefit.

Following are specific support strategies the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area Board is supporting into the future.

### ❖ Healthy Children

Many factors contribute to the healthy growth, mentally and physically of the youngest children. While 4CFK funding is directed toward children specifically, the Board supports programs that address problems of parents that may affect the health of their children. This includes substance abuse, obesity, and mental health, all of which can prevent parents from giving the best care to children’s health and leave them modeling bad habits to children at home. By teaching healthy parenting and healthy living, and encouraging awareness of county health services available for pregnant mothers & infants and conducting children’s health screenings, the services and programs funded by the Board can make a positive impact on the health of children in the four-county area.

Most recently, a new mental health program was added to the 4 Counties For Kids service roster and has been gaining interest month by month. It has already expanded from early childhood workers to a parent group; the benefits are extolled almost immediately, as adult caregivers learn to take care of their own mental health and emotions, and eventually to model that for their children.

### ❖ Children Ready for School

Strategies to achieve results in the area of Children Ready for School have traditionally centered around preschool activities. These strategies involved ways to make preschool more available and accessible to all children regardless of family income, and striving to have

all preschool experiences be of as high a quality as possible. There has also been more recent discussion of health issues and how important the various aspects of a child's health, i.e. physical, dental, eyesight, hearing, etc., to preparation to succeed in school.

### ❖ **Preschool Tuition Assistance Programs.**

A quality preschool experience is an essential step toward a child entering Kindergarten ready to succeed. 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area has for several years provided, in collaboration with community preschools, programs of tuition assistance for children in low income families. The ECI Area contracts directly with the tuition-based preschools to provide this assistance. The preschool is responsible for identifying and determining the eligibility of the children and families.

In the past, the majority of children served have been in the 4 to 5-year-old age range. With the advent of the state funded Voluntary Preschool Program for 4-year-old children, the served child population began to reach the younger group. Privately operated preschools are expanding the 3-year-old preschool availability and 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area is continuing to assist with tuition. In order to ensure that the children for whom tuition assistance is provided are receiving a quality preschool education, 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area requires that all participating preschool programs meet appropriate quality standards and utilize a curriculum that aligns with Iowa's Early Learning Standards. Toward that end, 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area has over the years supported the preschools in the areas by providing funding to assist preschool staff with training and to assist the preschool to purchase and develop quality curriculum.

### ❖ **Head Start Programming Support**

Some of the highest quality preschool programming is being provided for children from low-income families by the federally-funded Head Start programs. These Head Start Preschool programs are required to meet very stringent federal quality guidelines. The Head Start programs are free to children from families who meet income eligibility guidelines and provide positive benefits for both the children and their families. 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area has, from its inception as A.D.L.M. Empowerment Area, provided support for Head Start Preschool programs.

The Head Start programs are operated by two community action program providers, South Central Iowa Community Action Programs (SCICAP) and Southern Iowa Economic Development Association (SIEDA). The agencies operate a total of five Head Start sites. The Head Start Preschool programs operated by SIEDA in Appanoose County and Davis County, with partial financial support from 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area, offer a full seven-hour day of quality classroom time for children whose parents approve.



In Appanoose County the expanded day is offered to 4-year-old children who will be beginning Kindergarten the following year. In Davis County the expanded day is offered to a class that contains both 3 and 4-year-old children.

For the three Head Start sites operated by SCICAP in Lucas County and Monroe County, the availability of transportation to and from school has become a barrier. 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area is providing substantial funding support for safe transportation for all children who need it.

### ❖ **Preschool Supplemental Support Programs**

Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP) for Four-Year-Old Children provides "add-on" services which the state awarded funding is not be able to provide. These services include special needs consultation, additional developmental screenings, medical and dental screenings, and assessment tools, designed to directly help children and families. In addition, assistance may be provided to community preschool staff for professional development and meeting required program quality standards.

### ❖ **Healthy, Secure and Nurturing Families**

Family development strategies have been a central part of the operation of 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area since its inception as A.D.L.M. Empowerment Area in September 1998. A very large portion of the annual budget supports family development programs which range from home visitation programming to group development programming. 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area strategies have always been to make services available that are family driven and meet the individual needs of the families in our communities. The major motivation behind these strategies has been to help as many families as possible in their mission to provide for the healthy development of their children.

### ❖ **Home Visitation Family Support**

From its initial inception as Community Empowerment, to the current Early Childhood Iowa initiative, the benefit of home visitation programs in providing parent skill development programming and family support has been recognized. From its beginning as A.D.L.M. Empowerment Area, 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area has adhered to that belief.

The nationally recognized Parents As Teachers program has been an integral part of the support provided to families in the four-county area. Although the Parents As Teachers home visitation program is open to all families, higher priority is being placed on recruiting at-risk families with special needs. Those families whose needs are greater than the program capabilities can meet, are referred to more appropriate

programs offered by other community agencies including the Area Education Agency. The future of AEA is in flux as HHS re-evaluates the structure of Iowa's Health and Education programs.

Recognition of a serious unmet need in Monroe County led the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa (A.D.L.M. Empowerment) Area to collaborate with Monroe Public Health to provide a more intensive home visitation program, following the Healthy Families America - HOPES model. Unfortunately, perceived instability concerning the future of Early Childhood Iowa funding and structure, again related to the HHS program re-evaluations, combined with an instable economic outlook, led to the resignations of HOPES staff and the closing of the program. It has not been replaced; although, funding has been reallocated outside of the Home Visitation Support.

Recruiting staff trained for the more intensive home visits, which assist parents in working through issues in their lives that can have a detrimental effect on their children, is a real challenge, especially at the wage levels in the 4-county area.

### ❖ **Group Family Support Programs**

NEST programming is a very popular program with families in the 4 Counties For Kids ECI Area. The NEST program is an incentive-based program of parent skill development. Participating parents “earn” incentive points through a variety of healthy, positive activities. Parent participants are required to participate in skill development classes as a major part of earning incentive points. Point earning activities include such things as keeping prenatal visits, taking children to well-child check-ups, keeping up children's immunizations, etc. The incentive points can then be “spent” at the NEST store to buy child related items, like diapers, formula, clothing, car seats, etc. These classes employ a variety of research based short program curriculums.

When programming changes resulted in the loss of the NEST program (much of the service support moved to PAT) Monroe County Public Health decided to host the NEST program for their county. This program has continued to meet a need for Monroe County families and is expected to continue. NEST programming is truly a community collaborative as financial support is provided from a variety of sources, many community members donate time to supplement the parent skill development classes, stores give discounts for NEST store inventory purchases and a multitude of items are donated by individuals and businesses. The true beneficiaries are the children in the participating families. Their parents learn to be better parents. Many are having medical visits they would not have had were it not for the incentives earned. For some this has meant the early identification of a medical or developmental problem, which may have gone undiagnosed for years.

Parents also benefit by the development of informal community supports. Through their participation in group programs they are able to network with other parents, who then feel comfortable providing support to one another.

## ❖ **Secure and Nurturing Child Care Environments**

Improving the availability and accessibility of quality child care is a very high priority with the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area. The strategies employed are to provide a great deal of support to child care providers through a variety of learning opportunities ranging from group training presentations and conferences to individualized on-site training and consultation. Just as with family support, in providing this support for the children's surrogate parents the ECI Area is striving to meet the individual needs of the care providers and in turn of the children being cared for.

## ❖ **Child Care Recruiting and Consultation**

Building a child care business in today's regulatory environment can be a very challenging and complicated affair. Quality child care in 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area is child care that, at a minimum, meets all requirements for registration and licensing by the Iowa Department of Human Services. Moving into the realm of higher quality care means moving up the ladder to meet the increasing standards of Iowa's Quality Rating System.

4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area collaborates with Child Care Resource and Referral to provide recruiting and consultation services for those child care providers who want to improve themselves and their quality of child care. A Child Care Consultant serves providers in the four-county area with individualized on-site consultation. CCR&R also provides training opportunities that are designed to be accessible to all registered and licensed providers and those seeking registration or licensure and to meet the individual needs of each of those providers. 4 Counties For Kids also collaborates with Child Care Resource and Referral to provide monetary incentives to providers who make quality improvements in their programs.

## ❖ **Child Care Nurse Consultation**

A quality child care environment is a healthy child care environment. The child care facility is safe, clean and sanitary and the staff operates the program in such a way as to keep it safe, clean and sanitary. Child care providers take all available steps to maintain their own health, both physical and mental in order to best serve the children in their care. 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area is collaborating with two CCNC agencies to provide health consultation in all four counties in the area. Several registered nurses are trained and certified as Child Care Nurse Consultant to provide individualized support to child care providers in all four counties.

## ➤ PROCESS FOR AWARDING FUNDS

**4 Counties For Kids** Early Childhood Iowa Area Board of Directors employs an **open application process** to award ECI funds. The Board's policy number B-1.0 has been adopted to guide this process. Applications are typically accepted annually during April and May, and all funds are allocated at that time with services to begin on July 1.

The Board of Directors only awards funding to support **programs or services addressing the priorities** that the Board has identified and that are detailed in this Community Plan. The application is designed to lead the agency or individual to clearly explain how the proposed program or service will contribute to the Board's priorities. A typical program or service will primarily affect only one of the Board's priorities, although there may be side effects. The application requires the proposing agency/individual to address data collection and reporting of performance measures.

The entire **Board of Directors is the evaluation committee** for all proposals submitted during the annual funding cycle. A process has been developed to evaluate each proposal based on its adherence to the proposed program/service required performance. With a limited budget of ECI funds – often decreasing annually rather than increasing – the Board faces an ongoing challenge to decide on funding allocation. Historically, proposals have regularly been nearly equal in quality, presenting no clear reason for the Board to award either increased or decreased monies relative to the request.

The fiscal year 2025 RFA has been distributed to all current providers. While some ECI Area Boards are restricting the coming year's applications to existing contractors, the Board made the decision to allow any county agencies or individuals to apply, regardless of prior or current association with 4 Counties For Kids.

The application for funding contains language concerning the process for appealing Board decisions. Article XIV of the Board's Bylaws addresses the right to appeal. Appeals are to be made in writing and presented to either the Board Chairperson or the ECI Area Director at least 20 days before the next scheduled Regular meeting. The appeal will be reviewed and acted on by the entire Board of Directors.

## SECTION III. Fiscal Assessment

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### ➤ Fiscal Assessment Process

A fiscal assessment is completed as part of the 4CFK Community Plan in order to identify other funding coming into the area for families and young children. Fiscal data is gathered from publicly-available online data resources, as well as data collected directly from 4 Counties For Kids contracted service providers, via their annual ECI-mandated reporting, and through emails or phone calls to local partners. In past years, a survey process was attempted specifically for the Community Plan, but it yielded little useful information and was not re-initiated.

At the present time Early Childhood Iowa funds are primarily used to provide direct services to children and families. Where support of child care is concerned, the funding does provide indirect service by supporting the child care provider. Looking toward the future, increased collaboration with other funding organizations, and possible public-private partnerships, is desirable and will be needed in the 4-county area in order to meet the needs of children and families.

Continued budget reductions make it necessary that all agencies serving young children look toward the overall benefits that can be provided to the children rather than maintaining an isolated “silo” approach to providing services.

Taking into consideration the limitations of the fiscal information, the assessment provides broad guide to aid the decision-making processes. The fiscal assessment supports efforts to identify disparities, duplication, potential for efficiency, and trends of increasing and or decreasing funds.

➤ **Fiscal Assessment Results Matrix**

Although the matrix offers a general overview of the services and funding flowing into the community to support children, all data should be reviewed with an understanding of challenges and margins for error, such as:

- Program numbers and data cannot be compared with identical timeframes. Programs operate on a variety of calendars. Some may be reporting funds for a calendar year while others are reporting for the state or federal fiscal years.
- Several services are operated by regional agencies with numerous counties. Information for these services offers a fiscal picture that is larger than the region covered by the 4CFK Community Plan.
- Some programs serve children and families well beyond the age of 5 years. A program listed that serves people 0-18 does not confirm that a child 0-5 was actually served with the funding.
- Some programs may not have reported all outside funding (apart from 4 Counties For Kids monies) on their Annual Reports, although the information is requested. This will result in additional funding being under-reported, yet without determination as to where this may occur.

**PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS**

Agency/ Organization	Location	Type of Service Provided	Ages of Children Served	Number of Children / Families Served	Yearly Estimated Funding	Identified Sources of Funding	Identified Gaps in Funding	Agency’s Level of Collaboration
Davis County Daycare & Preschool	Davis	Preschool Tuition Assistance	0–5 yrs	14	\$17,000	4CFK ECIA		Contribution
Kids World Day Care & Preschool	Appanoose	Preschool Tuition Assistance	6 mos–4 yrs	6	\$19,000	4CFK ECIA		Contribution
Wigwam Preschool & Daycare	Davis	Preschool Tuition Assistance	3-4 yrs	13	\$17,000	4CFK ECIA		Contribution

## AGENCY AND ORGANIZATION SERVICES

Agency/ Organization	County Served	Type of Service Provided	Ages of Children Served	Number of Children / Families Served	Yearly Estimated Funding	Identified Sources of Funding	Identified Gaps in Funding	Agency's Level of Collaboration
SCICAP	Appanoose Davis, Lucas Monroe	Parents As Teachers	0-5 yrs	59	\$199,840	4CFK ECIA		Contribution
SCICAP	Lucas Monroe	Head Start Transportation	3-4 yrs	28	\$969 \$32,500	Head Start 4CFK ECIA	Transportation	Collaboration Contribution
SCICAP	Appanoose Davis Lucas Monroe	NEST	0-5 yrs		\$16,000 \$85,769 \$6,950 \$1,936 \$33,309	DECAT Grant ICAPP Grant Local Grants ( <i>Lucas, Davis, Monroe Cos</i> ) Misc. Donations 4CFK ECIA		Collaboration
Southern Iowa Economic Dev. Association	Appanoose	Head Start Preschool	3-5 yrs	16	\$162,011 \$8,000	Federal – Head Start 4CFK ECIA		Collaboration
SIEDA	Davis	Head Start Preschool	3–5 yrs	11	\$111,383 \$8,000	Federal – Head Start 4CFK ECIA		Collaboration
CCR&R – Orchard Place	Appanoose Davis, Lucas Monroe	Child Care Consultation & Training	0-5 yrs	82	\$36,922	4CFK ECIA		Collaboration
MATURA Action Corporation	Lucas	CCNC	0-5 yrs	6	\$9,147	4CFK ECIA		Collaboration
American Home Finding Association	Appanoose Davis Monroe	CCNC	0-5 yrs	23	\$25,101	4CFK ECIA		Collaboration

## SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Agency/ Organization	Location	Type of Service Provided	Ages of Children Served	Number of Children / Families Served	Yearly Estimated Funding	Identified Sources of Funding	Source of Data	Agency's Level of Collaboration
Albia Community Schools	Albia	Preschool – SWVPP	4-5 yrs		\$174,622	SWVPP State Grant	4CFK Community Plan - 2019	
Centerville Community Schools	Centerville	Preschool – SWVPP	4-5 yrs		\$207,617	SWVPP State Grant	4CFK Community Plan - 2019	
Chariton Community Schools	Chariton	Preschool – SWVPP	4-5 yrs		\$247,163	SWVPP State Grant	4CFK Community Plan - 2019	
Davis County Community Schools	Bloomfield	Preschool – SWVPP At Risk Preschool	4-5 yrs	53	\$206,635 \$8,000	SWVPP State Grant 4CFK ECIA	Annual Report	Contribution
Moravia Community Schools	Moravia	Preschool – SWVPP	4-year-old		\$69,206	SWVPP State Grant	4CFK Community Plan – 2019	
Moulton – Udell Schools	Moulton	Preschool – SWVPP	4-year-old		\$59,319	SWVPP State Grant	4CFK Community Plan - 2019	



## SECTION IV. Community Collaboration

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### ➤ Collaborative and Networking Opportunities

Collaboration – Partners engaged in a process through which they are constructively building an interdependent system which includes a common mission, comprehensive communication and planning, pooling of resources, and sharing risks and products. The 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area strives to be a driving force and convening authority for early childhood care, health and education in the Appanoose County, Davis County, Lucas County and Monroe County ECI Area. Prior to its inception in September 1998 there were minimal family support programming and services. Quality, availability and accessibility of preschool programming was inconsistent. Child care quality and availability were poorly managed and monitored. Small populations, rural location, inconsistent job markets, and high rates of poverty all combined to limit the availability of early childhood and social services programs.

The Community Empowerment initiative made it possible to begin to tackle some of those barriers to child success and family stability. The work which began in September 1998 continues today as **4 Counties For Kids** Early Childhood Iowa Area. Early Childhood Iowa has been able to infuse much-needed financial resources into the area. Community action agencies, school districts, county health agencies, county extension agencies, public and private preschools, and individuals have worked with and served on the ECI Area Board to help develop and grow a cohesive system. Those groups have weathered funding inconsistencies and continual changes in rules and regulations to continue to build an early childhood care, health and education system that works best in this 4-county community.

Collaborating with the ECI Area Board of Directors and its Area Director, public and private agencies in the area have been able to provide personnel resources in a variety of program and service planning and development activities. Their staff regularly participate in ECI Area Board of Directors meetings. They have been the employers of staff dedicated to providing essential services to children and families in the community. They provide office and meeting space frequently without reimbursement. However, the **collaborative vision of “pooled resources” is not yet realized**, since the majority of the agencies that are available to collaborate in this 4-county area also operate under numerous rules and regulations concerning the use of available resources, especially financial resources.

Collaboration with local partners and agencies **extends beyond financial concerns to all aspects of early childhood services**. In this capacity, the ECI Area Director regularly meets with the local Child Abuse Prevention Council to take action locally.

DHS Decategorization and Community Partnerships for Protecting Children continue to provide collaborative networking opportunities. Small rural communities typically mean that **people serve on a variety of committees and boards**. That is true of Early Childhood Iowa, Decategorization and Community Partnerships for Protecting Children. County government representation is common to all three; individuals and agency staff frequently participate in all. The Decategorization Project also collaborates by providing some funding support. The goal of networking with these community organizations continues to be to build the awareness of those groups, seeking information from them concerning community needs, and seeking opportunities to **build the needed collaborative system**.

The Child Care Nurse Consultant is the primary means for supporting early care environments to prevent the spread of infectious disease, protect against childhood injuries, develop emergency health protocols, and assist with medication and the care for children with special health needs. CCNC is provided under the State of Iowa's Healthy Child Care Iowa Initiative. It is implemented as part of Title V by the local Maternal and Child Health Agency. The four-county area works in collaboration with American Home Finding Association (AHFA) and MATURA Action Corporation to provide nurse consultant services. Appanoose, Davis and Monroe Counties are served by AHFA, while Lucas County is served by MATURA.

The limited current and expected future funding situation makes it imperative that the Early Childhood Iowa Area Board of Directors continues to seek ways to work with the communities it serves, **less as the primary funder of needed services and more as a partner** in a comprehensive system. It remains to be seen how Iowa Department of Health and Human Services realignment initiative will affect funding, management and oversight of the programs now served local by the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Area Board.

## SECTION V. Review and Evaluation

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### ➤ Process

**4 Counties For Kids** Early Childhood Iowa Area uses a Request For Application (**RFA**) **process every year** to determine the programs and services that it will fund for the coming fiscal year. Funded programs are required to provide annual updates in order for their funding to be renewed. Updates of statistical data and program level information will be used to monitor the changes going on in our communities.

In the fall/winter of each year, following preparation and **submission of our required Annual Report** to the Iowa Early Childhood Iowa Board, 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area will update indicator, demographic and statistical data in the Community Plan. The purpose of this update is to confirm the continuation of identified needs and priorities or evaluate with the Board any reason for change in priorities.

As a part of the application (RFA) process all applicants must address how their program or services are intended to impact the 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area priorities and what performance measures they collect and report to evidence that impact. Any state-mandated performance measures are considered the minimum reporting requirements, with additional measures developed with the cooperation of the provider(s) and the Board of Directors. All programs and services funded by 4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area are provided under a formal contract negotiated between and signed by the service provider and the Board of Directors. This contract addresses the work to be performed, reporting requirements, and payment policies and procedures. All service **providers are required to submit semi-annual and annual financial and performance/progress reports** to the Board of Directors.

The full reports for selected programs or services are reviewed when any Board member expresses a need to do so. Review of the data reported by the program provider(s) directly affects the continuation of the program or service and the compensation paid to the contractor. In the event of problems or questions concerning contractor performance, the Board of Directors will require the contractor to meet with the entire Board, and if necessary, the Board will present an explanation of corrective action required before additional contract funds are disbursed.

4 Counties For Kids Early Childhood Iowa Area **Board of Directors is required to submit an annual report to the State of Iowa** Early Childhood Iowa Board.

The annual report is an official report of the Board's operations and expenditures and provides performance and outcome data for all programs and services funded by the Board. The Board's annual report is a public document and is a very good source of information for anyone wanting to see how this community plan is being implemented in the area. The annual report is available upon request from the Board's Office at 221 S. Clinton, Albia, Iowa.

# APPENDIX

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## Community Needs Assessment Sources

- State of Iowa website  
<https://hhs.iowa.gov>
- County Public Health Needs Assessments & Improvement Plans (CHNA / CHIP)  
<https://hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/lphs/cha-chip/assessments-and-plans/assessments-plans>
- Iowa's Integrated Data System for Decision-Making (I2D2)  
<https://i2d2.iastate.edu/>
- Iowa's State Health Assessment  
<https://publications.iowa.gov/41180/1/SHA2021.pdf>
- Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral  
<https://iowaccrr.org/data/>
- Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral County Data Sheets Region 4-Central Iowa  
<https://stage.worklifesystems.com/iowa>

## Child Care, Education & Health Care Resources

- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
<https://www.rwjf.org/>
- State Library of Iowa Data Center  
<http://www.iowadatacenter.org/>
- US Census Bureau, 2018-2022  
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>

- Common Good Iowa  
<https://www.commongoodiowa.org/>
- I2D2 Data Drive.  
[https://i2d2.shinyapps.io/I2D2\\_Dashboard/](https://i2d2.shinyapps.io/I2D2_Dashboard/)
- Iowa Department of Health & Human Services  
<http://hhs.iowa.gov/programs/CPS//child-abuse-statistics>
- Prevent Child Abuse Iowa  
<http://preventchildabuseiowa.org/>
- Child and Family Policy Center  
<https://www.cfpciowa.org>
- Iowa Work Force Development Data  
<https://workforce.iowa.gov/labor-market-information/indicators/local/data>
- MATURA Action  
[bcomer@maturaia.org](mailto:bcomer@maturaia.org)
- American Home Finding Association  
[mandi@jeffcoph.com](mailto:mandi@jeffcoph.com) ; [tammym@jeffcoph.com](mailto:tammym@jeffcoph.com)
- Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral Annual Report  
<https://ccrannualreport2023.my.canva.site/>