

Early Childhood Action Strategy Update to the Hawai'i Community Foundation

July – September (Q3) 2023

About Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS)

ECAS Mission

To bring together government and non-governmental organizations to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight and to strengthen and integrate the early childhood system by streamlining services, maximizing resources, and improving programs to support our youngest keiki.

2023 Major ECAS Goals

- Sustain and Strengthen Child Care and Early Learning
- Prevent Family Violence and Protect Early Childhood Mental Health
- Support Safe Prenatal Care and Delivery
- Reach the Hardest to Reach Families

Current Developments - Maui

In August, 2023, the ECAS network pivoted to provide support to the organizations and individuals who comprise the systems that support young children and their families affected by the devastating fires on Maui. The ECAS network rallied together to draft a \$6M funding request to support young children and families through a Maui County Resiliency Center. Results of that funding request should be announced shortly. Additionally, ECAS partners helped to develop the Maui County ECRC early childhood literacy plan for FY 25 & FY 26, which would greatly expand the reach of early literacy efforts across Maui County, with an associated expanded budget request to the County.

Key Outcomes using *Conditions of System Change Methodology*:

Early Childhood Action Strategy works to influence the core conditions that enable or impede Systems Change. ECAS efforts and related outcomes are the result of ongoing partnerships between government and nongovernment actors who participate in the ECAS network.

[Effect Policy](#)

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Effect Policy

All efforts to improve the health, safety and learning of our youngest keiki need to be supported by effective policy.

Through both the [Commit to Keiki](#) effort and the ECAS policy engagement process, the ECAS network continues to play an active role in helping to shape the direction and focus of public policy in Hawai'i. ECAS has contracted with Summer Keliipio of 'Aal'ii Alliance to facilitate conversations with key stakeholders around the question of how ECAS might best support network partners by engaging in policy efforts and, in turn, how a new Policy Lead might best support those efforts. Findings from those conversations will help to inform the hiring of an ECAS policy lead (expected Q4, 2023).

In alignment with ECAS early childhood policy efforts, each of Hawai'i's counties have expanded their institutional response to early childhood issues as well. Brief updates from each County early childhood team in Q3 include:

Hawai'i County

- Hawai'i County Early Childhood Resource Team received employment commitments for the next three years
- Planning an early childhood conference for December, 2023 as follow-up to their April conference
- The [Reach Out and Read](#) effort continues to expand to more clinics across Hawaii County
- Hawaii County is providing scholarships to allow Hawai'i Island early childhood practitioners to attend ECE classes at Chaminade University

Honolulu County

- Convened a stakeholder workgroup to develop recommendations for the structure and functions of a Honolulu Office of Early Childhood.
- A report detailing recommendations for Mayor to consider will be completed October 2023
- Obtained approval for two city funded early childhood positions to include an EC Resource Coordinator and a Grants Management position. Anticipate hiring position in Fall 2023.

Maui County

- The Maui County Early Childhood Resource office has asked for budget support for over \$1.5M in grants for early childhood programs and services. The FY24 budget included a request to increase Early Childhood Workforce Development, Early Childhood Family Literacy, and Family Support Services including the Early Childhood Resource Center, Subsidy Assistance for childcare, and expanded parent education.
- Implemented the Reach out and Read program with 4 medical care providers and will soon expand to include 3 more programs.
- Maui Family Support Services is now an official Imagination Library affiliate, and the Imagination Library program is now being implemented in all zip codes across Maui County.

Kaua'i County

- The County of Kaua'i Chief of Staff is working closely with Alanna Bauman, ECE System Coordinator from Kaua'i Planning & Action Alliance on Early Childhood priorities.
- The first annual Kaua'i ECE Conference will be held in May, 2024.
- Hosted an inaugural island-wide mental health conference in June 2023

- The Kaua'i Parent & Child Fair was held in August, 2023 and will become an annual event to connect families with keiki ages 0-8 to early childhood educational programs, activities, and resources.

	<h2>Strengthen Cross-sector Leadership</h2> <p><i>Creating opportunities for cross-sector leadership aligns efforts and creates opportunities to nudge larger systems change</i></p>
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ECAS Backbone Team


ECAS is working to expand the leadership capacity of the network through several new hires this year.

- Christina Simmons is the Coordinator for the IECBH (Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral Health) Plan. This position is funded by Hawai'i Community Foundation, Early Childhood Action Strategy and Department of Health.
- Jonathan Alexander joined the ECAS Backbone team to coordinate the CSPD (Comprehensive System of Personnel Development) Plan. His position is funded by Department of Health, Department of Education, and ECAS.
- A Policy Lead will be hired to shepherd ECAS network policy priorities by Q4 2023
- A CCP (Community-Centered Partnerships) Lead will be hired to design and implement processes for intentionally engaging families with young children and recentering funding and strategy decision making in rural communities on neighbor islands

All Network Meeting (ANM) Planning

Planning for the Fall ANM was well underway when the Maui fires broke out. ECAS quickly pivoted to refocus the ANM around providing support and respite for those caring for families affected by the fires.

- The redesigned meeting will welcome Puni Jackson from Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services' Ho'oulu `Āina Program who will be sharing about their healing framework Lana Ka Mana`o - reserving hope in community navigation, drawing on stories of ho'olako; and sharing insights into how to provision the vessel to serve sustainably.
- Afternoon sessions will include a variety of wellness opportunities supporting mental health, massage, forest bathing (shinrin-yoku), `aina accountability, and malama Maui activities.

	<h2>Improve Alignment</h2> <p><i>Aligning the perspectives of key actors and clarifying their shared priorities strengthens our commitment to shared goals, leads to aligned policies and mutually supporting activities, and amplifies the effectiveness of our efforts to make a positive impact.</i></p>
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Early Childhood Behavioral Health (IECBH)

The Infant, Early Childhood Behavioral Health (IECBH) Plan integrates child and family mental health and trauma-informed care into our health and early care and learning systems throughout Hawai'i. The plan is designed to shift services to a trauma-informed care model emphasizing prevention and intervention in an equitable system of care thus reducing racial and socioeconomic disparities, saving money and ultimately, ensuring children succeed in school and life.

- In Q3, the IECBH team created an [IECBH Plan Tracking Table](#) to collect milestones and artifacts of work completed, in action, and planned in association with the IECBH Plan.
- A team completed the first Sprint with several outcomes: Creation of a [Primer on IECMH](#).
- The Primer was created for Medicaid leadership, and other state and private leadership, to provide a sense of the work we wish to collaborate on. We hope to create several more of these materials for the general public and to get more Hawai'i specific in future projects.
- IECMH partners recently participated in the *Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Financing Policy Project Convening 2023 - Exploring State Strategies to Finance a Robust Continuum of IECMH Services* meetings in Minneapolis.

Kindergarten Readiness Continuums

The community-based, kindergarten-readiness continuum initiative brings together community leaders and programs that work with young children and their families around the goal of assuring that all children reach kindergarten healthy, safe, and ready to learn.

- Current kindergarten readiness continuums include the Waimānalo 'Upena on O'ahu, and the Pāhoa Promise on Hawai'i Island.
- Each community partnership now has a core leadership team, and workgroups focused on key areas of development and wellbeing. Those workgroups are identifying baseline measures of child wellbeing that will be shared at in-person meetings in Q4 of this year. Year two of the project will focus on implementation efforts to improve child development outcomes.

Breastfeeding-friendly Hospitals

The breastfeeding subgroup of Team 1 (with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation) is convening conversations birthing hospitals across the state to align and implement breastfeeding-friendly practices.

	<h2>Support and Scale Innovative Practices</h2> <p><i>Adopting promising practices within our communities allows us to respond to immediate needs and address local conditions. Niche innovations create opportunities for learning and demonstrate that improved outcomes are possible. Systemic impact happens when innovations are scaled and sustained.</i></p>
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ECAS network efforts to innovative and scale innovative practices

ECAS teams initiate innovations and incubate them until they are ready to move to a permanent organization and/or agency. Makua Allies, Ka 'Upena Shared Services, Nest for Families, Words Matter LENA, Breastfeeding Toolkits, and Aloha at Home are recent examples of promising efforts that were initiated within ECAS teams before they were transitioned to new organizational homes. We are interested in developing ways to better understand the life of initiatives after they leave ECAS, including the factors that contribute to their sustainability and scaling.

Peer Support for Perinatal Substance Use

Partners participating on ECAS team 1, the Hawai'i Maternal and Infant Health Collaborative, initiated the Makua Allies pilot. The project now has a permanent home in EPIC 'Ohana Inc.

The Makua Allies pilot focuses on keeping new mothers who are healing from substance use together with their infants. With funding support from DOH, and now leadership from EPIC 'Ohana Inc., the program continues to be implemented on O'ahu and has been expanded to Hawai'i Island.

- Currently there are 4 Makua Allies peer counselors
- The program has expanded to Hilo
- A total of 23 mothers with newborns have been served by the program. Currently there are 16 mothers involved, and the program is doing intake for 4 more;
- In addition to providing peer support to moms, and family conferences when relevant, the peer counselors also work closely with CWS, providing training for incoming social workers to interact with birth parents; participate on workgroups
- Program partners have also completed the first draft of a Program Manual and Practice Guide
- Of the 23 mothers and newborns served, only one baby went to child welfare services and that was by choice.

Promising Practices around Early Language and Literacy

Partners participating on ECAS team 6 continue to expand their Early Language and Literacy programming efforts statewide. In Q 3:

- All Read To Me International staff are now certified LENA START trainers
- Always Dream Always Reading is working in 43 classrooms in 13 schools across Hawai'i in the Fall of 2023
- LENA implementation continues statewide (through a growing set of implementation partners)
- Pediatric practices working with the Read out and Read (ROAR) program on Hawai'i Island have now distributed over 4000 books during well child check-ups
- 3 pediatric practices in Maui County have adopted the ROAR program
- Maui County has expand the Imagination Library program to reach each zip code in the county

[Aloha at Home](#)

Partners participating on ECAS team 2, Safe and Nurturing Families continues to incubate the Aloha at Home project, led by A`ali`i Alliance


In Q3, with support from a Honolulu Grant-in-Aid, Aloha at Home continued to scale their reach via their website, community events and Aloha at Home family engagement boxes.

- As that initiative reaches the end of their funding, they have created a legacy of materials and content available for free on their website. They are working on a scaling and sustainability plan with recent requests to support West Maui families.
- The [Aloha at Home](#) team gave a presentation on their social media strategies to share the message that positive parenting supports strong and resilient families and helps young children develop to their full capacity and reach kindergarten ready to thrive at the Hawai'i Pacific Evaluation Association Meetings in September. A number of ECAS network projects have gained mention in the local and national media, and at professional conferences.

Healthy Keiki, Healthy Futures

Team 3 partners working to strengthen early childhood physical activity and nutrition programs have coalesced through the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures program with a grant from the Nemours Foundation.

- During the second half of 2023, this working group focused on developing strategies to improve access to healthy food.
- As Nemours funding comes to an end, the workgroup has applied for a FRAC grant to carry key aspects of the work forward, including conducting a needs assessment identifying gaps in access to healthy nutrition, identifying barriers to access, and strategies for improvement.

	<h3>Increase Investment</h3> <p><i>Establishing and coordinating sufficient and dependable funding mechanisms is a key to sustaining efforts to improve the health, safety and learning of our youngest keiki.</i></p>
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Statewide Preschool Expansion

By Q3, efforts to support the expansion of early care and education continue to expand statewide. Key efforts include the commitment to provide access to ECE to all 3 & 4 year olds by 2032 (reaching 50% of currently unserved children by 2027); providing funds for a publicly funded Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program; Expansion of Preschool Open Doors and inclusion of 3-year-olds in EOEL Public Prekindergarten, and support for accreditation efforts.

Early Childhood Funders' Hui

The EC Funders Hui is comprised of philanthropic funders who support work in early childhood health, safety and learning. It is designed to support funder collaboration, strengthen strategy development across funders and provide one of many pathways for ECAS teams to receive catalytic funding for emerging innovations. ECAS backbone is working with the Funders' Hui to strengthen the Hui and solidify the processes for submitting proposals.

Community Centered Partnerships

In collaboration with the Stupski Foundation, Omidyar and the Hawai'i Leadership Forum, ECAS is launching a Community-centered Partnership (CCP) effort, intended to center the wisdom and knowledge of community members to identify immediate community needs that can be met with philanthropic dollars, inform network systems-level strategies, potential state and county priorities and philanthropic decisions. Rural communities will be selected on neighbor islands with a focus on early childhood health, safety and learning.

- ECAS is currently hiring a project lead to help focus, develop and manage this initiative in order to support the health, safety and learning of Hawai'i's youngest keiki.
- Goals for the coming two years of the initiative include using data to identify communities in which to establish partnerships, hiring and training community facilitators and panel members, identifying and prioritizing needs of families with young children, identifying gaps in programs and services, and establishing relationships with nonprofits and government agencies best positioned to address those needs and gaps in services.



Shift Awareness, Narrative and Culture

Permanent change requires a fundamental reordering of societal priorities. We improve outcomes for all of Hawai'i when we prioritize early childhood development and wellbeing.

[Commit to Keiki](#)

The Commit to Keiki Facebook page, with its clear articulation of an early childhood policy agenda focused on the mental health, safety and early learning of all keiki, now has close to 5,000 followers.

Early Childhood Community Profiles

The first two [Early Childhood County Level Community Profiles](#) (for Maui & Hawai'i Counties) were released in 2023.

- The Honolulu and Kauai profiles are underway and are expected to be completed by the end of the year.
- Lessons from the development of the first two profiles have led to a more streamlined process and a new contractor has been hired to work on them.
- Data from the profiles has been presented to the Hawai'i County Commissioners, to members of the Hawai'i US congressional delegation, has been used to support grant proposals, and will be presented at the ECAS All Network meeting in November, 2024.

Systems Learning Efforts

- Working with partners at [Engaging Inquiry](#), the ECAS network has continued to work this quarter to build a map of the Ecosystem in which the ECAS network operates. In Q4 the map will be socialized with groups across Hawai'i. Beginning in Q4, 2023., the map will be used to help identify enablers and inhibitors of systems-change in support of young children and families, and to identify levers that will help to make positive changes in those systems.
- The systems mapping work aligns with our efforts to develop a systems-change strategic development and formative evaluation framework. In collaboration with Mark Cabaj of Here to There Consulting, that effort has led to the development of a framework and related set of tools to help us think about the ways in which ECAS efforts contribute to instances of systems change.
- Together, the Engaging Inquiry mapping work, and the Systems-Change evaluation work provide a framework that will help strengthen the ways that we use what we learn through our collective efforts to inform our strategic decisions, develop our portfolio of responses, and evaluate our progress.