

NEVADA EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2026-2030



PRESENTED  
December 23, 2025  
by Public Works LLC



**Nevada Early Childhood  
Advisory Council**

## 2026-2030 Strategic Plan

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PURPOSE AND SCOPE

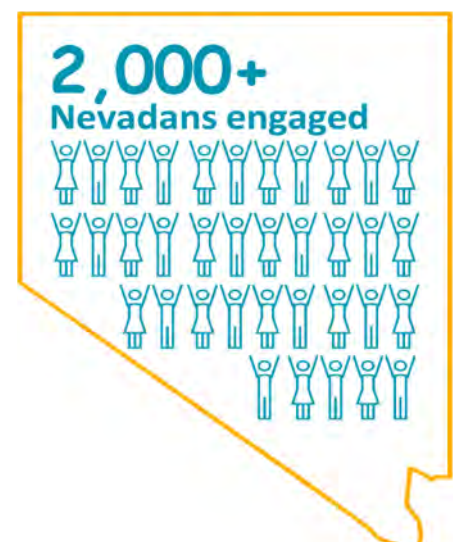
The 2026–2030 Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) Strategic Plan provides a clear, evidence-based roadmap to strengthen Nevada’s early childhood system at a time of significant fiscal, workforce, and policy uncertainty. The plan reflects ECAC’s statutory mandate under Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 432A.024 to advise the Governor, Legislature, and state agencies on early childhood policy, coordination, and systems improvement.

While ECAC does not administer programs or control funding, it plays a critical role in convening stakeholders, elevating lived experience, synthesizing data, and advancing actionable recommendations that improve outcomes for children from prenatal through eight years of age and their families.

This Strategic Plan was developed through a comprehensive and inclusive process commissioned by ECAC and facilitated by the public policy consulting firm, Public Works LLC. The process assessed external forces impacting early childhood systems, a review of ECAC’s organizational capacity, and an unprecedented community engagement effort involving more than 2,000 Nevadans that include parents, family members, staff of the early childhood workforce, early childhood providers, advocates, educators and early childhood system leaders from every county of the state.



*Our “North Star” is a unified Early Childhood System in Nevada where every child—from prenatal through age eight—can thrive, supported by sustainable public investment; affordable, high-quality early learning and services; a respected and well-resourced workforce; evidence-based policies and programs; data-informed decision-making; and the leadership of families whose lived experience strengthens the system.*



## WHY THIS PLAN IS NEEDED NOW

The need for a unified, strategic approach has never been more urgent. Families across Nevada are struggling to find and afford early childhood care and services. Providers face severe workforce shortages and rising costs. Systems meant to support children — such as early learning, health, and family services — often operate separately making it difficult for families to navigate.

Complicating matters, Nevada relies heavily on a patchwork of temporary federal funding sources to support its early childhood programs and services. Nevada also ranks among the lowest states in the country that invests **state dollars** to adequately fund an early childhood system. (Source: *Child Care Aware® of America April 8, 2025*).

Changes in federal policy and impending funding cuts in programs like SNAP, Head Start, and early childhood health will place substantial pressure on state and local systems to make up for the loss of financial support — losses the state and Nevadans can ill afford.

This Strategic Plan responds to these realities with a focused, forward-looking approach informed by authentic stories and insights from those most impacted by what this plan addresses — families raising young children and the educators, providers and early care and learning workforce that nurtures the young lives entrusted to them.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM NEVADANS

More than 2,000 individuals provided insights that shape this plan through interviews, surveys, and a statewide strategic planning retreat. Participants include parents, caregivers, early childhood educators, early care and learning providers along with non-profit and private sector leaders in the field.

Across all engagement activities, several consistent themes emerge:

- **Child care and early learning are too expensive** for most working families.
- **Finding and accessing services is difficult**, especially for families in rural areas or those with children who have special health or developmental needs.
- **Mental, socio-emotional and physical health needs are growing while demand exceeds supply especially in rural areas.**
- **Long waitlists** delay critical screenings, diagnoses, and supports.
- **The early childhood workforce is underpaid and undervalued** leading to high turnover of staff and program closures.
- Families want **simpler, more coordinated systems** to access services and **meaningful opportunities** to share their experiences and influence decisions.

*These insights directly shape the priorities, strategies and recommendations presented throughout this plan.*



## FIVE STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS

The 2026–2030 Strategic Plan focuses on five priority areas where ECAC can have the greatest impact through its statewide advisory role to shed light, give voice and attention on these **five vital areas**:

### 1 Early Childhood Workforce Development

ECAC will promote the growth and sustainability of a qualified early childhood workforce by elevating their voice, highlighting compensation disparities, advancing career pathways, and improving workforce data. The Council will serve as a convener and amplifier—bringing together educators, providers, training institutions, and policymakers to inform strategies that address recruitment, retention, and professional recognition.

### 2 Connected and Integrated Early Childhood Systems

ECAC will promote an aligned, family-centered early childhood system that reduces fragmentation and improves coordination across agencies and data systems. Priorities include advancing shared data use, supporting one-stop navigation approaches, encouraging coordinated governance, and elevating family experience as a key indicator of system performance.

### 5 Organizational Capacity and Sustainability

To fulfill its mandate, ECAC will prioritize building a sustainable operational foundation. This includes securing long-term administrative support, forming partnerships with universities to grow a cadre of interns, streamlining governance, enhancing communications and branding, securing a permanent home within state government, and ensuring that authentic voice is embedded across all areas of work.

### 3 Funding and Affordability

Recognizing the lack of affordability as the most frequently cited community concern, ECAC will focus on raising awareness of the return on investment in early childhood, identifying sustainable funding strategies, promoting universal pre-kindergarten for four-year-olds, and addressing policy barriers such as the “cliff effect” that destabilizes families as they work toward self-sufficiency.

### 4 Advocacy, Visibility, and Community Engagement

ECAC will elevate the visibility and value of early childhood learning and care by trusted sources of data, lived experience, and policy insight. Strategies include strengthening family leadership programs, promoting community resource hubs for easy local access to services, and facilitating the distribution of a *Child Opportunity Index* by county that measures and maps the neighborhood conditions children need to grow and thrive.

## MOVING FORWARD

This 2026–2030 ECAC Strategic Plan reflects both urgency and opportunity. It acknowledges the profound challenges facing Nevada’s early childhood system while offering a focused, realistic pathway for ECAC to lead through its advocacy roles of advising, listening, facilitating, and informing. By uplifting lived experience, making data-informed and evidenced-based recommendations and aligning efforts among early childhood learning and care sectors, ECAC is positioned to move Nevada toward a more coordinated, accessible and sustainable early childhood system—one in which every child in Nevada from prenatal to eight years is given the opportunity to grow and thrive.

## I. Project Overview

### 1. Purpose and Scope of Strategic Plan

The goal of the ECAC Strategic Plan process is **“to produce an evidence-based and actionable strategic plan through the use of a comprehensive development process aligned with the ECAC commitments” of:**

#### ECAC commitments

Family Engagement and Leadership

Transparency and Responsive Two-way Communication

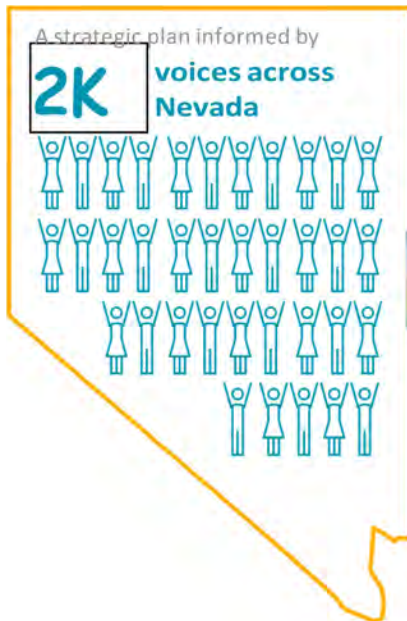


Responsiveness to Nevada’s Population

Continuity and Pathways from Prenatal into School Entry and Beyond

Access to Early Childhood Programs and Supports

Continuity and Pathways from Prenatal into School Entry and Beyond



The “comprehensive development process” in developing the strategic plan involved ECAC commissioning the public policy firm Public Works LLC to inform, guide and facilitate the development of the strategic plan. This involved conducting extensive research identifying external forces impacting Nevada’s early childhood systems, a review of the current state of ECAC’s work in fulfilling its vision and purpose, a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges analysis impacting ECAC and early childhood system sectors in Nevada. The strategic plan was also informed by an extensive Community Engagement process that included Key Informant Interviews, a Community Member Survey, Early Childhood Sector Survey and an ECAC Strategic Planning Retreat – all of which yielded over 2,000 individuals providing authentic voice and insights that informed this report and strategic plan.

## 2. Vision, Purpose and Current Goals of the Council

Aligning the Early Childhood Advisory Council’s vision, purpose, commitments and legislative mandate was foundational to developing the strategic plan and are presented here to highlight how they’ve been considered throughout the development process of the 2026-2030 ECAC Strategic Plan.



### VISION

Nevada’s children will be safe, healthy, & thriving during the first eight years of life and the system will support children & families in achieving their full potential.



### PURPOSE

The Nevada ECAC shall work to strengthen state-level coordination and collaboration among the various sectors and settings of early childhood education programs in Nevada.

The Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is a statewide advisory body focused on improving outcomes for young children and families. ECAC does not run programs or control funding. Instead, it brings together families, Early Childhood providers, and system leaders to examine needs, share data, and to advise and make recommendations to state leaders. As established in Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 432A.024, ECAC advises the Governor, Legislature, and state agencies on early childhood policy, service coordination, and strategies to strengthen Nevada’s early childhood system



### GOALS

The goals cited in the current strategic plan (2022-2024) and the work of the Council over the past three years are:

- Create a Coordinated Early Childhood Leadership Infrastructure
- Increase Coordination and Alignment Between Systems of Care for Young Children and Families
- Increase Capacity to Equitably Connect Families with the Early Childhood System Continuum of Care and Community at Large
- Identify Budget and Finance Strategies to Drive Policy Goals and Objectives
- Execute Data Collection and Integrated Systems to increase Equity and Accountability

References to an Early Childhood System throughout this report is broadly defined as “the interconnected network of programs, services, and supports for children birth through eight and their families.”



*We know what needs to happen. We just need to focus, we need to come together with a collective voice, and we need to stop pretending that volunteers and good intentions can substitute for professional infrastructure and adequate funding. —ECAC Member*

## II. Assessing the Current State

### External Factors Impacting Nevada Early Childhood Systems Introduction

An analysis of the current state within which Nevada’s Early Childhood Advisory Council operates begins with an overview describing the shifting social, economic, demographic, health care and workforce conditions impacting how services are funded, delivered, and experienced by Nevada’s children and families. Three major domains below outline key external forces shaping the landscape impacting early childhood systems and services.

#### 1. External Factors

**Federal Safety Net at Risk:** Funds & policy changes cited in the federal P.L. 119-21 known as the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” of the 119th Congress authorized to: reduce Medicaid spending by lowering health care Affordable Care Act subsidies, reducing SNAP food benefits, and potentially reduced funding to Head Start and Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) programs. The Act is intended to shift costs formerly funded by the U.S. Department of Education and Health & Human Services to the states. The impact of these impending funding deficits will bear a heavy toll as Nevada is already among the lowest states investing in early childhood systems and services. Thus, ECAC’s mission to advise and recommend enhancements to early childhood care, development and learning will face even less financial support as it continues to rely upon a patchwork of federal grants.

**Cost of Early Childhood Care, Development & Learning:**

With lack of Medicaid services, families will face greater out-of-pocket cost burden for early childhood development, physical and mental health services. The current long waiting list for diagnostic testing and subsequent services will continue to grow causing children to go without treatment. The lack of Head Start funds will likely lead to more centers closing since families won’t be able to afford the out-of-pocket expense, providers won’t be able to remain open if they are relying on reduced Head Start reimbursements to sustain their centers.

*Nevada invests no additional state early child care dollars beyond the minimum required to access federal matching funds, placing it among the lowest-investment states nationally.*

*Source: Child Care Aware® of America, An Uneven Start: 2025 State Funding for Child Care & Early Learning, April 8, 2025.*

**Workforce Shortage Rises:** Nevada’s wages trail state averages especially in early childhood field. Tighter public dollars lead to hiring freezes and wage stagnation among workers already being paid below living wages. Inflation and high housing, food, and transportation costs continue to strain family budgets and early childhood provider’s sustainability to provide care and services. Persistent workforce shortages and low wages threaten service quality and availability, especially for infant–toddler care and in rural areas. Efforts to strengthen the early childhood workforce such as through wage supplements, apprenticeship/credential pathways, and career lattices are expanding.

**Mental & Physical Health Needs:** Expect Maternal Child Health access in rural areas to become scarcer which is already flagged as “Maternal-care deserts.” About 41% of Nevada’s children eight years and under are living in households at 200% of federal poverty levels leaving them vulnerable to reduced access to services and greater exposure to mental and physical health needs. (Early Success, Nevada Early Childhood Policy Profile, 2023). The state’s limited early childhood systems funding and will likely lead to service gaps rather than being covered by state funding or providers.

## 2. Socio-Demographic Trends

Overall, there are several trends that will continue to exacerbate the needs of young children and their families over the course of the next three years. They range from the unaffordability of child care and learning, the high poverty rates among children and families, decreasing numbers early childhood workforce, and a lack of licensed early care centers to meet the demand of working parents.

The following facts reveal the early childhood needs that ECAC must consider over the next five years as they set goals and strategies to inform state policymakers and the public on advancing Nevada’s early childhood systems.



8th 

Nevada ranks as the 8th least affordable state for infant care.

Source: Nevada Children’s Cabinet 2025 Fact Sheet

41%


of Nevada children live under 200 % of the poverty level exposing them to risks of toxic stress and poor health.

Nevada Children’s Cabinet 2025 Fact Sheet  
Healthy People 2030, Health.gov

65% 

of children 0-5 years live in households with all parents in the workforce.

Source: Nevada Children’s Cabinet 2025 Fact Sheet

6.5% 

Only 6.5% of children living under 200% of poverty receive a state child care subsidy.

Source: Nevada Ready

30% 

Center-based infant-care exceeds the price of tuition and fees at UNR & UNLV by roughly 30%.  
30 credits per year

Source: Nevada Children’s Cabinet 2025 Fact Sheet

### 3. SWOC Analysis of ECAC’s Organization and Early Childhood System

An integral part of the Strategic Planning process is to assess an organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (SWOC) within the environment it functions, in this case, early childhood systems. The following highlights each of these areas:

#### Strengths

**Strong Commitment and Expertise.** Members, partners and staff demonstrate deep field experience and commitment despite structural and funding limitations.

**Federal Grant Alignment and Coordination Capacity.** ECAC effectively leverages federal funding (e.g. HRSA, PDG, ARPA) and aligns goals with federal initiatives.

**Infrastructure Achievements.** Foundations for the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS), Parent Leadership Councils, & professional pathways (e.g., First 5 Leadership Project).

**Progress in Family Engagement.** Expansion of Parent Leadership Councils, evening meetings, translation services, and compensation for family participation.

**Improved Collaboration and Cross-Sector Awareness.** Increasing inclusion of health professionals, coordination between data and evaluation teams, communication between state and local partners.



*Parents have voice at the table, are invited to committees, and there’s more parent engagement now than ever before.*

*—ECAC Member*



## Weaknesses

**Lack of Sustainable Funding and Administrative Capacity.** ECAC operates with zero state funding, relying on expiring grants and volunteer labor; administrative support ending in 2025/26 poses a serious threat.

**Structural and Governance Fragmentation.** 82+ annual meetings, overlapping subcommittees, unclear decision-making authority, and without an organizational home.

**Limited Visibility and Public Recognition.** Modest recognition by the public as to what ECAC does and its impact on the Early Childhood System, family engagement without decision-making influence.

**Strategic Plan Over-reach.** Goals exceed ECAC's statutory authority and capacity, staff consumed with clerical and logistical work to hold meetings limiting their focus on systemic change.

**Workforce Development Crisis.** Staffing shortages, suspended TEACH scholarships, and unclear career pathways destabilize the entire Early Childhood Education and Care workforce.

**Weak Legislative & Fellow-Agency Relationships.** Reports go unread by policymakers, recommendations unacknowledged, and representation on the Council lacks decision-makers.



*We're a mandated council with zero state funding.*

*We don't have any budget from the state at all and other states have that—they have budgets for this council."*

*— ECAC Leadership*



## Challenges

**Funding Cliff:** December 2025–July 2026. Simultaneous end of multiple grants (ARPA, PDG, HRSA) threatens council continuity, staff retention, and operational capacity.

**Workforce Collapse.** Ongoing staff shortages leading to program closures statewide; without workforce stability, all system improvements stall.

**Public Perception and Professional Recognition Crisis.** Early childhood sector viewed as 'non-professional,' weakening advocacy power and workforce appeal.

**Systemic Fragmentation.** Inter-agency competition and lack of authority perpetuate silos; agencies debate over who's responsible for ECAC.

**Geographic and Language Barriers.** Rural families face long travel distances; over 20 languages needed beyond Spanish for meaningful inclusion.

**Meeting Fatigue and Volunteer Burnout.** Current compliance and open meeting law requirements unsustainable under volunteer model.

**Data Integrity Concerns.** Conflicting population counts and limited ECIDS adoption reduce ability to measure true outcomes and progress.



*We also face a major workforce challenge. It is hard to find and keep great early childhood teachers when the pay and benefits are nowhere near what they deserve."*

*—Childcare Center Director*



## Opportunities

**Establish Sustainable State Funding and Administrative Infrastructure.** Advocate for a dedicated ECAC budget line, professional staff, and long-term sustainability beyond federal grants.

**Legislative Education and Advocacy.** Leverage family and educator voices to build legislative understanding and secure policy action ('policy influenced by parents on the front lines' in legislative districts).

**System Integration and Streamlining.** Align health, education, and social services under a potential Department of Early Childhood to address fragmentation.

**Workforce Innovation.** Develop alternative credentialing pathways, stackable credentials, and career ladders strengthen workforce retention and recognition.

**Visibility and Marketing.** Rebrand ECAC through improved communications, public-facing website redesign, dashboards to access services and storytelling to increase recognition.

**Data-Driven Decision-Making.** Expand ECIDS utilization, develop progress scorecards, and incorporate biannual public progress reviews.

**Authentic Family Leadership.** Transition from participation to co-leadership roles, ensuring families co-create policy and hold advisory power.

Overall, the Nevada ECAC exhibits significant strengths, including a strong commitment and expertise among its Advisory Council members, staff who successfully leverage federal grants and build crucial infrastructure. Family engagement has improved through the expansion of translation services, while collaboration with early childhood providers has increased awareness among health professionals and local partners.

Weaknesses, however, persist that include: a lack of sustainable funding leading to operational challenges, fragmented governance, and limited public visibility. Additionally, a workforce development crisis is exacerbated by staffing shortages and unclear career pathways. Notable challenges include: the impending funding cliff due to expiring grants, public and policymakers lack of respect for those who work in the field of early childhood, and geographic barriers causing a lack of early childhood services affecting rural families.



*ECAC's value lies in breaking down silos and enhancing cooperation among early childhood agencies."*

*— State Agency Representative*

Opportunities for improvement include advocating for sustainable state funding, enhancing visibility and communications, advocating for streamlined, easy-access to early childhood services and transitioning families from participation to co-leadership roles in policy-making processes.



### III. What We Learned from Community Engagement

The strategic planning process engaged a three-prong process of reaching out to Early Childhood thought leaders through 28 Key Informant Interviews including Governor-appointed members of the Early Childhood Advisory Council, a survey sent to community members and families yielding 1,777 completed responses and a survey sent to Early Childhood providers representing pre-schools, public-private centers and Head Start programs culminating in 212 respondents. All told, these three means of engagement yielded 2,017 individual insights to inform ECAC’s strategic planning. In addition, these findings were shared with 37 participants of the ECAC Strategic Planning Retreat. Overall, respondents represent every county throughout Nevada representing multiple stakeholders of the early childhood field. These survey insights are grounded and enlightened by the majority of respondents bringing lived-experience perspectives as parents, family, and members of the early childhood workforce.

The following section presents the key highlights learned from our community engagement endeavor to seek out “authentic voice” and tell their story.

**2,000+**  
voices shaped, informed and  
influenced this strategic plan.



## 1. Key Informant Interviews

Overall, among the 28 Thought Leaders individually interviewed, many of whom are members of the Early Childhood Advisory Council, we found that they want to see a transformative approach to early childhood services, emphasizing the need for substantial improvements rather than incremental changes. Participants envision a collaborative framework that unites various stakeholders, engages families and workforce as leaders and experts, fosters partnerships and coordinated data efforts to enhance service delivery and system effectiveness.

There is a strong call for action-oriented goals that prioritize tangible results that can be realistically pursued given the Council’s resources and advisory role. Community leaders expressed a clear expectation for the strategic plan to guide ECAC towards achieving an enhanced Early Childhood System benefiting Nevada’s children and families.

### Highlighted Insights from Key Informant Interviews

**The following insights are directly from notes resulting from hours of interviews conducted among twenty-eight Thought Leaders:**

- ECAC members, staff & partners bring decades of experience in Early Childhood Systems, and ECAC staff’s expertise in managing grants has strengthened the Council’s capacity in fulfilling its mission.
- New improvements to engage families illustrated by holding evening meetings, providing , incentives for participation and coordination with the Nevada First 5 Family Leadership Council have been very effective.
- Building cross-sector relationships has improved over the past few years with health, education and non-profit partners, however, the Council needs a greater public presence.
- The number of sub-committees and meetings (currently 82 annually) should be reduced as the logistics of organizing and conducting them overburdens the Council’s very limited staff.

- Lack of dedicated state funding of the Council, uncertainty and cuts in federal ECS funding, and a reliance on a patchwork of temporary grants significantly impacts ECAC’s organizational capacity.
- The entire Early Childhood System is facing significant challenges evidenced by a workforce shortage, centers closing, needs of children increasing, and long wait lists for children to be evaluated prior to accessing much needed support and services.



*“Dreams are great. Visions are great...but we also need to have a collective voice.”*  
 – Non profit Leader



*“Other states have dedicated budgets for their ECACs ...we rely on temporary grants and volunteer labor.”* – ECAC Member

## 2. Community Members Survey Respondents

A twelve-question survey was sent by an email invitation from ECAC to community groups and early childhood providers who, in turn, sent the survey link to their staff and families yielding 1,777 completed responses. Among those who completed the survey, 62% were parents and family members while 24 percent represent Early Childhood System providers and staff at early care or learning centers. It is notable that 41 percent of the respondents indicated that they are raising children with a diagnosed developmental disability and/or medical/health condition. A report on survey findings is available on Nevada ECAC’s website.

The following are key insights taken from the thousands of responses to quantifiable questions and open-ended comments.

62%

of respondents are family members

41%

report raising children with a “developmental disability and/or medical/health condition.”



### Two Major Themes from Community Members:

**Lack of affordability:** Early childhood care for children zero to eight years is viewed as too costly evidenced by 61 percent disagreeing that “Child care for children 8 years and younger is affordable,” Open-ended comments repeatedly cite themes of working families finding increased costs of child care consuming a sizable and unsustainable portion of their family budgets.

**Access, Availability & Fragmented Early Care System:** Respondents report a lack of early care and learning services available for children across the board but especially so among those living in rural areas citing the lack of access and availability as significant. Long wait lists to determine diagnosis and eligibility, transportation barriers and a desire for “easy access to apply for services” was cited as a “Very High”, or “High” need” by 88 percent of respondents. Parents describe feeling overwhelmed, isolated in finding help for children facing learning disabilities.

### 3. Early Childhood System Sector Survey Respondents

A fourteen-question survey was sent by an email invitation from ECAC to early childhood providers. The survey yielded 212 completed surveys of which more than half (56%) report being affiliated with “Early Childhood Education.” Nearly one-third identified their work as being in “Family Support” or “Maternal and Child Health.” Nearly half have worked in the early child field between 17 to 16 years while thirty percent have been in the field for 7-10 years. A report on survey findings is available on Nevada ECAC’s website. The following presents an overview of key highlights among the hundreds of responses to quantifiable questions and open-ended comments shared by respondents.



#### Two Major Themes from Early Childhood Sector

**Affordability, Access and Availability:** High cost of providing care and lack of funding to subsidize the costs for working families is seen as a significant challenge to operate early care centers. Families cycle in and out of centers due to changing subsidy requirements. Lack of full-day and extended care is along with insufficient infant slots were widely reported. Parents report quitting jobs because they are without affordable child care.

**Workforce Shortage, Training Needs and Fragmented System:** Recurrent themes citing a need for teachers and care aides to receive a living-wage and be given access to training, scholarships and career pathways to advance in the field were common. Agencies, programs and funding streams operate in silos leaving families and providers to navigate complex and duplicative steps to receive assistance and subsidies. Shortages of specialists in disability and developmental delay services and socio-emotional support were reported as high. Strong sentiments expressed that early care and learning should be seen as a bedrock to Nevada’s economic & social infrastructure while respecting the field and contributions of the early childhood workforce.



*Most families can't afford early childhood care because it's almost, if not more, than their monthly rent.” —Parent*



*Nevada's child care providers earn just \$13.50/hour, 20% below the living wage causing 35% annual turnover.”  
—Early Childhood Professional*

#### 4. ECAC Strategic Planning Retreat Insights

At the Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council Leadership Strategic Planning Retreat held in Las Vegas on October 29th and 30th, 2025, thirty-seven participants engaged in intensive collaborative work to shape the development of goals for the strategic plan. Following morning presentations that included stakeholder engagement findings, legislative priorities, and systems analysis, attendees broke into small groups for facilitated discussions. Each group was asked to identify three key takeaways from what they had heard and to develop up to five strategic goals for ECAC's 2026-2030 strategic plan.



#### Highlighted Observations from ECAC Strategic Planning Retreat

**Workforce Crisis & Compensation:** The misconception remains that early learning work is simply acting as a “babysitter.” There is an extremely high need for livable wages and benefits among the early childhood workforce and alternative pathways to certification in the early childhood field should be enhanced.

**Systems Integration & Access:** Families desire a user-friendly, “One-stop-Shop” method to finding and accessing early childhood services. As best described by one participant, “We need an early childhood system like Mayo Clinic’s model wherein all their services are seamless for the patient.”

**Funding & Sustainability** ECAC needs to find permanent funding not only for itself, but to advocate for other needed early childhood services and policies that benefit children and families. Materials and reports are needed to show provable high returns on investment that early learning, care and development services yield. It is also helpful to show the costs to society when those investments are lacking.

**Communication & Advocacy:** “Parents and families with lived-experience should be given the opportunity to share their insights, ideas and opinions as a means of providing valuable and authentic voice for ECAC’s work and advocacy on their behalf. The Council should form partnerships among multiple sectors making up the early childhood system, especially among workforce, health care, and mental health systems.”



*“Most families can’t afford early childhood care because it’s almost, if not more, than their monthly rent.”*

*—Family Support Professional*

## IV. Framing the Strategic Plan’s Focus Priority Areas, Goals, Objectives and Implementation Strategies

### Background on Identifying Priority Focus Areas

Following a comprehensive review of the current state of Nevada’s early childhood system broadly defined as the coordinated network of programs and supports serving children from birth through age eight and their families, the Early Childhood Advisory Council undertook several key analyses and community engagement activities. This process included conducting a SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges) analysis of the ECAC as an organization, as well as an in-depth review of the external forces that are currently influencing, and are expected to continue impacting, the Council’s mission and work over course of the next three years. As described previously, surveys were conducted among community members and early childhood system providers reaching just over 2,000 respondents.

The synthesis of these findings and retreat proceedings led to the identification of **five Priority Focus Areas** aligned with ECAC’s mission and current strategic plan.

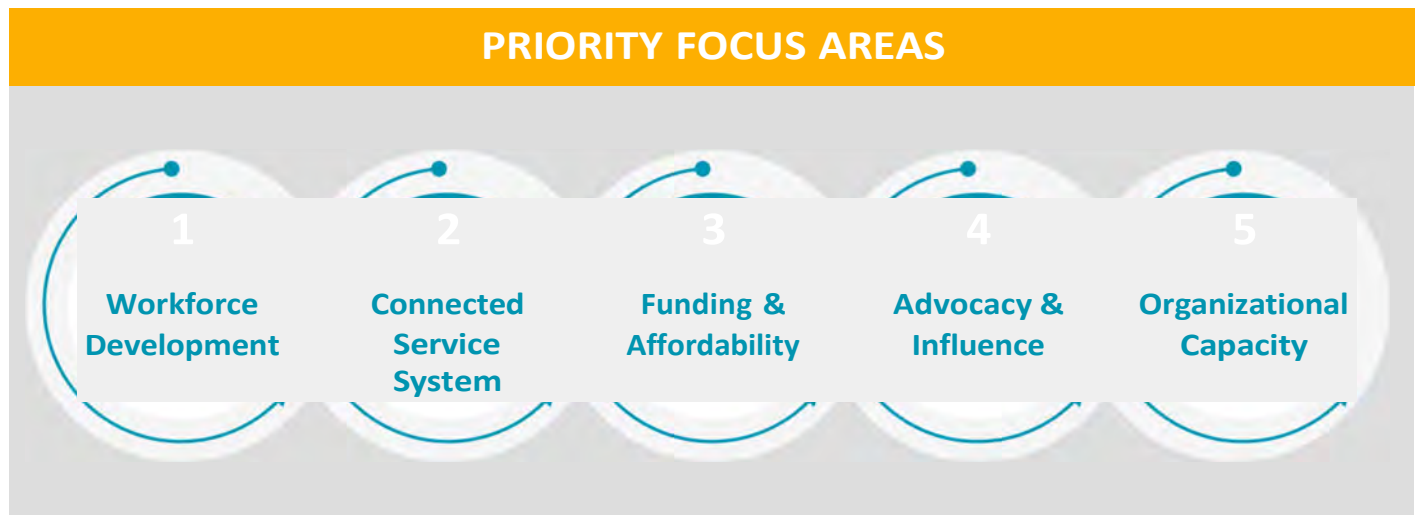
These focus areas establish the groundwork for the Goals, Objectives, and Implementation Strategies outlined in the 2026-2030 ECAC Strategic Plan. For each focus area, the following section details its specific goals, objectives, and proposed strategies that will guide implementation during the next five years.

The Priority Focus Areas all seek to fulfill our overarching vision for an Early Childhood System that enables all of Nevada’s children to grow healthily, thrive and achieve their fullest potential.



*Our North Star is a unified Early Childhood System in Nevada where every child—from prenatal through age eight—can thrive, supported by sustainable public investment; affordable, high-quality early learning and services; a respected and well-resourced workforce; evidence-based policies and programs; data-informed decision-making; and the leadership of families whose lived experience strengthens the system.*

### PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS





1

Workforce  
Development

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## GOAL OVERVIEW

ECAC embraces the principle that a strong early childhood workforce is foundational to Nevada’s success in supporting children from birth through age eight. A qualified, stable, and fairly-compensated workforce ensures high-quality learning and provides consistent relationships vital for a child’s development.

ECAC will foster collaboration among the ECS that strengthens career pathways, compensation parity, and amplifies the voices of the early learning and care workforce to shape statewide decisions and policies addressing what many consider a workforce crisis.



## GOALS

**Promote the growth and sustainability of a qualified, stable, and diverse early childhood learning and care workforce.**



## OBJECTIVES

**Shed light, voice and attention on the following areas impacting Early Childhood System workforce stakeholders that:**

1. Expand clear and flexible career pathways allowing early educators to enter and advance in the field including infant/toddler specialists, early interventionists, and Pre K to Grade 3 teachers.
2. Promote compensation parity by sharing pay and benefits data across program types and highlight funding models that support fair, competitive wages. This includes coordinating with the Funding & Affordability Priority Focus Area to ensure compensation data informs fiscal recommendations.
3. Grow and strengthen early learning educator, early care voices and leadership by embedding workforce listening sessions, surveys, and direct representation throughout the ECAC’s advisory process.
4. Improve recruitment and retention by identifying obstacles, highlighting best practices, and recommending incentives such as stipends, scholarships, or tax credits.
5. Utilize workforce data systems to monitor wages including benefits, industry trends, turnover rates, and benefits. Share annual Workforce Outcomes Updates in ECAC’s statewide reports.



*Early educators are often paid less than K-12 teachers, retail workers, or fast-food employees. Lack of health insurance, retirement plans, or paid leave discourages people from entering or staying in the field.” —Early Childhood Education Professional*



## IMPLEMENTATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. *Convene Workforce Advisory Workgroup* that aligns current ECAC workforce advisory groups to analyze career ladders, credentialing options, and training pathways across Early Childhood Systems.
2. Publish biannual 'Compensation Landscape Snapshots' summarizing early learning and care workers, pay, benefits, and workforce trends across Nevada informed by the ECE Workforce Dashboard through the Nevada Registry on workforce trends and outcomes.
3. Foster discussions and partnerships with vocational and higher education training providers to expand accessible certifications, degree and apprenticeship opportunities.
4. Host early care and early learning educator and provider listening sessions and synthesize findings in ECAC's annual report to inform policy recommendations.
5. Collaborate with state agencies to align workforce data sources (e.g., ECIDS, licensing, QRIS) and promote the development of a unified workforce dashboard for ECS stakeholders and local groups to access and enlighten their planning and decision-making.

Nevada families report navigating a fragmented landscape of early learning, health, and family support programs. In response, promoting an aligned, holistic, integrated, and family-centered early childhood system that connects services, strengthens data use, and enhances family members and guardians' ease of use to accessing services is vital.





2

Connected  
Service  
System

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## GOAL OVERVIEW

Improving the navigation of early childhood learning and services became a resounding theme among community member survey responses. In response, this goal advances an integrated, family-centered Early Childhood System by strengthening coordination across agencies, programs, and data systems serving children and families. It promotes clearer program roles, shared planning, and improved service navigation through one-stop access points, aligned eligibility tools, and shared data systems. These efforts aim to reduce fragmentation, support smoother transitions from early learning through third grade.



## GOALS

**Promote an integrated, aligned, and family-centered early childhood system that strengthens coordination across agencies and data systems.**



## OBJECTIVES

**Shed light, voice and attention on the provision of early learning and early care services within the Early Childhood System impacting children, families and service providers that:**

1. Facilitates the development of coordinated service mapping that clarifies program roles, reduces duplication, and supports joint planning across early childhood agencies and providers.
2. Promote ECS shared data systems and dashboards that connect early learning, health, and K–3 data to guide statewide decisions and continuous improvement.
3. Improve family navigation by promoting one-stop access systems, shared eligibility tools across programs and local Community Resource Hubs offering access to ECS resources.
4. Encourage shared governance structures to bring together agencies, providers, and families to improve coordination among health, human services, family supportive services and early learning and care sectors.
5. Advocate for a type of ECS Passport of information, testing results and eligibility requirements met among children with IEPs and FSSPs as they transition between early childhood learning through 3rd grade.



## IMPLEMENTATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Offer to conduct a community member survey among family members attempting to access ECS services to determine barriers, challenges and opportunities to developing a seamless, one-stop navigation portal.
2. Promote facilitation of quarterly cross-agency coordination meetings at the state and local levels to identify gaps, align goals, and identify opportunities to share resources locally and address geographic barriers in rural communities.
3. Use Nevada's ECAC Annual Reports to gather examples of system innovations and local models that showcase effective coordination and/or data use.
4. Partner with state data and technology teams to build ECIDS and integrate family experience indicators.
5. Facilitate family roundtables to gather feedback on service navigation and publish an annual *Family Experience Snapshot* that identifies gaps and opportunities to address them.



*Data collection and research-based decision-making helps identify gaps and improve service quality.*  
—Early Childhood Professional



3

Funding &  
Affordability

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## GOAL OVERVIEW

The most frequently cited need voiced throughout the community engagement process is the lack of affordable early care and learning in Nevada. Survey respondents encouraged ECAC to champion a dedicated state funding stream to support universal pre-K for four year-olds, expand early childhood services, and incentivize employers (e.g., through tax credits) to businesses that offer child care benefits. Many emphasize the need for the state to view early care and education as a public good similar to providing Nevada’s children an education through its support of K-12 schools.



## GOALS

**Promote sustainable funding streams for early childhood systems and improve affordability of early care and learning programs.**



## OBJECTIVES

**Shed light, voice and attention on the deep need for affordable early care and learning programs along with opportunities for the state to invest in funding streams and strategies that:**

1. Raise public, legislative and policymaker awareness as to the economic and social value of investing in early care and learning and the costs incurred by not making the investment.
2. Identify and promote varied, stable and shared funding sources that reduce reliance on federal grants and strengthen long-term sustainability.
3. Promote the development of a universal, state-funded pre-kindergarten program for all four-year olds.
4. Explore incentives for businesses to offer child care and early learning benefits and the state identify ways to allocate funds from revenue sources that ensure a permanent early childhood system funding source.
5. Discover ways to assist families from being cut-off from support as they work their way towards self-sufficiency known as the “Cliff Effect” (e.g. Dynamic Adjustment Policies).



***88% of community members say the need for “Easy access to apply for services,” is Very High and High.” Source: Nevada ECAC Community Member Survey among 1,777 respondents.***



## IMPLEMENTATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Maintain a *Fiscal Landscape Report* detailing all early childhood funding sources, system gaps and Nevada's national rankings in early childhood systems.
2. Publish Return on Investment (ROI) briefs and infographics that show how early learning investments strengthen Nevada's children, families, communities, workforce and economic growth.
3. Facilitate collaboration among state agencies, early childhood advisory bodies, stakeholders, and legislative staff to identify public-private partnerships and dedicated state funding options that improve the affordability of early care and learning in Nevada.

***Nevada ranked 41st among states for access to state funded preschool for four-year olds indicating very limited reach of public early learning investments relative to other states. Source: National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), State of Preschool Yearbook 2024, published April 2, 2025 (2023–24 data).***

4. Provide materials that show how the costs of child care and early childhood education impacts household spending through press releases, policy briefs and testimony to inform legislative and policymaker decision-making.
5. Issue an annual "State of Affairs" report on Nevada's Early Childhood System that presents facts, trends, and affordability indicators exemplified by stories of lived experience to track progress and gaps across the system. This "Call to Action" report would enlighten decision-making among stakeholders and policymakers.



*Let's launch a sustained, statewide public awareness campaign using compelling data and personal stories to reframe early childhood education as a critical public good and a smart economic investment." —Early Childhood Advocate*



4

Advocacy &  
Influence

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## GOAL OVERVIEW

ECAC's unique mandate and mission to strengthen state-level collaboration among early childhood sectors by making strategic recommendations that increase participation of children in early childhood programs and enhance the systems and services that support them. This goal leverages ECAC's position to drive policy change, influence decisions at the state level, and ensure that early childhood is embraced as a leading priority in Nevada.



## GOALS

**Elevate the visibility and value of early childhood learning and care achieved through a coordinated Early Childhood System dedicated to enhancing children’s lives.**



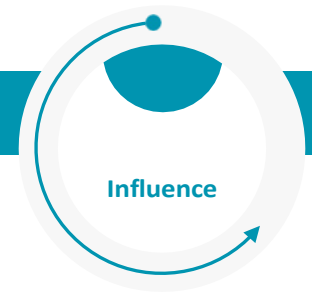
## OBJECTIVES

**Shed light, voice and attention on the value and promise of early childhood care and learning for children, families, communities and society that:**

1. Strengthens and enhances the Family Engagement and Leadership program that prepares family members to serve as partners in planning and implementing ECAC goals.
2. Provides materials accessible in multiple languages to expand family and ECS stakeholder awareness as to the issues and needs facing early care and learning in Nevada.
3. Positions ECAC as the “go to” source to receive authentic, lived-experience stories and voice among state agencies seeking input from community members and ECS providers to better inform their policy and decision-making.
4. Assembles an Early Childhood Data Toolkit of charts, infographics and briefs highlighting trends, issues, and childhood needs impacting the Early Childhood System among the Five Priority Focus Areas.
5. Provides “Community Engagement Mini-Grants” to partner with and support local non-profits, faith based groups, and libraries to host community/neighborhood events that provide information, referrals and resources to families seeking assistance in early childhood services.



*The state should actively engage and listen to ECAC to improve early childhood services.” — ECAC Member.*



## IMPLEMENTATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Create online, highly interactive listening sessions and forums that function as Work Groups gathering ideas and insights from ECS stakeholders among the Five Priority Focus Areas. The model would also be developed for local, in-person sessions.
2. Seek out University partners that can offer a cadre of interns to perform administrative and programmatic functions along with seeking volunteers from groups such as AARP with their strong intergenerational advocacy, non-profits and faith-based organizations.
3. Partner with state agencies and advisory bodies to sponsor legislative engagement events at local district offices and the Capitol, supported by policy briefs and advocacy toolkits that equip families, advocates, and providers to tell their stories and share their policy goals.
4. Form a partnership with a university, a state agency and/or a non-profit to develop a Child Opportunity Index for each county in Nevada utilizing the [Diversity Data Kids](https://www.diversitydatakids.org/) model. This will enable ECAC to “go local” in its advocacy and more powerfully tell the story of children’s early care and learning needs when the findings being shown are close to home.



**The Child Opportunity Index**  
 Measures and maps the neighborhood conditions children need to grow and thrive.  
 .....  
<https://www.diversitydatakids.org/>



5

Organizational  
Capacity

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## GOAL OVERVIEW

The Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is committed to building a sustainable operational foundation that strengthens its ability to represent and elevate the voices of families, providers, and community partners with lived experience. This goal establishes stable administrative capacity, streamlining governance, enhancing communication, and cultivating strategic partnerships that position ECAC as a trusted voice for Nevada’s early childhood system.



## GOALS

**Establish a sustainable operational Infrastructure to fulfill the mission and mandate of the Early Childhood Advisory Council.**



## OBJECTIVES

**Shed light, voice and attention on the need and opportunity for ECAC to strengthen its operational infrastructure as it faces potential reduction of resources yet maintains its capacity to fulfill its mission and mandate through actions that:**

1. Identify and acquire long-term administrative capacity and funding beyond the current in-kind, multi-agency, temporary federal grant dependent model.
2. Streamline the governance structure to accommodate impending diminished administrative support while maintaining capacity to fulfill the organization's mission and mandate.
3. Enhance communications, brand and messaging on early childhood needs to enlighten, inform and engage the public, legislators, family members and Early Childhood System stakeholders to address those needs.
4. Explore the feasibility and advantages of securing a "home" within state government that can provide a sustainable infrastructure and ambassador for ECAC to perform its core functions.
5. Develop state intra-agency and public-private partnerships that augment the work of ECAC in reaching its goals.
6. Create Key Performance Measures to ensure that opportunities for engaging authentic voice/experience throughout all of ECAC goals and objectives are met.



*Nevada's early childhood system is characterized by fragmented governance and under-coordinated investment, reducing the effectiveness of limited funding relative to other states. (Source: Guinn Center for Policy Priorities, From Crowded to Coordinated: Examining the Governance of Nevada's Early Childhood System, December 2023)*



## IMPLEMENTATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Explore with the Governor's Office, the Departments of Health and Human Services and Education and other state government ECS affiliated entities (e.g. the Children's Cabinet), the opportunity of receiving in-kind support and/or direct funding of two FTE administrative positions.
2. Explore and establish partnerships with local universities and colleges to acquire interns to assist with communications, supporting family engagement activities, use of social media, and conducting data analysis and research to develop briefs and White Papers.
3. Maximize the use of the current OnStrategy platform to track progress on goals, objectives and key results of implementation strategies among the five overarching goals and objectives of the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan.
4. Enhance and promote ECAC's value-added role in state government as a convener giving voice to community members, families, and providers of early learning and care. Explore the feasibility of state agencies and entities commissioning ECAC to perform and receive funding for this function.
5. Continue and enhance ECAC's work in establishing Early Care and Learning Legislative Priorities, one of which is to continue advocating for the establishment of a Governor's Early Childhood Office and another is to promote universal pre-k for four-year-olds.
6. Develop clear funding, strategy and/or program "asks" tied to measurable outcomes when advocates and stakeholders meet with legislators.

"Research is clear that dollars spent on quality Pre-K programs deliver the greatest return: reducing learning gaps, improving long-term outcomes, and easing the strain on schools later on. Access to Pre-K and early childhood programs is one of the smartest, most effective investments we can make for our state and our children's future."

*Early Childhood Advocate*

# Appendix



# Organizational Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges (SWOC) Analysis



## STRENGTHS

- Deep institutional knowledge and experience among ECAC members & staff managing major federal grants and systems (PDG, HRSA, ARPA, ECIDS).
- Tangible progress in family engagement (Parent Leadership Councils, evening meetings, translation services, and stipends for family member engagement) and communications via branding and messaging.
- Strengthened cross-sector relationships with health, education, and nonprofit partners improving coordination.
- Facilitated cross-agency data integration on early childhood needs, services & programs.
- Legislative mandate to give voice to families advocating for enhanced coordination among ECS sectors and make recommendations to the Governor.

## WEAKNESSES

- Lack of direct and sustainable state funding.
- ECAC operates solely on temporary grants ending in 2026.
- Loss of staff due to ending of grants December 31, 2025.
- Excessive meeting load (82–84 annually) strains volunteers and logistical planning with limited staff.
- Volunteer fatigue and compliance burdens under the current model are unsustainable.
- Limited public awareness of ECAC among advocates, ECS providers, community members and legislature.
- Goals sometimes exceed ECAC’s statutory authority and capacity.
- Lack of an organizational home that could garner direct access to the Governor’s Office and staffing/organizational resources.
- Weak relationships with fellow agencies, Governor’s Office and legislature as reports and recommendations go unread with no response.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Support for a Governor’s Office of Early Childhood remains as does securing a formal home for ECAC within state gov’t.
- Greater legislative engagement through concise data briefs and early-education advocacy at local and district level.
- Encourage development of workforce pipelines with stackable credentials and alternative pathways.
- Use of ECIDS data for transparency, reporting, and decision-making; facilitate developing Child Opportunity Index data by county.
- Solidify ECAC’s value-added role as giving voice to community members, families and ECS providers.
- Create internships and partnerships with universities and volunteer organizations to augment ECAC work.

## CHALLENGES

- Impending funding cliff as federal grants expire in 2026 threatens continuity of core functions and staffing.
- Fragmented governance and inter-agency silos make it difficult for ECAC to navigate and promote coordination.
- Advisory-only authority limits enforcement or accountability of recommendations.
- Early Childhood Systems & programs statewide will face extreme barriers to funding among federal grants.
- Economic hardships on families and children due to ACA subsidy, Medicaid, and SNAP cuts will increase as will costs of child care amidst an ECS workforce shortage.

## WHY EARLY CHILDHOOD MATTERS

### Early Childhood (0-8 yrs)

Early childhood (0 to 8 yrs) dramatically shapes lifelong learning, health, and success.

Many Nevada families struggle to find affordable, reliable child care.



The Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) works to improve and coordinate systems that support young children and families.

## KEY CHALLENGES

Child care is increasingly unaffordable for working families.



Workforce shortages and high turnover rates.



Fragmented services and difficult application process.



Long waitlists for developmental evaluation and intervention.



Impending federal funding cuts placing pressure on state budgets.



## NEVADA BY THE NUMBERS

Source: Children's Cabinet Fact Sheet, 2025

**41%**

of Nevada children live under 200% of the poverty level exposing them to toxic stress & poor health.



Source: Healthy People 2030



**8th**

Nevada ranks as the 8th least affordable state for infant care



**65%**

of children 0-5 years live in households with working parents.

**6.5%**

Only 6.5% of children living under 200% of poverty receive a state child care subsidy.



## WHAT FAMILIES AND PROVIDERS SAY

Source: 2025 ECAC Survey 1,777 sample

### Top concerns:

"Teachers leave because they cannot survive on low wages."

"Child Care costs as much as rent."

"Waitlists are so long that parents give up."



Early child care costs



Long waits for evaluation and support services



Limited infant and toddler slots



Confusing system to access services



Lack of access in rural areas

## HOW ECAC WILL HELP MOVE NEVADA FORWARD



Uplift the voices, insights and leadership of those with lived experience

Shed light, voice and attention to the issues, goals and objectives addressed in the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan.



Recommend policy solutions based on lived experience and evidence.

Facilitate coordination and communication across agencies and sectors.



Our North Star is a Unified Early Childhood System in Nevada where every child - from prenatal through age eight - can thrive by being supported through: sustainable public investment; affordable, high-quality early learning and services; a respected and well-resourced workforce; evidence-based policies and programs; data-informed decision-making; and the leadership of families whose lived experience strengthens the system.