

Where children are born can affect their chances for a strong start in life. Babies need good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences to foster their healthy brain development and help them realize their full potential.

This state profile provides a snapshot of how infants, toddlers, and their families are faring in each of these three policy domains. Within each domain, view data for selected child, family, and policy indicators compared to national averages. The profile begins with a demographic description of the state's babies and families to offer the broadest context for exploring what may be very different experiences of the state's youngest children.

Demographics

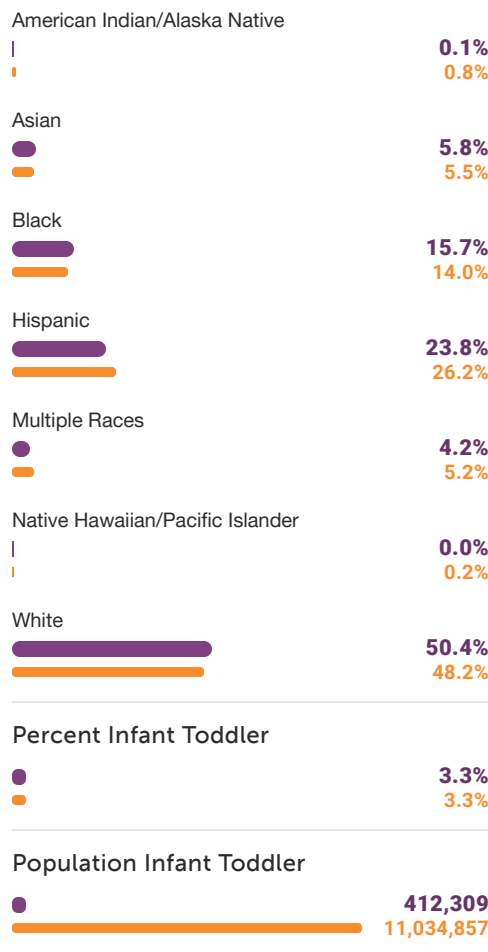
 Illinois  National Average

Infants and toddlers in Illinois

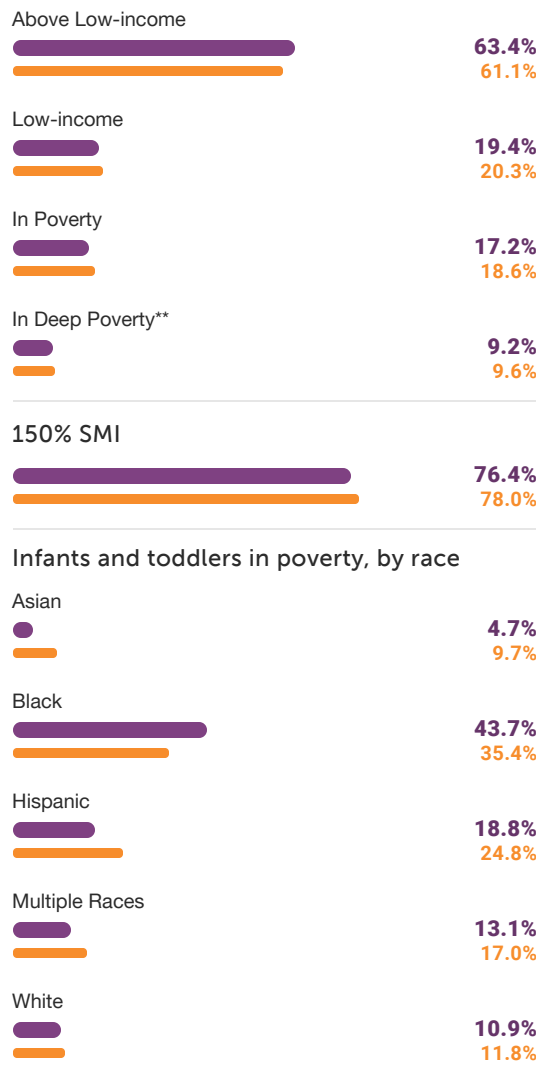
Illinois is home to 412,309 babies, representing 3.3 percent of the state's population. As many as 36.6 percent live in households with incomes less than twice the federal poverty line (in 2021, about \$55,000 for a family of four¹), placing them at economic disadvantage. The state's youngest children are diverse and are raised in a variety of family contexts and household structures.

1. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. Poverty Thresholds by Size of Family and Number of Children. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html>

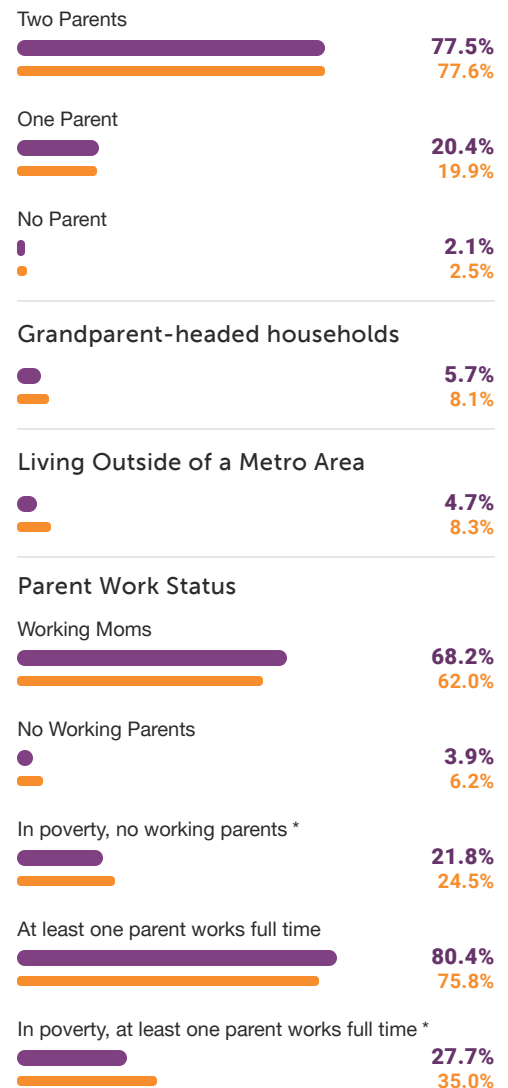
Race/ethnicity of infants and toddlers



Poverty status of infants and toddlers



Family Structure



*Numbers are small; use caution in interpreting.

**Subset of "In Poverty"

Note: N/A indicates Not Available

How are Illinois's babies faring in Good Health?

Supporting babies’ and mothers’ physical and mental health provides the foundation for infants’ lifelong physical, cognitive, emotional, and social well-being. Babies’ brains grow rapidly in the first years of life, and, in these early years, the brain works with other organs and organ systems to set the stage for subsequent development and health outcomes. Equitable access to good nutrition during the prenatal period and first years of life is key to ensure that babies receive the nourishment and care they need for a strong start in life. Strengthening equitable access to integrated, affordable maternal, pediatric, and family health care is also essential to meeting babies’ and families’ health and developmental needs.

Illinois falls in the Reaching Forward (R) tier for the Good Health domain. A state’s ranking is based on indicators of maternal and child health, including health care coverage, prenatal care, birth outcomes, and receipt of recommended preventive care as well as nutrition and mental health. Illinois performs better than national averages on key indicators, such as the percentage of babies receiving preventative medical care and Medicaid income eligibility level for pregnant women. The state is performing worse than national averages on indicators such as the percentage of eligible 1-year-olds participating in WIC and babies receiving preventative dental care.

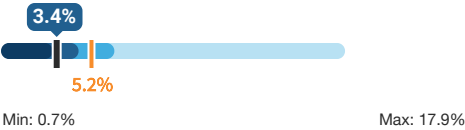
Key Indicators of Good Health

● Illinois ● National Avg

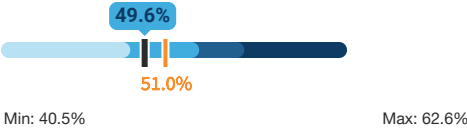
Eligibility limit (% FPL) for pregnant women in Medicaid



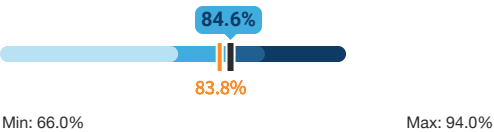
Uninsured low-income infants and toddlers



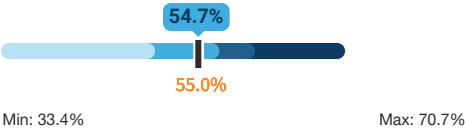
Medical home



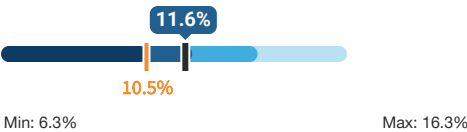
Infants ever breastfed NR



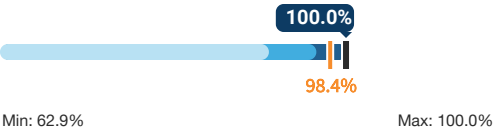
Infants breastfed at 6 months



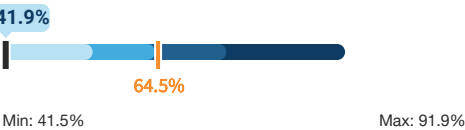
High weight-for-length in WIC NR



WIC coverage for infants *



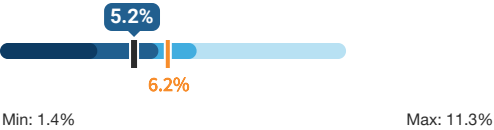
WIC coverage for one-year-olds



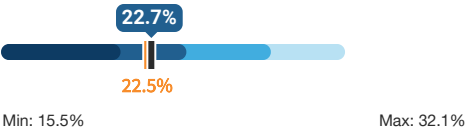
WIC coverage for two-year-olds



Late or no prenatal care received



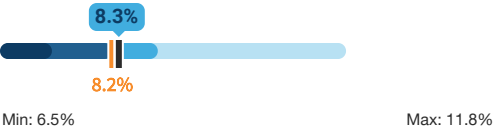
Mothers reporting less than optimal mental health



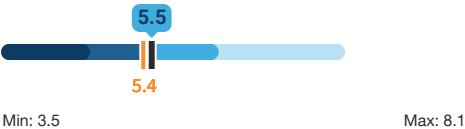
Babies born preterm



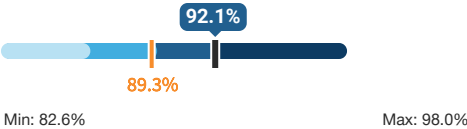
Babies with low birthweight



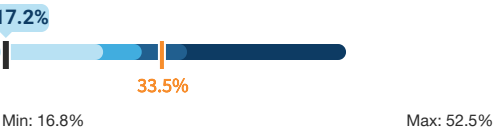
Infant mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)



Preventive medical care received



Preventive dental care received



Received recommended vaccines



*Numbers are small; use caution in interpreting.

Good Health Policy in Illinois

Medicaid expansion state		Yes	✓
CHIP maternal coverage for unborn child option	NR	Yes	✓
Postpartum extension of Medicaid coverage	Law covering all pregnant people for 1 year post-partum		
Pregnant workers protection	All employees covered (private and state)		
State Medicaid policy for maternal depression screening in well-child visits	Recommended		
Medicaid plan covers social-emotional screening for young children		No	✗
Medicaid plan covers IECMH services at home		Yes	✓
Medicaid plan covers IECMH services at pediatric/family medicine practices		Yes	✓
Medicaid plan covers IECMH services in early childhood education settings		No	✗

Note: N/A indicates Not Available

All Good Health Indicators for Illinois

State IndicatorNational Avg

Health Care Coverage and Affordability

Eligibility limit (% FPL) for pregnant women in Medicaid	213.0 200.0	Uninsured low-income infants and toddlers	3.4% 5.2%
Medical home	49.6% 51.0%		

Nutrition

Infants ever breastfed	NR	Infants breastfed at 6 months	54.7% 55.0%
High weight-for-length in WIC	NR	WIC coverage for infants	100.0% 98.4%
WIC coverage for one-year-olds	41.9% 64.5%	WIC coverage for two-year-olds	37.2% 48.1%

Maternal Health

Late or no prenatal care received	5.6% 6.4%	Maternal mortality rate (deaths per 100,000 live births)	NR 23.8
Mothers reporting less than optimal mental health	20.2% 21.9%		

Children’s Health

Babies born preterm	10.3% 10.1%	Babies with low birthweight	8.3% 8.2%
Infant mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)	5.5 5.4	Preventive dental care received	17.2% 33.5%
Preventive medical care received	92.1% 89.3%	Received recommended vaccines	69.6% 72.5%

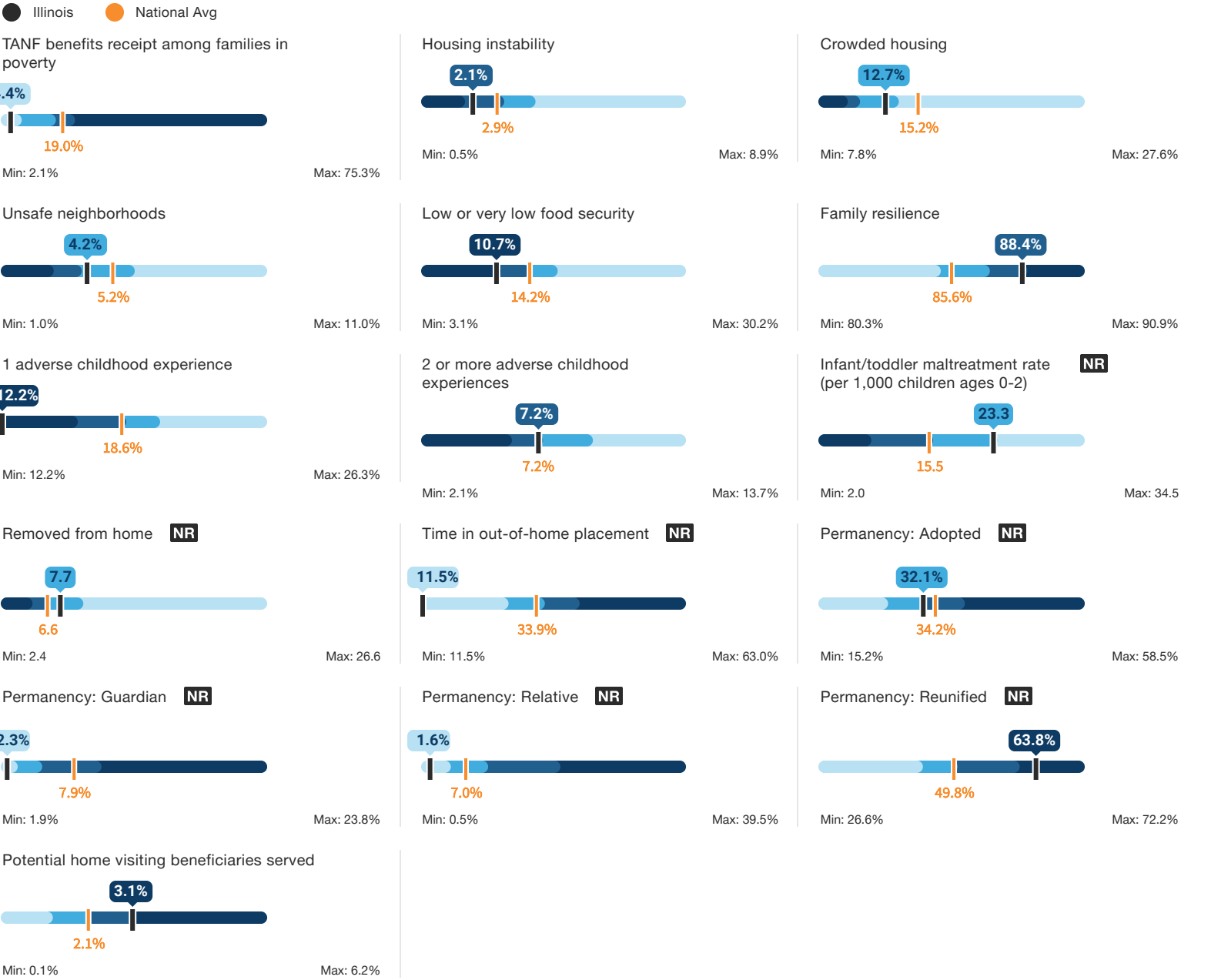
Note: N/A indicates Not Available.

How are Illinois's babies faring in Strong Families?

Young children develop in the context of their families, where stability, safety, and supportive relationships nurture their growth. All families may benefit from parenting supports, but families with low income and in historically marginalized communities of color face additional challenges that impact their babies’ immediate and future well-being. Many policies can be designed to address these disparities by race, ethnicity, and income, including the provision of safe and stable housing, home visiting services, family-friendly employer policies, economic support for families with low income, and tax credits that benefit families with young children.

Illinois falls in the Improving Outcomes (O) tier of states when it comes to indicators of Strong Families. The state’s ranking in this domain reflects indicators on which it is performing better than the national average, such as the percentage of babies experiencing food insecurity and babies who could benefit from home visiting receiving those services. The state is performing close to or better than the national averages for the Strong Families indicators used in the ranking.

Key Indicators of Strong Families



*Numbers are small; use caution in interpreting.

Strong Families Policy in Illinois

Paid family leave	No	✗
Paid sick time that covers care for child	No	✗
TANF work exemption	Yes	✓
State child tax credit	No	✗
State Earned Income Tax Credit	Yes	✓

Note: N/A indicates Not Available

All Strong Families Indicators for Illinois

State IndicatorNational Avg

Basic Needs

TANF benefits receipt among families in poverty	4.4% 19.0%	Housing instability	2.1% 2.9%
Crowded housing	12.7% 15.2%	Unsafe neighborhoods	4.1% 5.0%
Low or very low food security	10.7% 14.2%		

Child Well-being and Resilience

Family resilience	88.4% 85.6%	1 adverse childhood experience	NR12.2% 18.6%
2 or more adverse childhood experiences	7.2% 7.2%	Infant/toddler maltreatment rate (per 1,000 children ages 0-2)	NR23.3 15.5
Removed from home	NR7.7 6.6	Time in out-of-home placement	NR11.5% 33.9%
Permanency: Adopted	NR32.1% 34.2%	Permanency: Guardian	NR2.3% 7.9%
Permanency: Relative	NR1.6% 7.0%	Permanency: Reunified	NR63.8% 49.8%
Potential home visiting beneficiaries served	3.1% 2.1%		

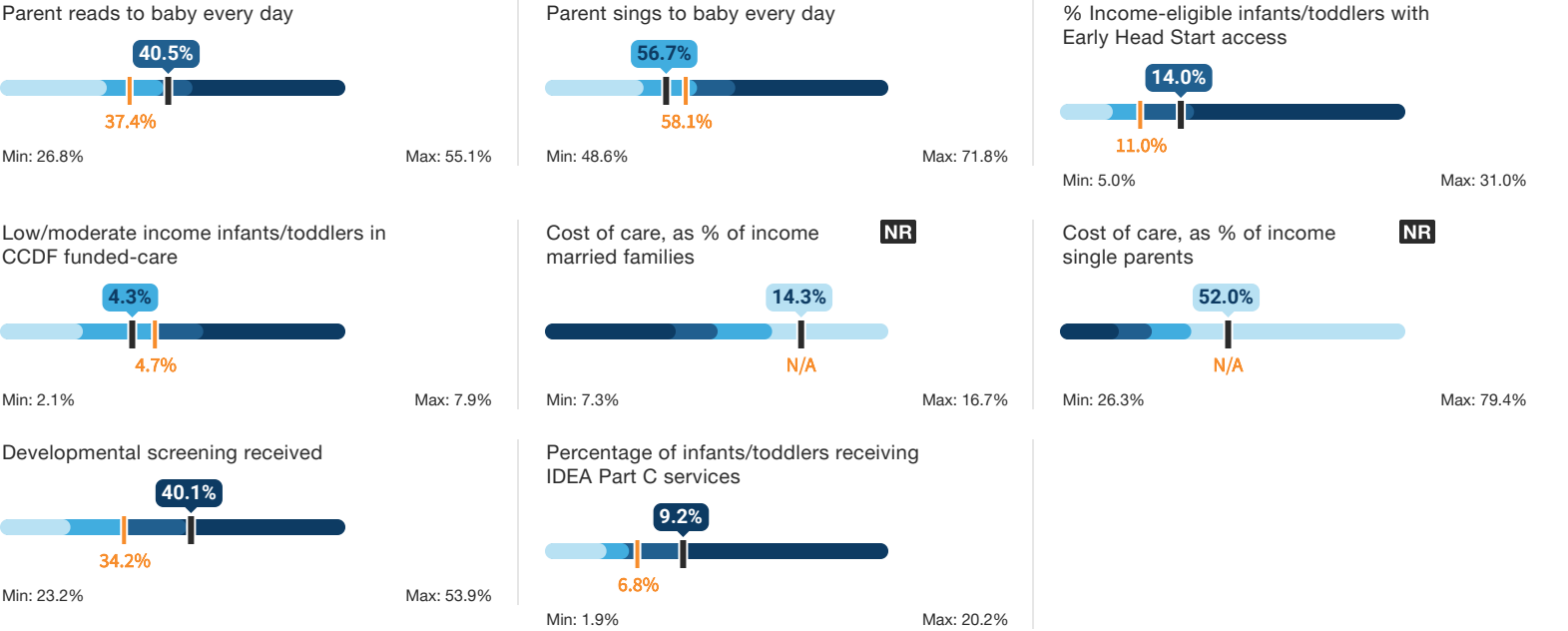
How are Illinois's babies faring in Positive Early Learning?

Infants and toddlers learn through interactions with the significant adults in their lives and active exploration of enriching environments. The quality of babies’ early learning experiences at home and in other care settings can impact their cognitive and social-emotional development as well as early literacy. High-quality early childhood care can strengthen parents’ interactions with their children in the home learning environment and support parents’ ability to go to work or attend school. Equitable access to high-quality care across factors like race, ethnicity, and income ensures all infants and toddlers have the opportunity for optimal development. However, disparities in access to high-quality care remain across many states and communities in the United States.

Illinois scores in the Reaching Forward (R) tier for Positive Early Learning Experiences. The state’s ranking in this domain reflects indicators on which it is performing better than the national average, such as the percentage of infants/toddlers who received a developmental screening in the past year. Illinois is doing worse than the national average on indicators such as the percentage of parents who sing to their babies daily. Beginning with the 2022 profile, infant care costs as a percentage of the state’s median income for single and married parents are not factored into the ranking.

Key Indicators of Positive Early Learning Experiences

● Illinois ● National Avg



*Numbers are small; use caution in interpreting.

Positive Early Learning Experiences Policy in Illinois

Adult/child ratio	EHS standards met for 1 of 3 age groups
Level of teacher qualification required by the state beyond a high school diploma	No credential beyond a high school diploma
Group size	EHS standards met for 0 of 3 age groups
Infant/toddler professional credential	NRYes ✓
Families above 200% of FPL eligible for child care subsidy	No ✗
State reimburses center-based child care	No ✗
At-risk children included in Part C eligibility definition	NRNo ✗

Note: N/A indicates Not Available

All Positive Early Learning Experiences Indicators for Illinois

State IndicatorNational Avg

Activities that Support Early Learning

Parent reads to baby every day	40.5% 37.4%	Parent sings to baby every day	56.7% 58.1%
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Access to Early Learning Programs

% Income-eligible infants/toddlers with Early Head Start access	14.0% 11.0%	Low/moderate income infants/toddlers in CCDF-funded care	4.3% 4.7%
Cost of care, as % of income married families	NR14.3% NA	Cost of care, as % of income single parents	NR52.0% NA

Early Intervention

Developmental screening received	40.1% 34.2%	Percentage of infants/toddlers receiving IDEA Part C services	9.2% 6.8%
Timeliness of Part C services	NR100.0% NA		

Note: N/A indicates Not Available.