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## **Publicly funded, center-based early childhood development programs are strongly recommended to reduce cognitive developmental delay**

Child development is a powerful determinant of health in adult life as indicated by the strong relationship in adulthood between level of education and health status. Low socioeconomic status in early life puts children's cognitive and behavioral development at risk. Comprehensive preschool programs for low-income children, aged 3–5 years, can improve readiness for school.

A systematic review of published studies, conducted on behalf of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services by a team of experts, found that early childhood development programs are effective in improving preparedness to learn: children who participated in these programs are more likely to be promoted with classmates and less likely to be placed in special education classes than children who were not in such programs. Based on strong evidence from this review, the Task Force issued a recommendation that this intervention be implemented.

### **Background on Early Childhood Development Programs**

- Publicly-funded comprehensive early childhood education programs are designed to foster healthy development and increase the school readiness of young children by promoting cognitive and social development. Head Start serves low-income families, providing a range of individualized services in the areas of education and early childhood development; medical, dental, and mental health; nutrition; and parent involvement.

### **Findings from the Systematic Review**

- In 12 of 17 studies reviewed, participation in early childhood development programs resulted in decreases in future grade retention and special education placement.
- The median estimates from the reviewed studies suggest that children who attend early childhood development programs are 13% less likely to be retained ("held back") in grade level and 14% less likely to be placed in special education programs in the future.
- Interventions that improve children's opportunities to learn and develop capacity should be relevant in essentially all communities. These interventions are particularly important for children in communities disadvantaged by high rates of poverty, violence, substance abuse, and physical and social disorder.
- Long-term benefits observed in follow-up periods of 15 or 20 years included improved high school graduation rates, decreases in teen pregnancy, decreased delinquency, and higher rates of employment.

### **Publications:**

- **MMWR/Recommendations and Reports** – [February 1, 2002/Vol. 51/ No. RR-1](#). A report on findings.
- **American Journal of Preventive Medicine** – [Am J Prev Med 2003; 24\(3S\); 32-46](#). A report on findings and evidence

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**The Guide to Community Preventive Services** (Community Guide) provides recommendations on population-based interventions to promote health and to prevent disease, injury, disability, and premature death, appropriate for use by communities and healthcare systems. For more information about the Community Guide (including links to publications and a variety of resources) see [www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org) and for more information about the social environment and health review see [www.thecommunityguide.org/social/](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/social/).

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