

# Promoting school readiness and a head start for all

United States of America/Department of Health and Human Services: Head Start Programme of 1965

Early childhood is the most critical phase of a child's development. The USA's Head Start programme, which promotes school readiness of children under five from mainly low-income families, is required to offer inclusive early childhood services and, since 2007, is mandated to ensure that at least 10% of enrollees are children with disabilities.

## IN BRIEF

The Head Start programme was founded in 1965, was expanded in 1981, and was reauthorized in 2007. It is the largest federal programme to deliver high-quality early learning opportunities to low-income children under five, founded on the idea that every child deserves the chance to reach his or her full potential. The programme provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services. Since 1972 the programme had been required to reserve at least 10% of its enrolment opportunities for children with disabilities, with more specific requirements implemented as of 2007.

## FACTS & FIGURES

- In 2013–2014, Head Start served 1,076,000 children and pregnant women.
- In 2014, 12.2% of enrollees were children with disabilities (108,316).
- In 2010–2011, there were 17,974 local education agencies (LEA); 14,086 LEA Agreements to Coordinate Disabilities Services; 12,961 LEA Agreements to Coordinate Transition Services; 10,946 Pre-kindergarten Collaboration Resource Sharing Agreements; and 6,107 Part C Agreements to Coordinate Disabilities Services.

## INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

### Equal opportunity for all

Head Start pioneered solutions to fight the effects of poverty and to build ladders of opportunity by empowering children and their families to foster positive parent-child relationships, to reach for economic and family stability, and to make connections to their peers and their communities.

### Early identification

Head Start's emphasis on providing developmental and health screenings helps to identify disabilities.

### Active recruitment

Head Start programmes actively recruit children with disabilities while also addressing the critical area of health and mental health.

## CONTEXT

During the transition from pre-school to elementary school, children in low-income families are often disadvantaged, especially those with disabilities. Shortly after its launch in 1965, Head Start was expanded to a year-round programme. Since 1972 at least 10% of enrolment opportunities had to be reserved for children with disabilities. In 1994, Early Head Start was introduced, servicing children aged 0 to 3. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 reauthorized the programme and required that at least 10 percent of enrollees are children with disabilities and that specific provisions be provided to support them with high-quality early learning opportunities. Since 2009 the Head Start Performance Standards have provided additional requirements applicable to both the Head Start and Early Head Start programmes.

## QUOTE

*I'm a Head Start kid. And thanks to an excellent teacher, Mrs. Pack, I did get a head start. I learned to love learning, and that love has stayed with me my whole life. That's a foundation that all children can have.* —Sylvia Mathews Burwell, 22nd Secretary of Health & Human Services (HHS), United States of America

## KEY FEATURES

The USA's Head Start Programme is a national legally-binding policy that promotes school readiness of children under five from mainly low-income families. While Head Start serves pre-school children, Early Head Start serves infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. Based on the "whole child philosophy," it comprises education, health, social, nutrition, as well as parental involvement services. Services are provided by a large variety of agencies (public, private, non-profit, and for-profit) to which federal grants are awarded directly. Since 2007 quality improvements have included a broader definition of disability, more accessible physical environments, stricter enrolment procedures, and better monitoring. Since 2009 grantees are required to develop a disabilities service plan, to actively recruit children with disabilities, to complete health and developmental screenings, and to create an individualized education programme for every child with a disability.

## OUTCOME, IMPACT, AND EFFECTIVENESS

- As of 2015, Head Start has operated for 50 years. Today, all 50 U.S. states sponsor additional child care services and the majority of states sponsor pre-kindergarten programmes.

- Attendees of high-quality pre-schools – including Head Start enrollees – are less likely to need special education.
- Children enrolled in Early Head Start were more likely to receive early intervention services for children with disabilities than comparable children not enrolled in the programme.

### **TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY, AND COST-EFFICIENCY**

In 2014 the total costs for Head Start and Early Head Start was approximately \$8.6 billion, an increase of \$1 billion since the programme's reauthorization in 2007. In 2015 a joint U.S. Policy Statement on the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programmes highlighted Head Start's role as a fully inclusive early childhood programme offering comprehensive services. The Office of Head Start frequently hosts visiting delegations from other countries – recently from Australia, India, and Singapore.

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### **POLICY**

Head Start Programme of 1965, reauthorized in 2007, of the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, United States of America

### **SOURCES**

U.S. Public Law 110-134 Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007:

<http://1.usa.gov/1k7lOlf>

Head Start Performance Standards, 2015: <http://1.usa.gov/1N5ycny>

ED & HHS, Policy Statement on Inclusion in Early Childhood Programs, 2015:

<http://1.usa.gov/1Lu5Uhj>