Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

Supporting Early Literacy for Babies and Toddlers in Military Families With Recent Federal Action in 200 Words

Health Equity

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When caregivers read aloud with their children in the earliest years, it helps stimulate healthy brain development and form the safe, stable, nurturing relationships that young children need to thrive.

Despite the benefits, it can be challenging to sustain these everyday routines. Military families, in particular, face deployment, frequent moves and other pressures. While they are resourceful and resilient in the face of adversity, families should also have universal access to evidence-informed practices that support their children. One such program is Reach Out and Read, a literacy promotion model implemented during routine well-child visits, which the American Academy of Pediatrics considers an essential component of primary care.

Recent activity at the federal level has put military families closer to this important literacy support. In June 2022, U.S. Reps. Chrissy Houlahan and Peter Meijer introduced H.R. 8208, the Children's Literacy in Military Bases (CLIMB) Act, to permanently provide Reach Out and Read in all military treatment facilities. This bill aligns with language that was included in the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act, thanks to the championing of the issue by Rep. Houlahan. Having consistent access to these expanded resources on military installations would be a great step forward towards all military families having both tools and guidance to promote child learning and development, and we will continue our efforts to explore how to sustainably fund Reach Out and Read here in Pennsylvania so it is accessible for all children.

Katie Lane, MPH, is the former policy manager for Reach Out and Read based at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategic Operations & Communications Director ***Lauren Walens***.