

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE 2020s AND BEYOND



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Results of interviews and facilitated conversations conducted between
November 2020 and March 2021

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BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY OF THIS REPORT

This report was created to assist the leadership of Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies – The Montana Coalition (HMHB) in its consideration of strategy in the coming decade. Early childhood and public health services are going through seismic shifts in Montana, affecting the range of opportunities facing HMHB.

Staff have adapted during the last 5 years to the changing conditions in Montana, showing positive results in areas not traditionally part of HMHB's work. Adaptations continued, and grew in importance, in 2020 during the Covid pandemic as HMHB partnered with many other organizations to address needs in maternal mental health, child care, out of school care, and other supports for families.

The methodology for this report included:

- Facilitated dialog with staff, board president, partners and key consultants to build insights
- Interviews with members of the economic development community and child care/out of school care
- Focus group with the Montana Early Childhood Coalitions to explore the value of HMHB's facilitation
- Staff planning session (virtually) to identify and clarify opportunities in the operating environment and organizational capacity
- Analysis of organizational documents, website, and external information sources

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

While many in our state know and appreciate HMHB for the emerging roles of the last 5 years, they have not been clearly reflected in HMHB's core identity, communications, or ongoing revenue generation strategies. Similarly, while the board has been informed about the tactical adaptations made by staff, ***there has not been the opportunity for a larger conversation with the board of directors about how HMHB's programmatic approach and strategy have evolved.*** The Covid-19 pandemic provided a chance to step back and reconsider the strategic framework of HMHB, and help the board "catch up" with the strategic shifts in public health and early childhood.

During this period of evolution in HMHB's roles in Montana, this report is intended to assist the board of directors in its governance role as "guardians of the mission", and in strategic planning and budgeting. ***As your entrepreneurial, passionate staff explore and develop new opportunities, it is probable that the board will be asked to consider and approve changes to key areas of HMHB's functioning, including:***

- programmatic mix and focus
- budget
- new funding sources and strategies
- brand identity/marketing
- staffing

WHAT DOES THE STAFF NEED FROM THE BOARD IN ITS GOVERNANCE ROLE?

- **Generative Thinking:** asking questions about the big picture and the “why” behind new ideas, in their role as “guardians of mission”. In this role the board seeks insight and illumination about the work of HMHB on a deeper, intentional level with a long-term view.
- **Fiduciary:** assessing potential risks and financial implications. In this role the board is acting as stewards of the mission and the resources entrusted to HMHB
- **Strategic Thinking:** assessing the strategic landscape, prioritizing potential responses and formally approving new programs, initiatives or other shifts in strategic direction
- **Support:** outside the board room, help with implementation of strategy through connecting to your individual networks and resources, or serve on committees or task forces to develop a new concept

HMHB’S HISTORY OF CONNECTING COMMUNITIES WITH POLICY

Consultant Ned Cooney was aware of some pieces of HMHB’s history of community engagement. Ned attended a meeting in Kalispell as a community member (before his involvement in the early childhood field) in the mid 2000’s hosted by Steve Yaekel and branded as a Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies activity. These community meetings took place around the legislative cycle to gather community input about the needs of mothers, infants and families with the intent to inform a legislative agenda in Helena. Local coalitions around maternal health and child health existed around the state in some areas, and efforts were made to reach areas where those coalitions did not exist.

This part of HMHB’s history is remembered by some around the state, but was not familiar to current board and staff leadership. The local-to-state communication channel evolved in other ways, but the policy focus of such discussions did not continue in the same way, leaving a gap that HMHB could address in new ways in the coming decade.

HMHB Mission: Improve the health, safety, and well-being of Montana families by supporting mothers and babies, age zero to three.

Vision: There will be a safe and healthy beginning for all babies in Montana.

EARLY CHILDHOOD IN MONTANA, 2020-2021

- In the aftermath of the State DPHHS not receiving implementation funding for its strategic plan (known as Birth to Five or “B5”), there is a noticeable gap in resources and coordination of state-to-local resources. The State Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB) had funded and convened local collaborations for the last decade.
- Early Childhood Coalitions have evolved, and some have stopped functioning or substantially shifted focus with the end of B5 funding. Some have joined with funding from Headwaters Foundation; others remain under-resourced yet resilient, determined to continue their work and create space for early childhood in their communities.
- With a change in administration in state government, ECSB has modified the Best Beginnings Advisory Council to support a wider vision for early childhood systems. Instead, the Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council (MECAC) will more narrowly focus on child care issues.
- Early childhood stakeholder groups have proliferated, leading to concerns about a lack of coordination and potentially divergent messages and priorities. The list includes:
 - Funders for Montana Children (working with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis), a group of Montana-based foundations working on legislative and business sector awareness
 - Montana Advocates for Children, including Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies, Montana Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Head Start State Association, Montana Child Care Association, Montana Association for the Education of Young Children (MT-AEYC) and Montana Budget and Policy Center/Kids Count
 - Zero to Five state office
 - ENHANCE Montana, a group formed out of the VOAD Sub-Committee to bring attention to the longer-term viability of child care and out-of-school time providers
- Before 2020, there were signs of increased multi sector awareness of need for child care to support working families. There were efforts by Governor Bullock to spotlight the issue with the business and infuse new resources. Private groups like Funders for Montana Children and Zero-to-Five Montana hosted a number of forums to spur conversation and explore options for employer-supported care. Communities around the state (Bozeman, Missoula, Choteau and Havre among others) had made some inroads in exploring and developing co-operative or employer-supported child care, with varying levels of success and viability.
- New philanthropic organizations have entered the early childhood and public health “spaces”, including Headwaters Foundation, Montana Healthcare Foundation, and others. New funding requires capacity to acquire and manage initiatives, negotiate grants, and execute on objectives. HMHB has demonstrated capacity and is positioned in the state to tap into these new sources.
- The Covid pandemic’s impact on care options was widespread. Concerns about transmission of the virus closed many child care facilities, canceled summer and afterschool programs and limited access to members of the extended family and the care they provide (grandparents most notably). These impacts led to a new level of awareness and appreciation of the necessity of care options for families and workers – especially when schools also closed. Many in the early childhood field recognized this as a new opportunity to address the long-standing market failure of the child care system. By reframing child care and out-of-school time as essential parts of our economic infrastructure (like roads, energy, internet or water), there is renewed hope for support for more funding and workforce supports in the coming years. ***Many have recognized that now may be the time to promote greater investment in supports for families, and HMHB is well-positioned to play critical roles in that work.***

HMHB ROLES EMERGING OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS (IN ADDITION TO WORK IN MATERNAL/CHILD HEALTH, PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH, ETC.)

Convenor/Facilitator of planning, learning

HMHB has developed its capacity to bring people together for shared learning, problem solving and visioning. With a combination of staff and consultants, HMHB has brought together a diverse range of stakeholders around various early childhood including:

- Maternal Mental Health conferences (2016-present)
- Early Childhood Coalitions around coordination of efforts, mutual support, and exploring such topics as advocacy and collective impact (2017-present)
- Montana Children’s Health Data Project Partnership Project (2018-present)
- No Child Left Home Summit in partnership with ENHANCE Montana participants (July 2020)

Policy “Think Tank” and Legislative Policy Work

Over the last two legislative sessions, HMHB has stepped into a vacuum of communication and information about early childhood issues. State staff are not able to engage in or support legislative lobbying, advocacy or policy development but often have important insights if there is a way to have an organized conversation. Similarly, there is not another group bringing information together across a range of departmental budgets and legislative committees affecting early childhood. Other groups are more narrowly focused on child care, public health/health care, or education; HMHB has brought groups together into a monthly meeting with a single stream of information on legislative priorities.

- The MT-ECC group has benefited from the watchful eye of Stephanie Morton, who has tracked the many moving pieces of early childhood-related funding and policy
- HMHB serves as coordinator for Montana Advocates for Children (MAC), bringing together Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies, Montana Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Head Start State Association, Montana Child Care Association, Montana Association for the Education of Young Children (MT-AEYC) and the Montana Budget and Policy Center/Kids Count project
- The Early Childhood Legislative Priorities Group was also convened in 2021 by HMHB with the goal of policy alignment between various players in the early childhood advocacy and policy arena, including MAC, Montana Chamber of Commerce, Funders for Montana Children and Zero-to-Five Montana
- ENHANCE Montana, emerging from the work of the VOAD Child Care Sub-Committee related to pandemic recovery, has seen early successes in affecting executive action and engaging new stakeholders in the conversation around family supports. With HMHB playing a central role, the group succeeded in advocating for an allocation of \$50 million from federal Covid relief funds by Governor Bullock to meet the needs of families in flexible ways during the pandemic.

Networkers and Bridge-builders

HMHB works to connect and build relationships with intention across state departments and beyond, including:

- Connecting the healthcare system with public health and community-based supports
- Connecting early learning initiatives with family support and public health initiatives
- Connecting initiatives within state organizations and between bureaus

Connector of local needs and action with statewide work, informing strategy and service delivery

This has been a strength of HMHB in its traditional mission delivery, through efforts like Safe Sleep, Safe Seat for Baby, The PURPLE Program and Maternal Mental Health. HMHB is a resource for local health departments, health care providers, first responders and mental health providers to address the needs of their clients. Often, especially in rural Montana where capacity is limited and access to training and funding are rare, easy access through a central resource like HMHB is the only way services and program will happen. HMHB has used this same approach to assist local communities and providers in other arenas, such as prevention, to expand its scope to include age ranges and needs beyond the perinatal and infant/toddler stages. Other opportunities could include addressing trauma and community resilience, family engagement, or increased family supports like home visiting expansion.

Project Managers and Sub-Contractor/Sub-Grantee Relationships

With the size and scale of most organizations around the state, a common strategy is to channel resources from a central organization to smaller, local partners. In 2020, through a contract with Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), HMHB created sub-contractor relationships with the Early Childhood Coalitions to identify and catalog family-friendly, alcohol-free events and programs around the state. This will help inform DPHHS in their creation of a prevention strategy for substance use disorder including opioids, meth and other drugs.

Similar statewide relationships could be developed to address other gaps, such as support for local early childhood and maternal mental health coalitions; trauma and community resilience; family engagement; or increased family supports like home visiting expansion.

Advocate for inclusion of early childhood issues in a range of public health policy and service delivery, such as:

- Disaster relief/recovery (including the Covid-19 pandemic)
- Prevention of substance use disorder/family-friendly activities
- Economic development/business sector (No Child Left Home Summit July 2020)

Research, coordination of data collection

HMHB has worked across many groups and projects to provide training on data collection, and coordinate efforts, including:

- MTECC
- MAC
- Montana Child Health Data Partnership
- HOPE BRFSS project

Public messaging on health issues

- Safe Sleep Campaign
- Look Closer Campaign
- PMAD Awareness
- B4/Meadowlark project

OTHER SYSTEM GAPS HMHB COULD ADDRESS

There are longstanding gaps in the field of advocacy for maternal/child health and early childhood issues in Montana which go beyond the emergent roles from the last 5 years:

- Mobilizing “The Army of Moms” for political and social influence by building grassroots connections with individuals to speak about their needs and opportunities
- Engaging “Whole Family” and community to influence statewide policy and action and broaden the range of voices statewide speaking in support of 0-3 priorities (similar to the “Army of Moms” idea)
- Advocacy for legislation, executive branch action and policy development focused on prenatal to the age of 3 (and possibly beyond), including funding and policy support for home visiting, early Head Start, infant/toddler care options and other issues affecting moms, children and families (HMHB’s efforts to support inclusion of home visiting in insurance eligibility is one example of this kind of advocacy)
- Coordinating statewide media messaging and awareness building about the importance of maternal/child health, perinatal mental health, early childhood and related family issues (look to the example of Montana High School Association radio PSAs, which speak to the value of high school athletics to children, schools, and communities, aimed at building widespread awareness)
- Advocating for inclusion of HMHB priorities in the agendas of other sectors or fields, such as out-of-school/afterschool care, economic development, justice system, housing/community planning, reproductive health and other issues
- Promoting trauma-informed, resilience-building strategies and programs for families, organizations and statewide early childhood systems (including in pandemic recovery efforts)
- Providing Capacity-building with other organizations (technical assistance, planning, data systems)

Often, especially in rural Montana where capacity is limited and access to training and funding are rare, easy access through a central resource like HMHB is the only way services and program will happen.

HMHB-LINKED GROUPS ARE CRITICAL TO YOUR NEW OPPORTUNITIES

HMHB serves as convener and/or active participants in many groups bringing connections to local, state, national, and international levels:

- Montana Early Childhood Coalitions (MT-ECC)
- Montana Advocates for Children
- Early Childhood Legislative Priorities Group
- The Partnership (with MT Budget and Policy Center)
- VOAD Child Care Sub-Committee /ENHANCE Montana
- National maternal mental health advocacy/leadership groups
- Local Maternal Mental Health groups

HMHB ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITIES NEEDED TO SUSTAIN AND GROW THE WORK

The emerging and potential roles of HMHB outlined in this report require specific skill sets and knowledge, some of which are already developing within HMHB, while others are provided by outside consultants or other resources. Securing these capacities, or developing them within existing staff, will require investment of staff or board time, and in some cases, monetary resources. Examples of these organizational capacities include:

- Facilitation of group discussion and decision making
- Lobbying legislative and executive branches
- Legislative analysis and tracking
- Communications and marketing capacity including social media, public relations, and creative design
- Ongoing board engagement in strategic planning and generative discussions
- Research and data collection, including integration of complex data systems
- Ability and budgetary resources to reach local communities in person or virtually (travel, video conferencing capability)