



When we address **mental health** concerns **early in life**, the benefits to Hawai'i's communities far exceed the costs.

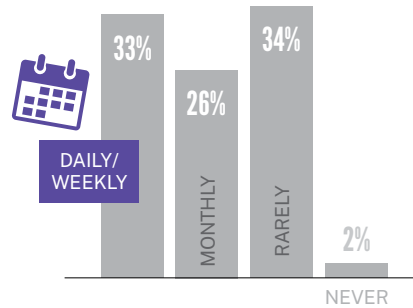
## PREVALANCE

Keiki as young as birth to 5 experience mental health challenges.

Around 1 in 10 children under the age of 5 experience mental health issues.<sup>1</sup> Children under 6 years of age have a similar rate of mental illness as older children and youth (14% to 20%).<sup>2</sup>

Infants and toddlers don't talk about their mental health, but instead show behavioral or physical changes. There are professionals especially trained to notice these signs.

Hawai'i's primary providers frequently observe attention and behavioral issues, anxiety or depressive disorders, and trauma-related problems among keiki under 5.



**One-third of primary and behavioral health providers encounter keiki under age 5 with mental health concerns at least weekly.**<sup>3</sup>

**Mental health issues occur in all types of families. Some factors increase the risk and make families more vulnerable.**

- Intergenerational trauma and health disparities can lead to mental health impacts for the extended family.
- Historical trauma and colonization increases the need for mental health supports.
- Stigma about mental health might create a barrier in some communities.

<sup>1</sup> Zero to Three

<sup>2</sup> Clinton J, Feller AF, Williams RC. The importance of infant mental health. *Paediatr Child Health*. 2016 Jun-Jul;21(5):239-41. doi: 10.1093/pch/21.5.239. PMID: 27441014; PMCID: PMC4933050.

<sup>3</sup> Promising Minds Provider Survey, 2025

## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Early interventions are more effective than later remediation.

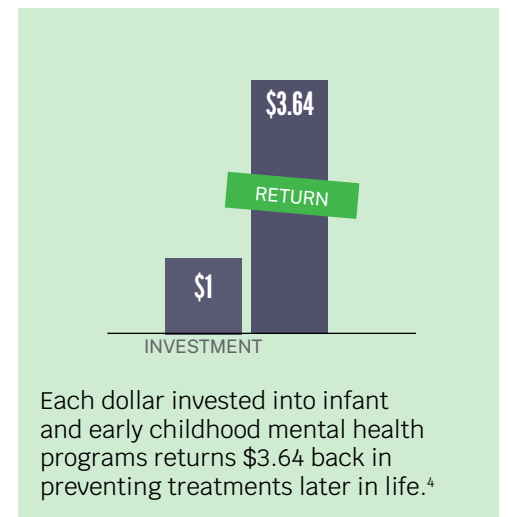
A sound social and emotional base is the launching pad for all other development – the physical, motor and cognitive development that prepares children for both school and success in life.



The failure to ensure every young person in Hawaii has access to early screening and intervention puts a heavy longterm burden on taxpayers, employers, hospital systems and public services.

Mental health services for young children and their families offer a great return on investment.

**Lifelong impacts lead to increased state spending across multiple programs, linked to lifetime costs of approximately \$300,000 per child.**<sup>5</sup>



Each dollar invested into infant and early childhood mental health programs returns \$3.64 back in preventing treatments later in life.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Think Babies. (2022). *Infant and early childhood mental health*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022, June 3). [Data and statistics on children's mental health](#).

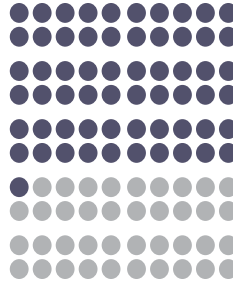
<sup>5</sup> Smith JP, Smith GC. Long-term economic costs of psychological problems during childhood. *Soc Sci Med*. 2010 Jul;71(1):110-5. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.02.046. Epub 2010 Mar 31. PMID: 20427110; PMCID: PMC2887689.

## BARRIERS

The majority of Hawai'i's keiki do not receive an evidence-based screening.

61%

keiki without developmental screening



Screening needs to reach children early.

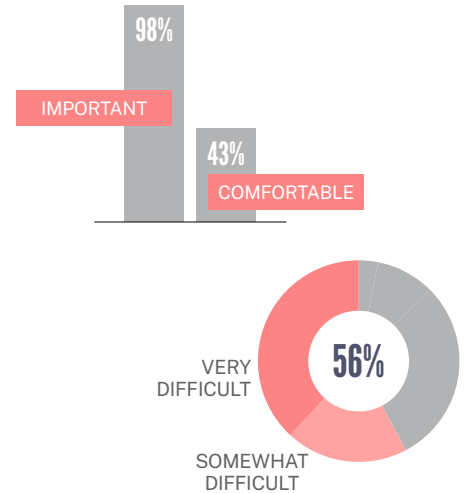
61% of keiki did not receive a developmental screening during the critical early age of 9-35 months (2024).<sup>6</sup>

- Statewide Childcare and Preschool shortages decrease the chance of early identification of developmental delays.
- Existing mental health services for young children are mainly focused on treatment.

The need for mental health supports for keiki under 5 far exceeds the skilled workforce necessary to address the issues.

Less than half of the Primary Care providers feel comfortable with screening, assessing and diagnosing keiki under 5.<sup>7</sup>

- The majority of all respondents believe it is important, but less than half feel comfortable with it.
- The majority of respondents would like specific training for keiki under 5.
- A majority of providers reported difficulties in accessing mental health services for children under age 5, primarily due to long wait times and a shortage of qualified professionals.



<sup>6</sup> National Survey of Children's Health, 2024  
<sup>7</sup> Promising Minds Provider Survey, 2025

A comprehensive Mental Health (MH) system that includes **Infant and Early Childhood** services builds healthy families while saving money.



[Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral Health \(IECBH\) Plan](#)

### PREVENTION

IECBH evidence-based preventions reduce risks and costs. Expanding mental health services towards early prevention will ease shortages in services for older kids.

### INTERVENTION

There are many proven, cost-effective therapies that can help infants and toddlers recover from traumatic events, decrease the risk of trauma and build their resilience. We need to address barriers to access.

### WORKFORCE

Expanding the number of statewide mental health professionals trained in IECBH needs will move Hawai'i closer to a prevention model. Sustainable funding for existing workforce development efforts can expand skills among professionals.

Culturally grounded training can reduce parental reluctance and increase the effectiveness of family-focused interventions.



Commit to Keiki is a statewide, non-partisan collaborative designed to ensure a brighter start for Hawai'i's youngest keiki and their families. [CommitToKeiki.org](https://www.committokeiki.org)

Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) takes action for Hawai'i's youngest keiki by bringing together government and non-government stakeholders to implement systems-level strategies. [HawaiiActionStrategy.org](https://www.hawaiiactionstrategy.org)