Every parent strives to support their child as best as they can, but children don’t come with operators’ manuals. Parents rely on family members, colleagues, health and early childhood professionals to develop the skills and make decisions to best meet their children’s needs.

Access to early screening and referral services and voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs provide families with supports and services to help foster healthy child development. Early identification of child needs and connections to services encourage bonding between parents and a new baby, promote positive parenting practices, support parental health and well-being, and prevent child maltreatment.

Colorado served an estimated 8,810 families through evidence-based home visiting models in 2016.¹ In 2016, there were 316,900 pregnant women and families with children under six years old who could benefit from access to home visiting services; these families included 396,600 children.²

Evidence-based home visiting services have a track record of success in improving outcomes for children and families, but are unfortunately limited in their reach in Colorado.

In 2016, Colorado reported a rate of 41.8 percent for developmental screenings in the first three years of life for children enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP. This is above the median rate among other states reporting on this measure, but still means that less than half of our youngest children in the state are screened according to the recommended schedule.

According to National Survey of Children’s Health, Colorado’s rate of developmental screening for children under age five across all insurance types was 43.4 percent in 2016.

Early identification of developmental delays or mental health challenges in young children helps put children on a path to future success. Unfortunately, our system has gaps in screen, referral, and care coordination services that can interfere with parents’ efforts to support their children’s healthy development.

² Ibid.
Colorado is currently lacking a centralized coordination system, a consistent and universal process, and consistent data on screening, referral and connection to services. Establishing such a system is a critical step in reaching the solution of ensuring that all young children, mothers and families are screened, referred for any needed follow-up or evaluation, and when needs are identified, connected with the appropriate services and supports.

Long-term cost savings from early support for families with young children stem from providing earlier and more targeted intervention; this is likely to result in less expense to the educational system, the mental health system, and other areas down the road.

**Questions for Candidates**

*Here are questions you might ask candidates to learn more about their positions on issues affecting Colorado kids. Whether you ask in person, online or by phone, these questions are designed to help you educate candidates while learning more about whether they are making kids a priority in their platform:*

1. Given the return on investment from early screening and referral to evidence-based services, including those provided by home visitors, how would you ensure more families can get the support they want to help their children?

2. Fewer than half of children in Colorado get the developmental screenings they need. And even if we increased our screening rate, many families face obstacles to navigating the system to access services. What steps would you take to (1) increase developmental screening rates and (2) make it easier for families with young children to access developmental services?

3. Given the return on investment for high quality parent-support and home visitation programs, why do you think access to these services is so limited and what would you do to expand their reach?

4. How do you plan to make support for families with young children a priority for your administration?

5. What are ways that you would couple supports for young children’s healthy development with strategies to enhance opportunities for their parents?