

EASTERSEALS AND THE ABBOTT FUND JOIN TOGETHER TO ADVANCE EDUCATION AND HEALTH EQUITY

CHICAGO, June 22, 2022/PR Newswire/ -- Easterseals announced today that it has received a grant of \$750,000 from the Abbott Fund, the foundation of the global healthcare company Abbott, to pilot the Project on Education and Community Health Equity from now through 2025. The three-year project aims to address systemic barriers to high-quality education and healthcare experienced by children and families in underinvested communities.

Research shows that many young children, particularly children with disabilities and children of color, face significant gaps in access to crucial health and social services that can provide the targeted support they need to be prepared to succeed in school. One example: according to [a study](#) by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Black children with autism and other disabilities are diagnosed an average of more than three years after their parents expressed concerns about their development. This delay in diagnosis means these children miss out on age-appropriate care and the chance to improve their health and cognitive skills, often resulting in them entering kindergarten with knowledge and skill deficits that many are not able to overcome throughout their K-12 educational journey.

The Project on Education and Community Health Equity will create an integrated system that addresses the educational and healthcare needs of children to help them be kindergarten ready and reach their full potential. This includes work in three areas: expanding access to essential physical and mental health screenings and care for children; providing targeted social services to help families overcome gaps in basic needs, nutrition, transportation, and other social and economic barriers; and ensuring that early childhood administrators and educators have the right training to identify and address health and social challenges and provide culturally appropriate support for children. The project will be implemented at Easterseals Childhood Development Centers in Southern California, Atlanta and North Georgia, and the greater Washington, D.C., area.

“Addressing the healthcare needs of infants and toddlers as early as possible in their lives is one of the critical ways in which Easterseals serves young children and families across the country,” said Erika L. Watson, National Director of Childhood Development, Education and Equity at Easterseals. “The Project on Education and Community Health Equity will allow us to better address healthcare disparities experienced by young BIPOC children and their families in historically underserved and marginalized communities, and to better understand the connection between more equitable access to healthcare and kindergarten readiness. Centering communities of color in our efforts is a critical strategy to close the gap. Outcomes from the project promise to inform its future expansion to early childhood and early education programs throughout the Easterseals Network of 70 affiliates in communities nationwide.”

“We’re proud to support Easterseals’ important work to help close equity gaps in education and community health,” said Melissa Brotz, president of the Abbott Fund and vice president of Global Marketing and External Affairs at Abbott. “We’re committed to advancing health equity and fighting racial health disparities, and our partnership with Easterseals will help reduce barriers to care for children, their families and their communities.”

The Project on Education and Community Health Equity builds on results seen through another Easterseals program, the Black Child Fund. [Launched in 2021](#) with support from the Abbott Fund and others, the Black Child Fund advanced early identification and interventions among Black children with autism and other disabilities to reduce health disparities often experienced in early childhood. The Abbott Fund investment launched pilots at Easterseals locations serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford, DuPage and the Fox Valley Region (IL), and Kansas City and St. Louis (MO).

Through these pilot programs, an 87% increase in the number of Black families seeking services and support was realized, with more than 300 Black children screened for early diagnosis of autism and other disabilities in just one year. Of these children, 80% were five years old or younger, with 75% requiring and receiving additional services through Easterseals. An important outcome of these pilots has been the strengthening of relationships within Black communities across these Easterseals service areas to ensure more equitable and more culturally responsive services and supports to young children of color with disabilities and their families.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released [data](#) revealing that during the pandemic public health emergency, rates for primary and preventive services among children in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) declined substantially. This decline in care for millions of children from low-income families will potentially have a significant impact on long-term health outcomes for the nearly 40 million children in the U.S. who rely on Medicaid and CHIP, including three-quarters of children living in poverty and many with special healthcare needs including infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities.

“Through the Project on Education and Community Health Equity, it is Easterseals’ intention to address the disparities in healthcare among young children in low-investment communities and to understand the connection between health equity and early childhood educational attainment. We intend to center the experiences of children of color and their families, for whom inequities have only been exacerbated because of the pandemic,” Watson concluded.

The Abbott Fund's partnership with Easterseals supports [Abbott's 2030 Sustainability Plan](#), which aims to advance health access and equity through partnership. Abbott's ongoing commitment to address health equity challenges includes targeted programs to increase [diversity in clinical trials](#), create [opportunities in STEM](#) for women and underrepresented groups, and [empower communities](#) to break down social and economic barriers to better health.

About Easterseals

Easterseals is leading the way to full equity, inclusion, and access through life-changing disability and community services. For more than 100 years, we have worked tirelessly with our partners to enhance quality of life and expand local access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. And we won't rest until every one of us is valued, respected, and accepted. Through our national network of Affiliates, Easterseals provides essential services and on-the-ground supports to more than 1.5 million people each year - from early childhood programs for the critical first five years, to autism services, medical rehabilitation and employment programs, veterans' services, and more. Our public education, policy, and advocacy initiatives positively shape perceptions and address the urgent and evolving needs of the one in four Americans living with disabilities today. Together, we're empowering people with disabilities, families, and communities to be full and equal participants in society. To learn more, visit www.easterseals.com

About Abbott and the Abbott Fund

Abbott is a global healthcare leader that helps people live more fully at all stages of life. Our portfolio of life-changing technologies spans the spectrum of healthcare, with leading businesses and products in diagnostics, medical devices, nutritionals and branded generic medicines. Our 113,000 colleagues serve people in more than 160 countries.

The Abbott Fund is a philanthropic foundation established by Abbott in 1951. The Abbott Fund's mission is to create healthier global communities by investing in creative ideas that promote science, expand access to healthcare and strengthen communities worldwide.

Connect with us at abbott.com and abbottfund.org.

For further information: Easterseals Media: Sharon Watson, swatson@easterseals.com; Abbott Media: Angela Duff, Abbott and the Abbott Fund, angela.duff@abbott.com
