

May 22, 2025

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education, and Related
Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Collins, Vice Chair Murray, Chair Capito, and Ranking Member Baldwin:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations dedicated to the health and well-being of the nation's children, pregnant women, and mothers, we write to thank you for your continued bipartisan support of the Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) program and request \$180 million in funding for ECHO in the Senate Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies appropriations bills.

The ECHO program, within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is designed to understand the effects of a broad range of early environmental influences on child health and development, including socioeconomic status, family support, biological factors, nutrition, and physical and chemical exposures. ECHO research is centered on five outcome areas of child health: pregnancy and birth, breathing, body weight, brain development, and well-being. By answering crucial questions about how various early-life influences shape the health outcomes of adulthood, the ECHO program plays a vital role in addressing the serious challenges of chronic disease in children and advancing the health and well-being of America's young people.

The ECHO Cohort, the largest longitudinal child health study in the U.S., includes over 130,000 participants, including more than 64,000 children. ECHO Cohort observational studies look at information about these participants' everyday lives to understand the factors that influence children's health over time. Separately, the ECHO program's IDeA States Pediatric Clinical Trials Network (ISPCTN) provides children in rural and medically underserved communities with the opportunity to participate in state-of-the-art clinical trials and is the only NIH clinical trial network focused on children from these locations. The network has sites in 18 states and targets those states identified by the NIH Institutional Development Awards (IDeA) Program, which is designed to broaden the geographic distribution of biomedical and behavioral research. In all, the ECHO program funds research activities across 44 states.

The ECHO program continues to produce impactful research on the root causes of childhood chronic disease. In one example, an ECHO-funded study revealed how prenatal exposure to "forever chemicals", such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which are present in food, drinking water, and common household materials, may be linked to increased weight and higher risk of obesity among children and adolescents.ⁱ Another ECHO study assessing links between phthalate exposure during pregnancy and the development of health outcomes in children found a potential association with increased risk of developing chronic health conditions including obesity, mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression, and asthma and other lung-related diseases.ⁱⁱ

ECHO-funded studies have also helped elucidate the role of nutrition in child health. One study found that expectant mothers who maintain diets meeting USDA dietary guidelines during pregnancy may be more likely to have infants with healthy birthweight and infant growth through 24 months.ⁱⁱⁱ The findings of the project offer insights into the ways that prenatal nutrition impacts future child health outcomes such as body weight. Furthermore, ECHO research examining youth social media patterns finds that among adolescents, less time on social media is associated with slightly better mental health, but positive peer relationships play a bigger role.^{iv}

In 2026, the ECHO program will celebrate its 10-year anniversary. In its first nine years, ECHO Cohort research teams have collaborated to build a dataset and body of knowledge that is helping the nation better understand the impact of environmental influences on child health and development, while the ISPCTN has brought access to trials to children from rural and underserved communities. A sustained investment in ECHO will allow it to continue to collect data and conduct research that addresses timely questions about child health and well-being.

Thank you for your longstanding and continued commitment to this vital child research program. We urge you to continue to provide \$180 million to sustain the important research supported by ECHO to improve the health of children and look forward to working with you to advance child health and well-being.

Sincerely,

5p- Society
Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Pediatric Society
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Children's Hospital Association
Endocrine Society
flok Health
Genetic Alliance
March of Dimes
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Institute for Children's Health Quality
National League for Nursing
Organic Academia Association
Pediatric Policy Council
Profound Autism Alliance
PXE International
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Society for Pediatric Research
Society of Toxicology
University of Montana

ⁱ Liu Y, Wosu AC, Fleisch AF, et al. Associations of Gestational Perfluoroalkyl Substances Exposure with Early Childhood BMI z-Scores and Risk of Overweight/Obesity: Results from the ECHO Cohorts. *Environ Health Perspect.* 2023;131(6):67001. doi:10.1289/EHP11545

ⁱⁱ Day DB, LeWinn KZ, Karr CJ, et al. Subpopulations of children with multiple chronic health outcomes in relation to chemical exposures in the ECHO-PATHWAYS consortium. *Environ Int.* 2024;185:108486. doi:10.1016/j.envint.2024.108486

ⁱⁱⁱ Hedderson MM, Schuh HB, Knapp EA, et al. Prenatal Diet and Infant Growth From Birth to Age 24 Months. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2024;7(11):e2445771. Published 2024 Nov 4. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.45771

^{iv} Blackwell CK, Mansolf M, Rose T, et al. Adolescent Social Media Use and Mental Health in the Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes Study. *J Adolesc Health.* 2025;76(4):647-656. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2024.12.003