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REACH OUT AND READ ADVANCES STATEWIDE EFFORT IN OHIO TO SUPPORT CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND LEARNING

The state’s youngest children are falling behind — and the window to act is short. Reach Out and Read Ohio works with communities across the state to bring early literacy and family support into pediatric care so every child and family can thrive from the start.

COLUMBUS (Apr. 1, 2026) – Building on three decades of impact in Ohio, Reach Out and Read today announced the launch of Reach Out and Read Ohio, a statewide Affiliate that unifies and strengthens its evidence-based model — integrating early literacy and family support directly into pediatric care to improve outcomes for children and families.

This statewide approach establishes shared infrastructure and centralized support to strengthen delivery and expand access across communities — creating a sustainable pathway to reach more children and families.

Reach Out and Read has a strong, longstanding presence partnering with pediatric clinicians, health systems, and community partners across Greater Cleveland, Northwest Ohio, Central Ohio, Southwest Ohio, and Eastern Ohio. This next phase builds on that foundation, strengthening a community-driven movement so more families can access consistent, high-quality support during a critical window for children’s development and long-term health. The first five years, crucial for early learning, only happen once.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Steven M. Lake, Ed.D., CFRE, Reach Out and Read Ohio is continuing to grow its reach and deepen its impact across the state.

“Ohio parents are eager to help their children succeed, but many lack consistent access to early learning support. Reach Out and Read Ohio is working to ensure every child in Ohio can thrive from the start,” Dr. Lake said. “Reading aloud from birth strengthens language skills, nurtures healthy caregiver-child relationships, and supports brain growth during a critical window. By unifying our work statewide, we can equip more pediatric clinicians so children leave their well-child visits not just with a book, but with meaningful guidance that families can carry into everyday life.”

Reach Out and Read Ohio works directly within pediatric care. During routine well-child visits, clinicians provide a developmentally and culturally appropriate book, model shared reading, and offer guidance through an evidence-based model. Delivered through trusted clinician-

family relationships, this approach equips caregivers at a stage when everyday interactions have the greatest impact.

“Reach Out and Read Ohio represents exactly the kind of innovative, evidence-based approach our pediatric community values — one that recognizes the powerful role clinicians play in supporting not just physical health, but early brain development and family connection,” said Melissa Wervey Gittelman, CEO of the Ohio Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics. “By bringing this work together statewide, Reach Out and Read Ohio is strengthening the ability for health care providers to ensure every child in Ohio has the foundation they need to thrive.”

More than 60 percent of Ohio children are not fully prepared for kindergarten, but nearly 90 percent attend well-child visits. By embedding this work in health care and working with partners to expand access to books across communities, Reach Out and Read Ohio can ensure all Ohio families receive meaningful, relationship-based support when it matters most.

“This simple act — sharing a book and talking about the importance of reading together — is profoundly impactful. It helps children enter school ready to learn and provides families with tools to succeed long term,” said Dr. Greg Szumlas, Reach Out and Read Ohio Advisory Board Member, Medical Director of Reach Out and Read at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, and Medical Director, Hamilton County Imagination Library. “Expanding this work ensures that no matter a child’s ZIP code, families have access to the same high-quality, relationship-centered support during the earliest and most formative years.”

In FY25, Reach Out and Read served more than 174,000 children and distributed nearly 304,000 books at 201 clinical sites across Ohio. Already reaching nearly a quarter of young children statewide, Reach Out and Read Ohio brings the infrastructure needed to scale so every young child in Ohio has the resources and relationships essential to learn and thrive.

To learn more about Reach Out and Read Ohio, visit [ReachOutandRead/Ohio](https://reachoutandread.org/ohio).

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About Reach Out and Read: As a 501(c)3 nonprofit, Reach Out and Read leverages the near-universal reach of the pediatric well-child visit to support caregivers in fostering healthy relationships with their young children through shared reading. In FY25, Reach Out and Read served more than 4.8 million children and provided 9 million free books across 11.2 million well-child visits. Around 70 percent of the children Reach Out and Read serves are from low-income families. The only national pediatric literacy model endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Reach Out and Read serves children in every state across the U.S.,