

2021 Year End Report





LETTER FROM CHARLOTTE BRODY, NATIONAL DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

Another year unlike any other year. Here we are: surrounded by climate, political and pandemic chaos and ongoing systemic racism, yet still doing our vital work to lower the levels and disproportionate impact from toxic chemicals.

In the midst of the 2021 maelstrom, Healthy Babies Bright Futures has steadily paddled towards lower levels of toxic chemical exposures that are harming babies' brains.

Our work continues to focus on the largest sources of neurotoxic exposures—reducing the disproportionate impact on babies, especially babies of color—from lead in drinking water, toxic chemicals in baby foods, and air pollution from burning fossil fuels.

Bright Cities are building more equitable, less neurotoxic environments for their residents. Congressional leaders introduced the Baby Food Safety Act, legislation that was prompted by our 2019 baby food study. The same Congressional concern that created the Baby Food Safety Act also moved the FDA to introduce their plan to restrict heavy metals in the foods babies eat.

And the Biden Administration is focusing money and agency attention on eliminating lead in drinking water and in homes.

Can anyone predict what 2022 will bring? Certainly not me. But I can promise—and even resolve—that Healthy Babies Bright Futures will keep focused on how to squeeze the value out of every opportunity to protect babies from the harm caused by neurotoxic chemicals.

In solidarity and for good trouble,

Charlotte Brody, RN
National Director, Healthy Babies Bright Futures

Baby Food

As we shared in our mid-year report this June, the impact of Healthy Babies Bright Futures' work for safer baby foods has continued to grow in 2021. From partnering with other organizations to supporting legislation and regulatory action, our focus continues to be ensuring that babies—especially babies of color—are protected from arsenic, lead, cadmium and other brain-harming chemicals in their food.

Because the fruits, vegetables, and grains that go into baby food often come from long-contaminated soil and water, the problem of heavy metals in the foods babies eat cannot be solved overnight. But it is a problem that **can** be solved. Our testing of products, reports, and communications strategies have spurred action by the federal government and inspired the formal introduction of federal legislation.

On February 4, the Congressional House Committee on Oversight and Reform released a new study, inspired by HBBF's 2019 baby food report, finding that top baby foods are contaminated with dangerous levels of toxic heavy metals, with amounts of arsenic, lead, cadmium, and mercury routinely found above recommended limits.

The report found that companies often ignore internal standards and fail to test their finished, processed products, leading to the use of contaminated ingredients and additives and unknown amounts of heavy metals in the final mixtures that babies eat. The estimated advertising value of HBBF coverage in subsequent news stories was more than \$19 million.

That report and the press coverage that followed contributed to our baby food work throughout the rest of the year.

Working to Make WIC Safer

HBBF has been working to reduce heavy metals in WIC program foods for infants. On November 22, Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi, the Chairman of the US House Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy, sent [a letter to Stacy Dean](#), the Deputy Under Secretary of USDA who oversees the WIC program, asking for the federal program to remove infant rice cereal from the WIC program.

- The letter, as suggested by Healthy Babies Bright Futures, also asked WIC to provide water filters for infants fed formula mixed with tap water.
- These actions would help protect all WIC-enrolled infants from heavy metals, but especially infants of color. Sixty-six percent of the infants receiving WIC are exclusively formula fed. According to the CDC, 26% of Black infants are exclusively formula fed, compared with 17.1% of Hispanic babies and 13.4 % of non-Hispanic white babies.
- WIC feeds 53% of all infants in America. Forty-one percent of WIC recipients are mothers, children, and infants of color—approximately the same as the percentage as People of Color in the United States.
- State WIC programs in Oregon, Alaska, and Hawaii have all removed infant rice cereal from their WIC programs, actions inspired by HBBF's work and used by Rep. Krishnamoorthi as successful models for the national changes envisioned.





Second Congressional Study on Baby Food Safety

As a follow up to their [2021 February report](#) that showed high levels of toxic heavy metals in baby foods, the House Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy released a report in September which showed that Walmart, Sprout, and Plum baby food brands **knowingly sold products with arsenic levels well over FDA's 100 ppb protective limit.**

- Although testing found Gerber products above the limit, the company took no action to tell the public or get them off the shelves. Plum Organics baby foods are tainted with high levels of toxic heavy metals. Plum's finished products contain up to 225 ppb inorganic arsenic—more than twice the FDA's action level.
- Since these reports have been made public, Attorneys General of New Mexico and the District of Columbia have filed lawsuits against the baby food companies. More than 80 other lawsuits have been filed.
- On October 21, the New York Attorney General and 22 other state attorneys general submitted a petition to the FDA to accelerate actions to remove toxic heavy metals found in infant and toddler foods. HBBF worked with the NYAG office on the contents of the petition.
- The Congressional subcommittee reports resulted in the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies inserting into the Senate appropriations their “concern that lead, arsenic, cadmium and mercury are often present in dangerous quantities in foods intended for consumption by infants and toddlers” and including \$12.9M for FDA's Closer to Zero plan.
- The Congressional study garnered nearly 1K press hits, and since June, there have been 238 additional media stories that include Healthy Babies Bright Futures and baby food. This continued attention will keep pressure on baby food companies, lawmakers, and the FDA to take action to ensure safer baby foods for our most vulnerable population.

FDA's Closer to Zero Plan

In November, the FDA held their first public meeting on their Closer to Zero plan via Zoom. The consistent message from members of the two FDA organized panels and the invited public speakers (including HBBF's Charlotte Brody and Jane Houlihan) was to **move quickly and boldly** to continually lower the levels of toxic heavy metals towards zero in the foods babies eat, including homemade baby food.

The participation of other partners in the [Food Chemicals Alliance](#) (EDF, EWG, Consumers' Reports, CSPI) created the opportunity to coordinate our 3-minute presentations and make the most compelling arguments.



Healthy Babies Bright Futures

HBBF Leaves Baby Food Council After Baby Food Companies Backpedal on Commitments

By Charlotte Brody, RN
NOVEMBER 5, 2021

Healthy Babies Bright Futures (HBBF) has been proud to work with top baby food brands in the Baby Food Council toward a shared mission to reduce heavy metals in the companies' products to as low as reasonably achievable using best-in-class management practices. But today, Healthy Babies Bright Futures, along with the Environmental Defense Fund, is withdrawing from the Baby Food Council.

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Withdrawal from the Baby Food Council

The decision of the baby food companies to abandon the development of a voluntary standard for heavy metals in baby food resulted in Healthy Babies Bright Futures, EDF and the American Academy of Pediatrics ending their membership in the Baby Food Council.

Before its dissolution, the Council evaluated laboratories that claimed to be able to measure low levels of lead, arsenic, and cadmium in food and found that half failed the test. The Council also funded research at Cornell, Louisiana State, and Purdue Universities to identify best practices to reduce heavy metal contamination in four important baby food ingredients—sweet potatoes, carrots, squash, and quinoa.

HBBF will continue to test the foods babies eat, using the approved labs, and promote the best practice findings to the baby food companies and, more generally, to the organic and conventional producers, processors and retailers of the foods babies and their mothers eat.

Bright Cities

Our Bright Cities program provides grants of up to \$35,000 to city governments and community-based partners to equitably reduce their community’s exposures to neurotoxic chemicals that interfere with all babies’ brain development.

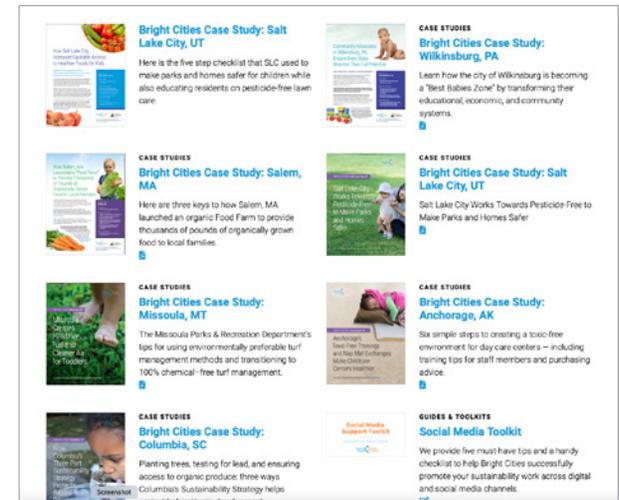
We currently have 30 cities—ranging from 15,000 to 1.6 million residents—enrolled in Bright Cities. Data from completed and ongoing projects show that Bright City projects have positively impacted the lives of more than 5,000 children. These metrics showcase the effectiveness of actions cities have taken to measurably reduce neurotoxic exposures: integrating neurotoxic exposure into sustainability, resilience or climate planning and reducing these exposures in public housing and spaces, city purchasing, food production, and outdoor air.

Our work in 2021 focused on building scalable, effective models for cities and focusing on issues of equity and racial justice. Bright Cities’ work resulted in more city leaders talking about the importance of reducing neurotoxic exposures, new peer connections, and an elevated awareness of taking action to reduce exposures to the often invisible chemicals that harm babies’ brain development in national organizations serving cities.

Resource Building

HBBF created a library of resources for Bright Cities to use in their work to reduce neurotoxic exposures for residents. These resources— including toolkits and case studies—dive into city initiatives that resulted in measurable impacts so that city leaders have access to “plug-and-play” strategies to incorporate into their new or existing plans.

- HBBF created 12 case studies to showcase tried and true strategies for implementing various Bright Cities projects, including green infrastructure, food safety and accessibility, pesticide-free lawn maintenance, and safer daycare centers.
- Each case study includes a playbook with detailed step-by-step explanations of the project so that other cities can replicate the impacts in a way that is unique to their residents.



Partnering to Double Impact

In 2021, we saw Bright Cities learn from one another, share best practices, and follow the science to scale their projects and make an even larger impact. We saw cities utilizing existing resources to build scalable, replicable projects and make the most impact for their residents. By embracing the data and finding ways to address the largest source of toxic exposures, these cities showed their flexibility and innovation.

- Providence, RI built out an online public health education campaign, [Pesticide Free PVD](#), that was modeled after Salt Lake City’s Pesticide Free SLC campaign.
- Anchorage, AK developed a “Healthy Children in Toxic Free Childcare” training program that was approved for 2.5 hours of continuing education credits by the Alaska System for Early Education Development. Similar work was also done in the Bright City of Jackson, MS.
- Drawing momentum from our research showing that 95% of tested baby food include toxic chemicals that lower babies’ IQ, Salem and Lynn MA; Champaign, IL; and Salt Lake City implemented programs to increase access to healthier, organic produce in disproportionately impacted neighborhoods.

New Bright Cities Grants

The HBBF Bright Cities program provides grant funding in two ways: both on a rolling basis and through unique RFPs designed to strategically reduce exposures to toxins that harm babies' brain development. In 2021, HBBF presented **awards to 10 new Bright Cities totaling \$95,000.**

- **Flint, MI** will prioritize lead-paint mitigation of homes and provide educational outreach to expectant families and/or families with young children on strategies to reduce neurotoxic exposure and to cope with the effects of stress and trauma. Participating families will provide input into Flint's inaugural resilience plan.
- **Ann Arbor, MI** will continue investing in green infrastructure to remove air toxics among the many other co-benefits of planting trees by building on their 10,000 Trees Initiative to provide targeted tree plantings and distributions to underserved communities in Ann Arbor.
- **Providence, RI** will launch a pilot residential composting plan that identifies short and long-term steps to eliminate food waste from the residential waste stream and amplifies the role of compost in reducing the use of pesticides and herbicides.
- **Portland, OR** will share information about how to reduce the use of neurotoxic pesticides in affordable housing communities using a community health care worker model.
- **State College, PA** will plant trees in local parks to mitigate exposure to environmental toxins and to intentionally create calming outdoor spaces for those who live with autism and neurodevelopmental delays.
- **Duluth, MN** will identify and implement opportunities to reduce neurotoxic exposures through operational changes to the city's purchasing guidelines.
- **Grand Rapids, MI** will implement a rental property lead hazard inspection program in response to a concerning increase in childhood lead poisoning since 2014. Funding will support community engagement, stakeholder education, and the development of an amendment to the current city housing code, all preparing for the launch of a new ordinance and code enforcement.
- **Madison, WI** will augment an existing city program designed to promote energy efficiency in multi-family housing by adding a lead testing and mitigation program designed to identify and reduce the presence of lead and mold in multifamily housing.
- **Pine Bluff, AR's** Parks and Recreation Department will help make parks safer for children and families by testing water in public drinking fountains for lead, tree planting, community education about lead-safe soils, and community garden efforts.
- **San Rafael, CA** will scale up a Production Farm operated by Community Action Marin, providing fresh, nutritious, and organic produce for families of low income who previously had low to no access to organic fruits and vegetables.

The latter five projects were co-funded by HBBF and the Mayors Innovation Project to empower city leaders to improve children's health and reduce health disparities in their communities by scaling programs that decrease regular exposures to chemicals that harm babies' brain development.



Coming in Early 2022

New Baby Food Research

In early 2022, HBBF will be releasing two new studies about the levels of heavy metals and other neurotoxins in the foods babies and young children eat—and in the ingredients parents use to make homemade baby food. We’re designing this work to help expand the success of our baby food work to impact foods beyond the baby food aisle. The reports are expected to launch in early 2022.

HBBF will also continue our Lead in Water program in partnership with Virginia Tech, providing test kits and personalized action reports to families across the country and emphasizing actions to protect bottle-fed infants.

Healthy Environments for Healthy Lives

HBBF is working with the March of Dimes and other partners on a project that addresses the intersection of black infant mortality and environmental health. This inaugural brief of the March of Dimes “[Igniting Impact Together](#)” campaign is expected to launch in February 2022 and will help us lift up the link between environmental problems of air pollution and extreme heat and the health problems of preterm birth, low birth weight, and stillbirth.





Healthy Babies Bright Futures (HBBF) is working to create and support initiatives that measurably reduce exposures to neurotoxic chemicals in the first thousand days of development.

Our efforts are inspired and supported by science and data, and designed to help restore the chance for a full life to children who would otherwise face brain-diminishing exposures to toxic chemicals beginning in utero.

Learn more at hbbf.org

