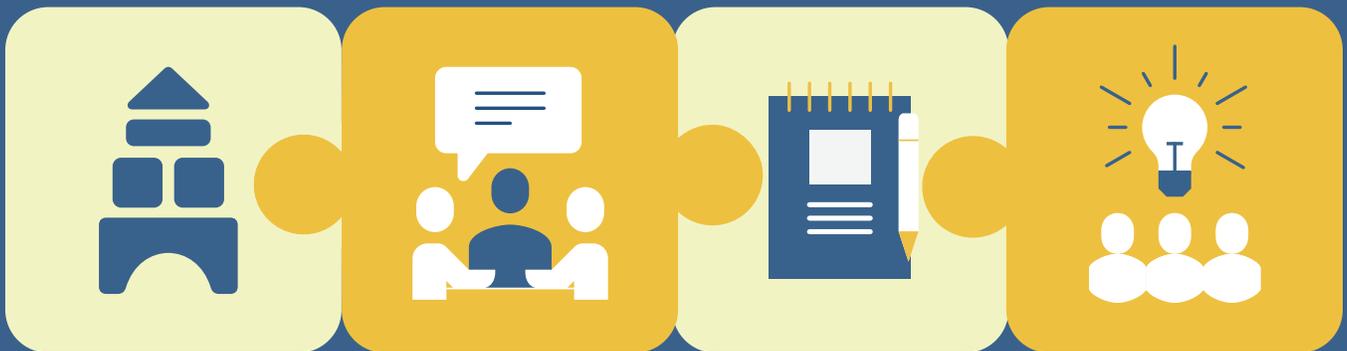




Bipartisan Policy Center

BUILDING BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR CHILD CARE: A TOOLKIT

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Disclaimer

The findings and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of BPC, its founders, its funders, or its board of directors.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLKIT

A growing body of research shows that Americans recognize early childhood development as critical to the well-being of the nation. Across the country, states in all shades of red, blue, and purple are stepping up to develop policies and invest in working families and young children.

When leaders come together across the aisle, they can sign into law well-designed, meaningful, and sustainable changes that have real impacts on children and their families. To do this, leaders must recognize that although there is widespread agreement on the importance of high-quality early childhood experiences, there will be different opinions about how to solve pressing issues. Coming to the table ready and willing to discuss these differences is the key to transformative change.

The goal of this toolkit is to offer a wide array of resources to help you build bipartisan relationships and solutions to ensure all children have an equal opportunity to a quality educational foundation that will prepare them to grow, learn, and succeed. This toolkit and additional resources are available online at <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/policy-area/early-childhood/>.



TIPS FOR BUILDING A BIPARTISAN COALITION

- 1** Bipartisan partnerships are not built overnight. It takes time to establish trust and find common ground. Lasting bipartisan partnerships are rarely born out of a crisis. Instead, it is critical to build strong, trusting partnerships early to head off a crisis or to be better prepared to deal with one.
- 2** Words matter. Know your audience and the messages that might resonate with them. Avoid inflammatory buzzwords and jargon and establish shared definitions at the beginning. Don't let miscommunications derail the conversation and hinder productivity.
- 3** Work with people who want to work together. Be open-minded when recruiting people to collaborate with, but keep in mind that not everyone will mix. Let invitees know who will be participating so they can make an informed decision about joining.
- 4** Meet people where they are. Participants will bring a range of knowledge about and experience with child care, but if someone is at the table, that person cares enough to show up. They might offer a new perspective or a point of view you haven't yet considered.
- 5** Provide clear and useful background materials and space to ask questions and learn. Offer partners the opportunity to share relevant materials.
- 6** Be inclusive. And mean it. Make sure that people are there to speak and be heard, not just to check a box.
- 7** Be open and transparent about your goals. Be respectful and honest when disagreements arise and talk them through. Realize you might not always see eye to eye and might have to meet in the middle to move the conversation forward.
- 8** Follow up with next steps to keep momentum. Put them in writing to make sure everyone is on the same page.

**CHILD CARE
AND EARLY
LEARNING
FUNDING**

OVERVIEW OF CHILD CARE FUNDING

Quality child care is essential for many reasons: so that parents can work; so that young children can grow, learn, and succeed; and so that employers and the broader economy can count on a productive workforce today and in the future. In the United States, parents rely on a diverse set of child care arrangements and options to meet their particular and widely varying circumstances and needs. Three realities are driving the current policy debate about child care in the United States—and contributing to a growing recognition that the country as a whole faces a child care crisis. First, with more parents of very young children in the workforce, the demand is higher than ever for affordable, quality infant and toddler care. Second, care for young children is expensive everywhere, and child care has become a major financial burden for many working families. Third, a growing body of evidence indicates that disparities in learning and life outcomes begin far earlier than previously appreciated—well before children reach school age.¹ This evidence is bolstered by recent advances in neuroscience that point to the years between birth and age 3 as a particularly critical time for cognitive and emotional development.

Against this backdrop, the United States must expand its investment in child care. This section reviews the current funding landscape for child care. It provides business leaders, policymakers, and advocates with the information necessary to frame a productive discussion of needs, resources, and options that advance the goal of providing access to high-quality child care for all. We begin with an overview of the current child care market in the United States, before focusing on the federal and state roles in funding child care in subsequent sections. Worksheets for compiling state-level child care and early learning funding data are available on the Toolkit site at <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/policy-area/early-childhood/>.

CHILD CARE BY THE NUMBERS

Number of children under age 5 (2017):²

19,938,860

Children under age 6 with all available parents in the labor force (2017):³

14,945,000 or 66%

Children from birth through age 5, not yet in kindergarten, who participate in various weekly nonparental care arrangements, by child and family characteristics (2016)⁴

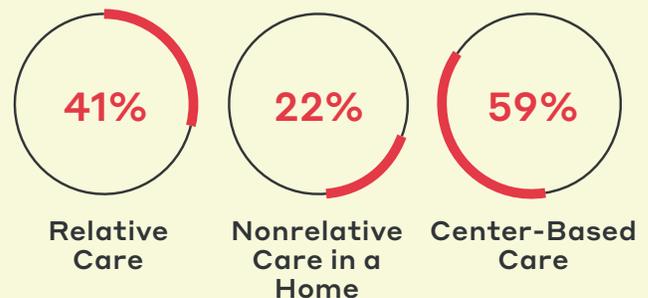
Total number of children:

21,362,000

Total percentage of children in at least one weekly nonparental care setting:

60%

Percentages* of children in at least one weekly nonparental care setting:



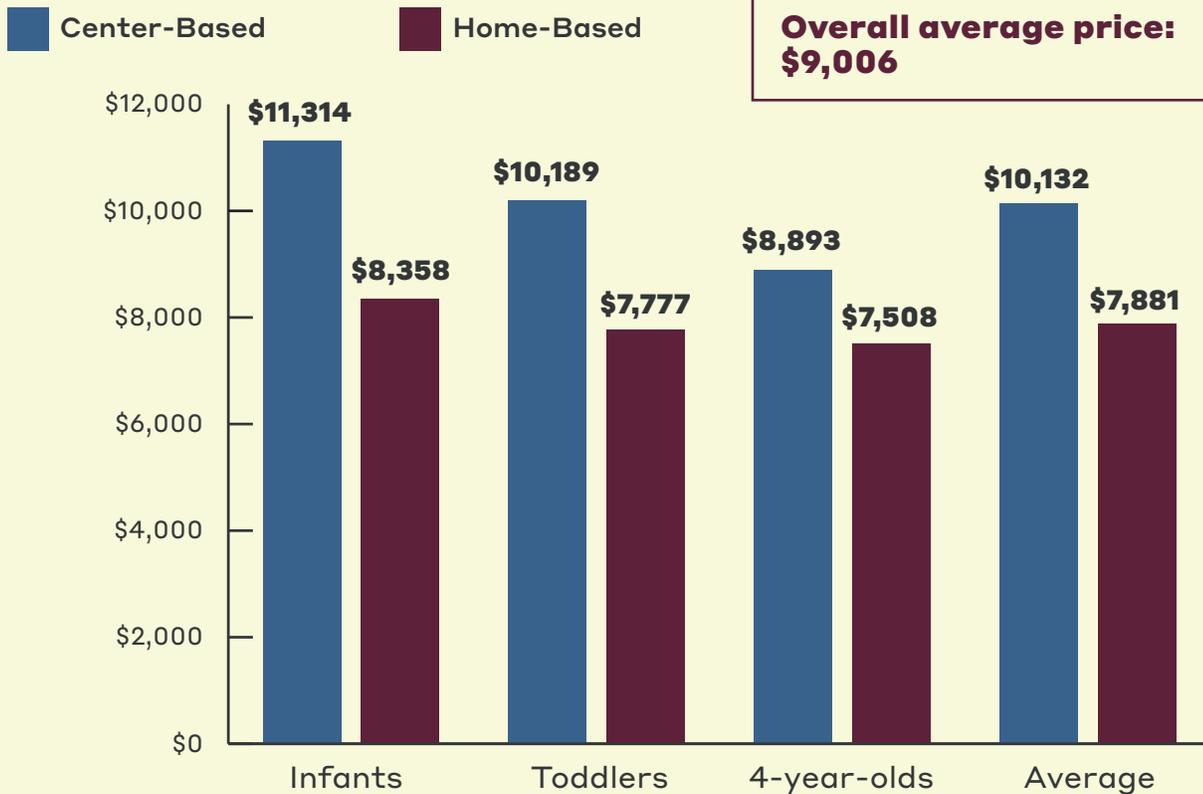
**Percentages do not add to 100% because children may be in more than 1 setting.*

Proportion of Weekly Household Income Spent on Regular Nonparental Care for All Children Under Age 6, by Household Income Level (2012)⁵

Income	% of Income Spent
Poor households (<100% FPL)	26%
Low-income households (100-199% FPL)	20%
Moderate-income households (200-299%)	16%
Higher-income households (≥300% FPL)	10%
Overall Average	20%

CHILD CARE BY THE NUMBERS

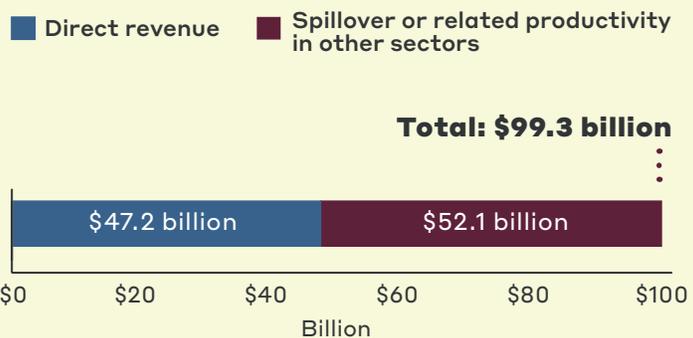
Average Price of Child Care (2018)⁶



Median Pay for Child Care Workers (2018)⁷

\$22,240 per year
or
\$11.17 per hour

Economic Impact of Child Care (2016)⁸



The Child Care Market

Child care in the United States is a market-based system. Families can choose from a variety of for-profit and non-profit providers. Around the country, millions of working parents rely on: large child care centers run by national or regional companies; child care provided in the owner's home (often referred to as family child care or home-based care); care provided in faith-based settings; and individual caregivers (such as nannies or relatives), who may provide care in the child's own home. Some parents may qualify for publicly supported early education programs, such as Head Start, Early Head Start, or public prekindergarten. Such programs often have limited hours and days of operation. Parents who work outside the standard nine-to-five, Monday-through-Friday schedule may require multiple care arrangements. Older children may also attend a public program during the school year and then a private child care program during the summer. Varying circumstances demand a variety of care options.

Governments, businesses, and philanthropic organizations invest billions of dollars in increasing the supply and quality of child care and early learning programs. However, these investments do not come close to being sufficient to make affordable, high-quality child care experiences available to all children.⁹

The Price of Child Care

Child care is among the most significant expenses for households with children, especially young children. The price of child care varies across regions and depends on the age of the child, the care setting, and the type of care provided. Based on data in the National Survey of Early Care and Education, families with children under age 6 spend on average 20 percent of their household income on child care, and families with income below the federal poverty line spend 26 percent of their household income on child care.¹⁰

Affordability is the most commonly cited problem that parents encounter when seeking care.¹¹ A 2018 survey by *The New York Times* also found that the high price of child care is the top reason why young adults are having fewer children than their ideal.¹²

Difficulty finding stable child care arrangements can negatively impact a parent’s ability to focus at work. In a 2019 survey by ReadyNation, more than half (54 percent) of parents with children under age 3 reported feeling distracted at work because of child care problems.¹³

The high cost of child care is also a frequent reason that parents, most often mothers, leave the workforce. Alternatively, parents may choose to reduce work hours, turn down promotions or new job offers, or switch from full-time to part-time work. These changes may lead to lost earnings or less work experience. The 2019 ReadyNation report estimated that U.S. businesses lose approximately \$13 billion per year due to employees missing work, leaving work early, or leaving their job completely for child-care-related reasons.¹⁴

Programs to help parents pay for child care are limited but can play a critical role in making care accessible to low- and moderate-income families. Depending on income and other factors, parents may receive assistance through their employers, federal or state tax credits, or publicly funded subsidies. Parents may also be able to access early learning programs that provide no-cost care for at least part of the day, including programs like Head Start, Early Head Start, and public prekindergarten.

“U.S. BUSINESSES LOSE APPROXIMATELY \$13 BILLION PER YEAR DUE TO EMPLOYEES MISSING WORK, LEAVING WORK EARLY, OR LEAVING THEIR JOB COMPLETELY FOR CHILD-CARE-RELATED REASONS.”

The Business of Child Care

Providing child care is expensive. Providing high-quality child care is even more expensive. A center-based, high-quality child care program needs a safe facility that includes developmentally appropriate design elements, trained child care teachers and assistants, staff-to-child ratios that ensure all children get the attention they need, and a well-designed curriculum. Each of these components adds to the cost of providing care. Despite these high costs, providing child care is low-wage work. Across the country, more than half of child care workers, compared with 21 percent of the American workforce as a whole, were part of families enrolled in at least one of four public-support programs: (1) the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, (2) Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, (3) the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and (4) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.¹⁵

The price of child care varies depending on the age of the child and geographic location.¹⁶ Care for infants and toddlers is the most expensive. States require a lower ratio of children to adults for infant care. Because providing care to infants and toddlers is costlier than providing care for older children, many child care providers rely on a mixed-age program to balance costs and expenses. In fact, recent efforts to expand public prekindergarten programs for 4-year-olds have created challenges for private providers who once balanced their costs by serving a mix of younger and older children.^{17,18}

Business and Employer Investment in Child Care

Businesses are directly affected when employees cannot find child care, their child care fails, or is unreliable. Replacing employees is expensive, both because of the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training new employees and because of the loss of the investment in the employee who leaves. These issues will continue to grow as workers have children later into their careers, making them costlier to replace.¹⁹

Businesses have adopted different strategies to support workers with children. These include providing information about how to find child care, subsidizing the cost of care, and providing child care on site. Some businesses have also implemented policies aimed at responding to certain child care emergencies that can cause parents to unexpectedly miss work, such as providing emergency child care through contracts with local

providers or helping employees pay for a last-minute caregiver. However, these benefits are only available to a small percentage of employees. According to a report by the Society for Human Resource Management, just 2 percent of employers help employees pay for child care outside of a flexible spending account and just 3 percent subsidize the cost of child care at company-affiliated onsite or near-site child care center.²⁰

From an employer's perspective, providing child care benefits can increase employee retention, productivity, and loyalty. The government also rewards businesses that provide child care assistance through the Employer-Provided Child Care Credit, a tax credit for businesses that directly pay the child care expenses for their employees.²¹ The credit is for up to 25 percent of direct child care expenses up to \$150,000 per year.²²

Philanthropic Investment in Child Care

Philanthropy plays a critical role in supporting child care and early learning. In 2018, 245 funders granted about \$68.5 million across the United States.²³ The funds went to a variety of projects, including research, professional development for child care and early learning teachers, and capital and infrastructure projects. Overall, since 2006, private donations for child care initiatives and organizations have totaled about \$2.8 billion.²⁴ As data continue to underscore the positive returns to investment in child care and early learning—for children and parents, and for the economy at large—philanthropic entities are increasing their funding in this area and asserting a larger role in the early education community.

“JUST 2 PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS HELP EMPLOYEES PAY FOR CHILD CARE OUTSIDE OF A FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNT AND JUST 3 PERCENT SUBSIDIZE THE COST OF CHILD CARE AT COMPANY-AFFILIATED ONSITE OR NEAR-SITE CHILD CARE CENTER.”

THE FEDERAL ROLE IN CHILD CARE

The federal government supports young children and their early learning in several ways: (1) by directly funding programs that have an explicit child care or early learning purpose; (2) by providing funds to states that can be used to provide child care; and (3) through tax expenditures that subsidize child care, such as the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.

Child Care and Development Fund

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is the largest federal funding source for child care in the United States.²⁵ The CCDF consists of two federal funding streams: (1) discretionary funding authorized by the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act, subject to annual appropriation; and (2) an entitlement portion of mandatory and matching funds made available under Section 418 of the Social Security Act. For administrative purposes, the funds are referred to as the “Child Care and Development Fund” and administered as a single program by the Office of Child Care in the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).²⁶ However, CCDF is not a term established in statute or regularly used outside of the federal government. Therefore, people often refer to the entire program as the “Child Care and Development Block Grant” or just “CCDBG.”

The government awards CCDF funds to states, territories, and tribes to help low-income working parents pay for child care so they can work or attend school or job training. States, territories, and tribes must also invest some of their CCDF awards in activities that improve the quality of child care. These quality investments go beyond the subsidy system and improve the quality of child care for all families.²⁷

HHS allocates each of the funding streams in a different manner:²⁸

Discretionary Fund

HHS allocates the CCDBG based on a formula focused on three components: (1) the number of children under age 5, (2) the number who qualify for the National School Lunch Program^a, and (3) per capita income. The funds are subject to annual appropriations. CCDBG funds are 100 percent federal and do not require states to spend any of their own funds to access them.

Mandatory Fund

HHS allocates the fund—also known as the Child Care Entitlement (CCE)—based on the federal share of expenditures in the state IV-A child care programs (such as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training program, transitional programs, and at-risk programs) in 1994 or 1995 (whichever is larger), or the average federal share in these programs for 1992 to 1994. This allocation amount does not change from year to year, and states do not have to spend any of their own funds to access their mandatory awards.

Matching Fund

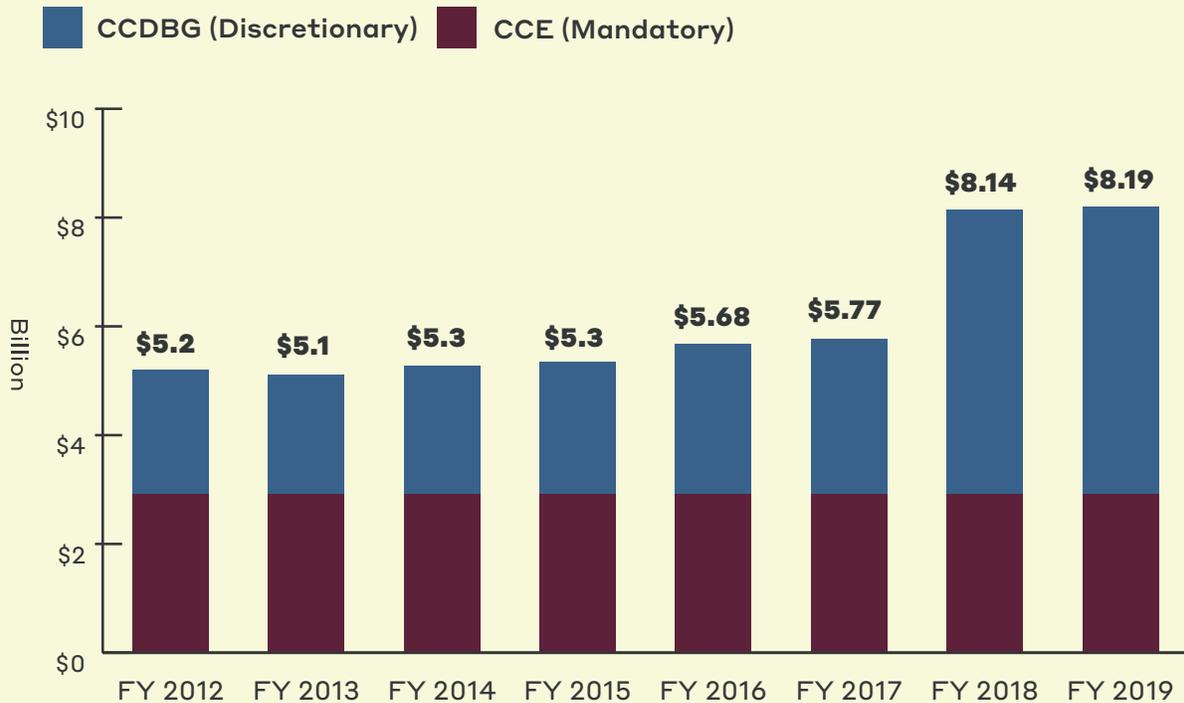
HHS allocates the fund based on the number of children under age 13 in a given state. In order to access their full award, states must put in their own funds, called matching funds. The amount that states must invest is based on their applicable Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) rate. Matching funds are not subject to annual appropriations.

The federal government sets certain requirements around eligibility, health and safety training, consumer education, and spending allocations, but states, territories, and tribes have significant flexibility in how they administer the program. For example, the federal government limits eligibility to families making below 85 percent of the state median income, but many states set their eligibility threshold below the federal limit. Because of funding constraints, states often have to make tough choices about how much to pay child care providers and where to set the income limit for eligibility.

a The National School Lunch Program is a federally-assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day. The percentage of students eligible or receiving free or reduced price lunch is often used as a proxy for the percentage of students living in poverty.

CCDF BY THE NUMBERS

CCDF Appropriations in Billions (FY 2012-2019)²⁹



Estimate of eligible children served by CCDF (FY2015)³⁰

Number eligible under federal rules:

13,598,000

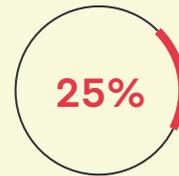
Number eligible under state rules:

8,417,000

Percentages of eligible children served under:



Federal Rules



State Rules

CCDF preliminary estimate number of child care providers receiving CCDF funds (FY 2017)³¹

In child's home:

41,418

Family child care home:

156,938

Center:

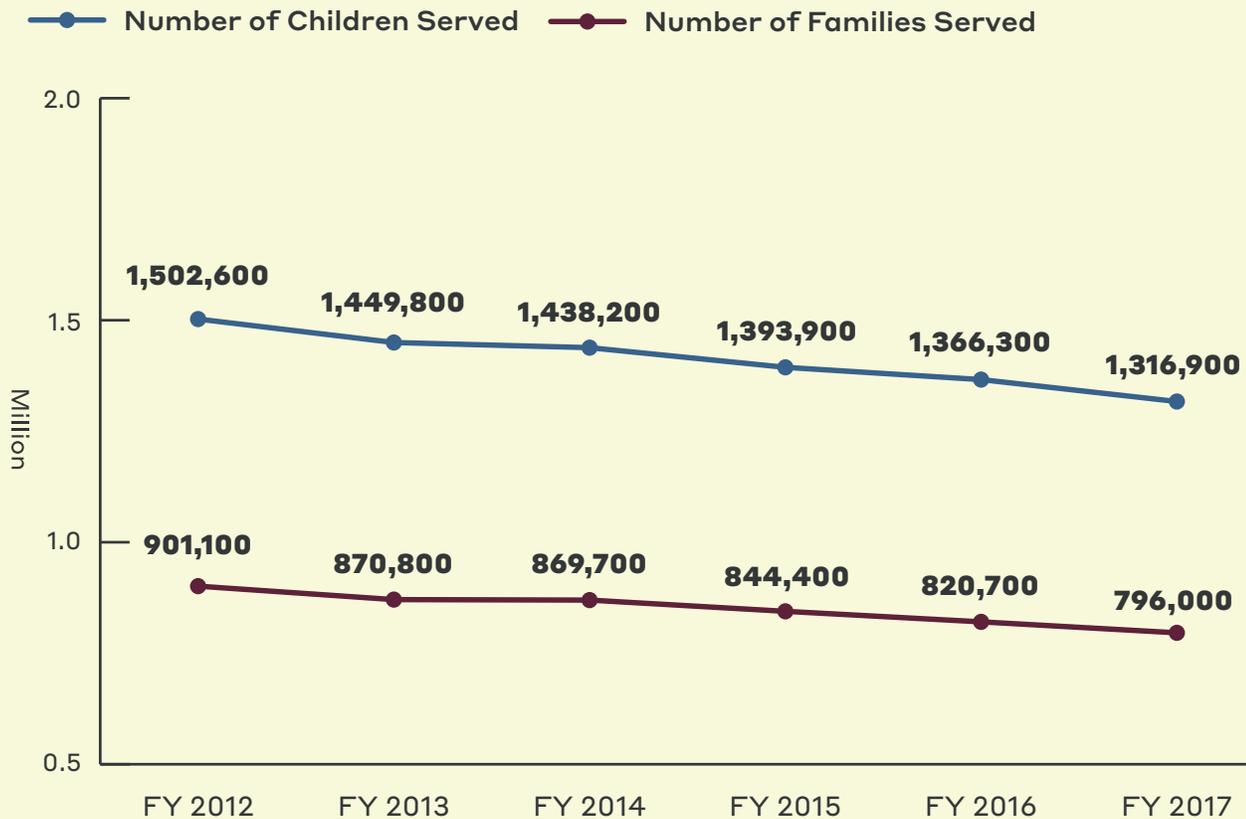
79,475

Total:

277,831

CCDF BY THE NUMBERS

Average Monthly Adjusted Number of Families and Children Served (FY 2012-2017)³²



CCDF Preliminary Estimate Average Monthly Subsidy by Age (2017)³³

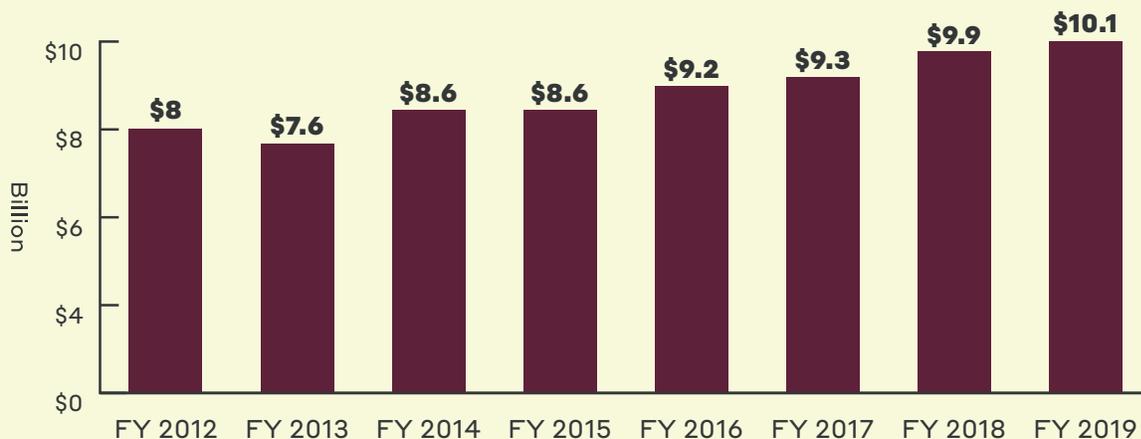
Age Group	Monthly Averages	Annualized
Infant/toddler (birth to 3)	\$561	\$6,732
Preschool (ages 3 to 4)	\$490	\$5,880
5-year-olds	\$411	\$4,932
School-age (ages 6 to 13+)	\$331	\$3,972
National	\$447	\$5,364

Head Start and Early Head Start

The federal government also funds child care and early learning through the Head Start program, which includes Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships.³⁴ The Office of Head Start (OHS) in ACF within HHS provides grants to local community organizations to implement Head Start (for 3- and 4-year-olds) and Early Head Start (for infants and toddlers). OHS administers funding and oversees the 1,600 public, non-profit, and for-profit agencies that provide Head Start and Early Head Start services.³⁵ The federal government distributes Head Start funds directly to programs at the local level through grants and partnerships, bypassing the state. Unlike Head Start, Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (also for infants and toddlers) grants are awarded to local community organizations *and* states.³⁶ While the state role in Head Start is minimal, each state has a Head Start Collaboration Office to facilitate partnerships between Head Start and the other state entities and programs that serve low-income children and their families.³⁷ Additionally, the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 requires states to designate or establish a state advisory council that is responsible for promoting coordination and collaboration among the wide range of early childhood programs and services at the state level.³⁸

HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START BY THE NUMBERS

Head Start, including Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Appropriations, in Billions (FY 2012-2019)³⁹



HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START BY THE NUMBERS

Number of Children Served in Head Start and Early Head Start⁴⁰

	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
Head Start	946,011	932,164	885,410	897,710	857,198	820,578
Early Head Start	151,342	150,100	145,308	158,558	195,673	209,918
Total	1,097,353	1,082,264	1,030,718	1,056,268	1,052,871	1,300,496

Proportion of eligible children served by Head Start and Early Head Start (2016-2017)⁴¹

Number eligible under Head Start:

2,364,000

Number eligible under Early Head Start:

2,205,000

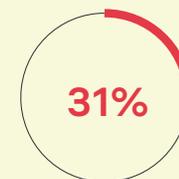
Percentages of eligible children served:

Number served under Head Start:

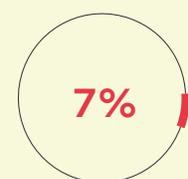
732,711

Number served under Early Head Start:

154,352



Head Start



Early Head Start

Number of Head Start and Early Head Start programs (2018)⁴²

Head Start:

1,610

Early Head Start:

1,513

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start:

37

Migrant and Seasonal Early Head Start:

26

American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start:

146

American Indian/Alaska Native Early Head Start:

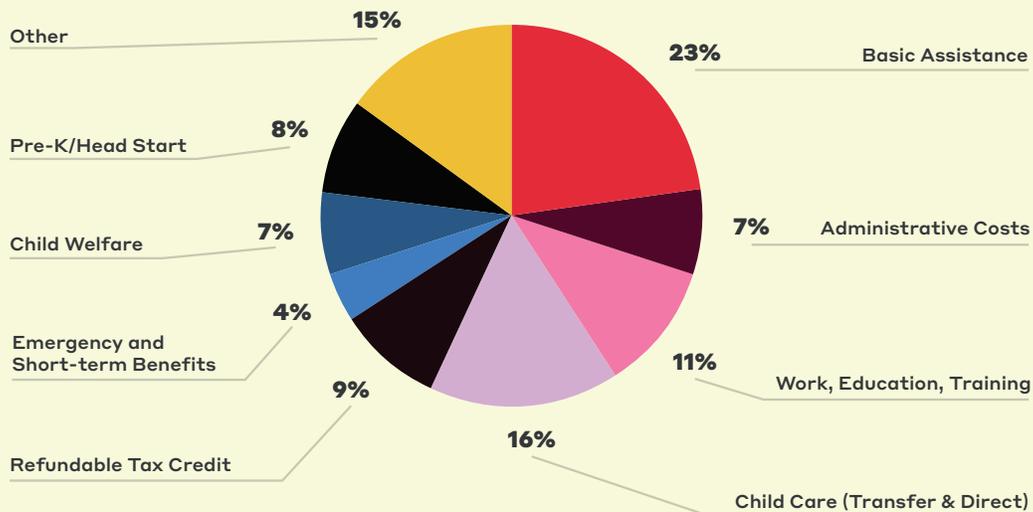
82

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program primarily helps needy families with children and discourages dependency on government programs by promoting job-readiness and work. State officials can transfer up to 30 percent of TANF funds to CCDBG to fund child care subsidies for low-income families.⁴³ Officials can also spend TANF funding directly on child care without limitations. TANF funds transferred to CCDBG are subject to all the same rules as CCDBG funds; TANF funds spent directly on child care are not. TANF funding may also be spent directly on Head Start and state prekindergarten programs.^a TANF funds spent directly on child care and Head Start or prekindergarten are not subject to federal reporting requirements, which means that no data are available regarding the number of children who receive assistance through TANF, the type of care these children receive, or the average amount and duration of child care assistance.

TANF BY THE NUMBERS

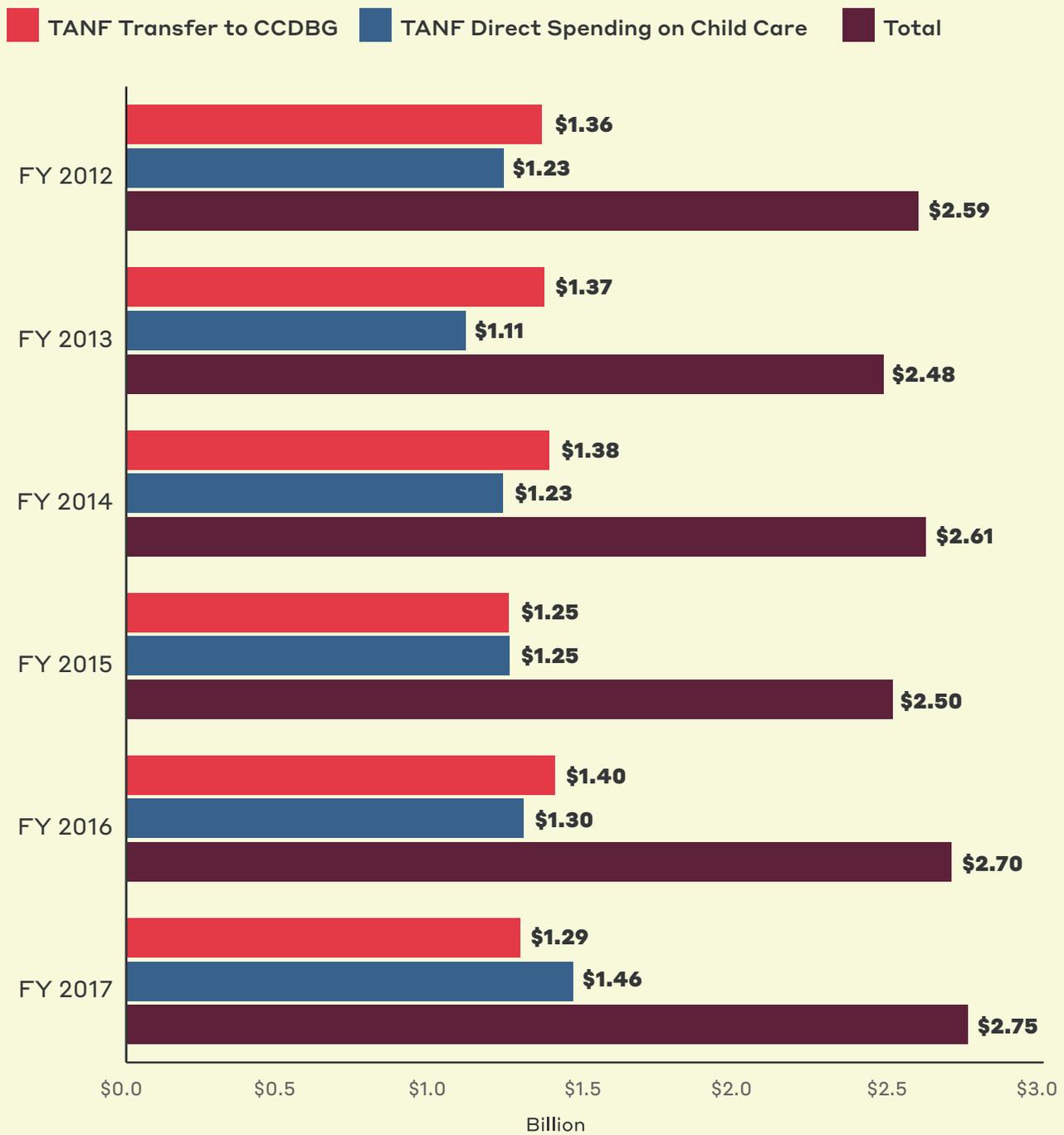
FY 2017 Use of TANF and MOE Funds as a Percentage of Total Federal TANF and State MOE Funding⁴⁴



^a For state-by-state data on TANF spending on child care and prekindergarten/Head Start visit bipartisanpolicy.org/tanf.

TANF BY THE NUMBERS

TANF Expenditures on Child Care, in Billions⁴⁵



Other Federal Program that Support Child Care

While most federal funding for child care and early learning comes from CCDF, Head Start, and TANF, many other programs provide funding to support young children and their families. This section summarizes additional federal programs that the U.S. Government Accountability Office identified in a 2017 report as having an explicit child care or early learning purpose.⁴⁶

Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities (IDEA, Part B, Section 619)

Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities is a program established under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B, Section 619.⁴⁷ It is administered by the Office of Special Education Programs within the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and provides grants to states to meet the needs of children ages 3 to 5 with disabilities. Funding for this program in fiscal year (FY) 2019 totaled \$391 million.⁴⁸

Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (IDEA, Part C)

Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities is a program established under Part C of IDEA.⁴⁹ The Office of Special Education Programs within ED administers the initiative and provides funds to states to support early intervention services for infants and toddlers. States set eligibility criteria for participation in this program in order to support children with developmental delays or disabilities. Funding in FY 2019 totaled \$470 million.⁵⁰

Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five

Legislators authorized Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5) in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.⁵¹ HHS and ED jointly administer the program. PDG B-5 strengthens state and local efforts to build, develop, and expand high-quality preschool programs so that more children from low- and moderate-income families enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school. Funding for PDG B-5 in FY 2019 totaled \$250 million.⁵²

THE STATE ROLE IN CHILD CARE

Most public funding for child care and early learning programs comes from the federal government. States have flexibility, within certain parameters, to determine how to use the funds. Specifically, states decide who is eligible for assistance and how much to pay child care providers. To access their full share of federal child care resources, states must invest some of their own funds under so-called match and maintenance-of-effort (MOE) requirements.⁵³ For FY 2019, the required match was \$1.24 billion and the required MOE was \$888 million.⁵⁴ States may also meet TANF MOE requirements through state early childhood investments.⁵⁵ In FY 2017, states spent \$2.5 billion of state TANF MOE funds on child care.^{a,56}

The largest share of state-directed investment in child care and early learning investments is usually in public prekindergarten programs. Over the last two decades, states have increasingly committed to offering public prekindergarten. Reflecting this trend, state spending on prekindergarten increased from \$2.4 billion in 2002 to \$8.15 billion in FY 2018.⁵⁷ Nationwide, 45 states and the District of Columbia operate public prekindergarten programs, which predominately serve 4-year-olds.⁵⁸ Specifically, 1.3 million 4-year-olds and 227,000 3-year-olds were served in FY 2018, or approximately one-third of eligible children.⁵⁹

a States may use the same funds to meet TANF MOE and CCDF MOE requirements, up to the required CCDF MOE amount. Therefore, this figure likely overestimates total state spending on child care. If one assumes that all CCDF MOE funds are double-counted to meet TANF MOE requirements, the actual additional child care funding from TANF MOE was about \$1.6 billion in FY 2017.

“NATIONWIDE, 45 STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OPERATE PUBLIC PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS, WHICH PREDOMINATELY SERVE 4-YEAR-OLDS. ”

States determine all aspects of their public prekindergarten programs including per-pupil spending, teacher salaries, family eligibility, classroom quality, professional-development requirements, program locations and settings, and other parameters. Thus, there is wide variation in the design and implementation of state prekindergarten programs.

CONCLUSION

Even a brief review provides a sense of the complexity of the current market for child care and early education in the United States and of the variety of different funding sources and entities that are active in this space. Despite wide acknowledgement of the importance of high-quality care and learning opportunities for young children, and despite increased public, private, and philanthropic investment to expand access to these opportunities, the reality is that available resources still fall far short of the need. As a result, millions of low- and middle-income families continue to struggle to find affordable, reliable child care, and millions of children spend developmentally crucial years in care environments that fall short of providing optimal conditions for them to thrive cognitively and emotionally. Few policy challenges are simultaneously more daunting and more important for the nation's long-term well-being than finding effective, scalable solutions to close this gap and ensure that all of America's children receive safe, nurturing, high-quality care in the earliest years of life.

**TIPS AND
GUIDES FOR
BUILDING
BIPARTISAN
SUPPORT**

MESSAGING TO CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS

In 2018, the Bipartisan Policy Center partnered with Luntz Global to survey conservative and liberal viewpoints on child care and early learning.⁶⁰ The survey found that Americans across the political spectrum support funding child care and early learning initiatives.^{61,62} However, different political leanings respond to different approaches.

For liberals, addressing the problem means ensuring access for all families, whereas conservatives focus on solutions that involve increasing parental involvement and faith-based connections. Despite these differences, crafting the right message and using targeted language can reach specific audiences- and even skeptics.

Framing the Conversation

When communicating to conservatives and liberals alike, certain terms and phrases work, while others do not. Specifically, the term **universal** does not work for conservatives or low-income families to describe an early learning program that would be available to all children, free of charge. However, both conservatives and liberals are receptive to the phrase **equal access**.

Conservatives are primarily concerned not about tax increases, but about government overreach.

Conservatives worry that increased governmental involvement replaces interaction between parents and children and that the government will begin teaching values—a role they assign uniquely to parents. Liberals, on the other hand, believe responsibility for the problem lies with the federal government, but they are concerned the government will inefficiently and ineffectively manage the programs.

Both conservatives and liberals agree that:

...Too many families are struggling. The cost of everyday life - including child care - is too expensive in this country. Moms and dads must work a second or third job just to make ends meet. And that means they're spending less and less time interacting with their kids. Parents need more time with their children to teach fundamental values. Not less.

Themes that Work

Growth and Success

Talking about growth and success works. It is not about school readiness or improving long-term academic success; it is about preparing children to **learn, grow, and succeed**.

Child-Focused Messaging

Keep the message **child-focused**. Frame the issues around the impacts on children. Audiences may be less receptive to arguments focused on parents or the workforce.

An Equal Opportunity

Most Americans believe every child deserves an **equal opportunity** at a quality early childhood education. The term **equal** is strongly preferred over **real** or **fair**.

Every Family

Keep messages focused on programs for **every family**. Conservatives and liberals alike are receptive to designing high-quality learning programs for **every family**. Conservatives are also receptive to programs for **hardworking families**, while nearly half of liberals responded to **struggling families**.

Keep Messages Positive

For conservatives, making an argument for **closing the achievement gap** does not work. To reach conservatives, reframe the message using positive language.

Putting It All Together

Words that work: Every child deserves an equal opportunity to a quality educational foundation that will prepare them to grow, learn, and succeed.

21 Words for the 21st Century

Americans respond better to specific words and phrases, such as **equal access** and **efficient and effective** programs. Consider these terms when crafting a message:

- Every Family
- Equal (instead of “Fair”)
- An American Issue
- Learn. Grow. Succeed.
- Prepare/Preparing
- Kid-/Child-Focused
- Efficient and Effective
- Parental Involvement
- Educators (not “Instructors”)
- Healthy
- All Children
- Choice/You Decide
- Deserve
- Future-Focused
- Inclusive
- Family Leave (instead of “Parental Leave”)
- Accountable/Accountability
- Achieve Potential
- Opportunity
- Faith-Based (for Conservatives)
- Strong/Solid/Quality Foundation

CONVENING A BIPARTISAN COALITION

Are you interested in building or broadening a coalition around child care and early learning in your community or state? Do you need to build support for specific goals or policies, and need to speak with a range of stakeholders, but don't know where to start? Below is a guide to get you started.

Identifying the Goals

The first step is identifying what you want to accomplish.

1. What is the issue, policy, and outcome you are looking to address or influence?
2. What is standing in the way of achieving this vision?
3. What will your message be?

Identifying Possible Coalition Members

The second step is identifying the existing actors and their roles. Who is missing from the conversation but could be helpful to your efforts? It is important to get the widest range of individuals possible on board.

Policymakers and agency officials:

- U.S. senators and representatives
- State senators, representatives, and delegates
- Governors and their policy staff
- Mayors, county officials, community leaders
- Members on relevant committees, caucuses
- Federal and state agency officials
- Family-service agency officials

Local stakeholders and organizations:

- Faith leaders
- Business leaders
- Parents and parent groups
- Schools and child care providers
- Teachers and early educators
- Police, fire, and similar groups
- Court system, juvenile justice system, etc.
- Local investors or philanthropy
- Other

Questions to consider while planning:

1. Who in these lists are currently involved and active in this policy area? What are their roles?
2. Who are opponents of your goals—and why are they opposed?
3. What is the perspective of each official, organization, or stakeholder involved? Is it helpful?
4. Who is the most influential voice in this policy area? How can they support your goals?
5. Who is currently not involved and active in this policy area? For each, assess:
 - Could they be a helpful addition?
 - What would their role be?
 - Who will reach out to them to get them involved?

Ensuring a Common Understanding of the Issue

After identifying members of the coalition, establish a common understanding of the issue in preparation for any meetings or discussions.

1. What is each member's baseline knowledge?
2. What background materials would prepare stakeholders for the discussion?
3. Have you given stakeholders enough time to review background materials before any convenings?
4. Have you provided contact information and opportunities for members to discuss questions and concerns before the group discussion?

Convening Coalition Members

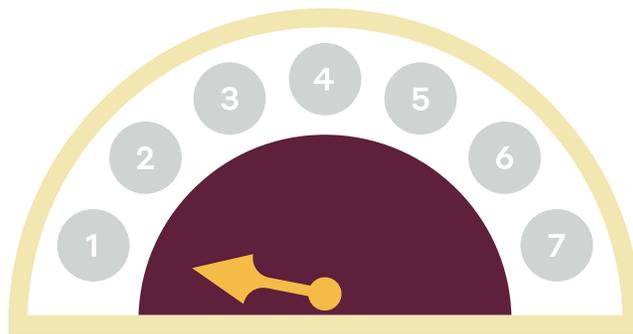
Finally, bring the coalition members together to discuss goals and to develop a shared vision and process for reaching such goals.

1. What is our shared goal?
2. What is a general timeline?
3. Who can make our vision a reality, and who do we need to convince?
4. How will we communicate our goals and vision to such individuals?
5. Who will communicate it? When will they communicate it? In what format?
6. What materials are necessary to support these communications?
7. How can the coalition use individual member strengths to reach these individuals?
8. What ongoing communication will the coalition have as these activities progress?
9. How can the group stay flexible to changing circumstances while staying on track?

ENGAGING POLICYMAKERS

The Child Care Elevator Speech

You find yourself in a situation where you have a short window of time to introduce yourself to an influential individual to discuss the importance of child care. How can you make the most effective and impactful use of your time? Tailor the format below to your time line—30 seconds to several minutes.



1. Introduce yourself.

2. Identify the problem.

3. Identify the solution.

4. Explain specifically and clearly how the individual can help.

5. Ask for a follow-up meeting and offer to be of assistance.

6. Leave behind your contact information (business card).

7. Follow up with a thank you and resources.

The Child Care Meeting Format

You have successfully scheduled a meeting with someone who can influence child care policy.

How do you format the meeting?

Before the meeting: Do your research on who you are talking to. Are they familiar with early childhood topics, or will you need to provide a basic overview? Have you met with them before, or do you have a personal connection you could bring up? What have they done in the past on this or other related topics you could discuss? Are they a supporter, or do they need to be convinced; what arguments or talking points will work best? Let your agenda reflect these realities, and ensure your talking points target what messages will resonate with them. Make sure to speak in general terms; do not assume they understand the jargon and acronyms the field recognizes.

After the meeting: Continue to cultivate the relationship. Send a follow-up email thanking them for their time and providing any requested details. Reach out when relevant information becomes available or with any opportunities to attend meetings or events that connect your priorities to the policymaker's interests or questions.

During the meeting:

1. Thank them for their time.
2. Introduce yourself and your organization.
3. Briefly explain why you requested the meeting.
4. Review your priorities, the need, and your requests.
5. Engage the policymaker on matters related to their priorities.
6. Tell a story that connects your priorities, the policymaker's priorities or personal history, and your request.
7. Ask if they have any questions you can help with.
8. Offer to be a resource and ask to stay in touch.
9. Offer to host the policymaker and staff at a site visit or at another in-person opportunity.
10. Thank everyone in the room and leave printed materials behind.

Site-visit invitations: If you invited the policymaker for a district site visit at a child care center or other early learning program, follow up on this to make it a reality. These visits are a wonderful way to get policymakers interested in your priorities and to understand how the programs work on the ground and impact families in their district or service area.

**DIVING DEEPER:
REASONS TO
SUPPORT
CHILD CARE**

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF CHILD CARE

Child care plays a critical role in ensuring parents can work, children can learn, businesses can succeed, and the economy can thrive. There are many research-based arguments for investing in child care and early learning programs across the country. Sometimes you just have to find the right argument to reach your audience.

This section includes summaries of several topics related to the importance of child care. Following the summaries are talking points you can use when having discussions with policymakers. Handouts with the same information are available for you to download at the Bipartisan Toolkit website at <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/policy-area/early-childhood/>.

THE SCIENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Decades of neuroscience and behavioral research illustrate why a child's first five years of life are the most critical periods in their brain development.⁶³ Brains are built over time; the basic architecture begins at birth and grows the fastest over the first five years, before continuing into adulthood.⁶⁴ One's earliest experiences affect the quality of that

architecture by establishing either a strong or fragile foundation for the learning and behavior that follows. Just as a weak foundation compromises the quality and strength of a house, adverse experiences early in life can impair brain architecture, with long-term and negative effects that last into adulthood.

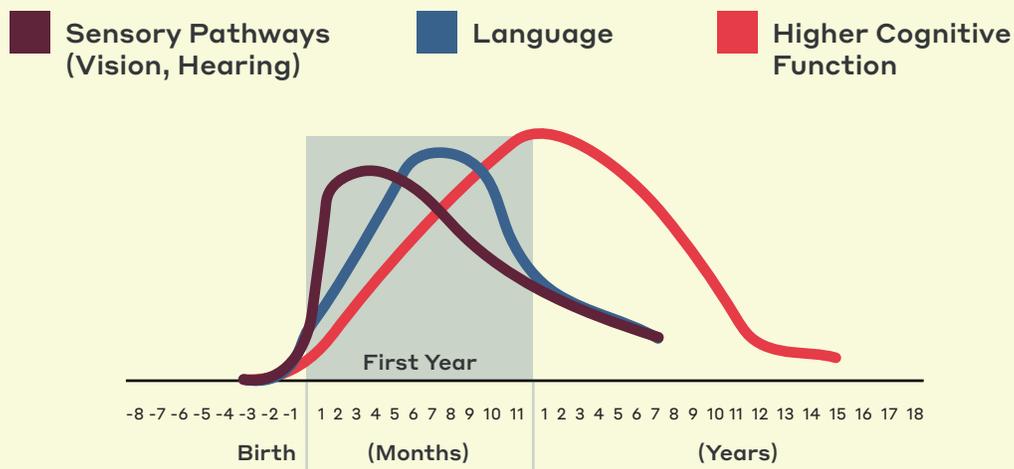
90 percent of the brain develops before age 5.

Brain Development

The brain is most flexible and adaptable to learning during the earliest years, and as the brain matures, it is less capable of reorganizing and adapting to new or unexpected challenges. The emotional

and physical health, social skills, and cognitive and linguistic capacities that emerge in the early years are all important for success in school, the workplace, and in the larger community.

Human Brain Development: Neural Connections for Different Functions Develop Sequentially⁶⁵



Positive Interactions

Children's brains require stable, caring, interactive relationships and positive experiences with adults.⁶⁶ A child's attachment to their parents is primary, but they can also benefit from close relationships with other nurturing caregivers. Decades of research have shown that mutually rewarding interactions are essential prerequisites for the development of healthy brain circuits and

increasingly complex skills. Unfortunately, children who face greater stress and adversity, such as living in poverty or facing repeated abuse, are at far greater risk for delays in their cognitive, language, and emotional development. The architecture of these children's brains does not form as expected, which can lead to disparities in learning and behavior.⁶⁷

Building A Strong Foundation

A strong foundation in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes, and a weak foundation increases the odds of difficulties later in life. Therefore, creating the right conditions for early childhood development is likely to be more effective and less costly than addressing problems at a later age. The science of early brain development clearly indicates that federal, state, and local officials should support the implementation of programs that promote a balanced and developmentally

appropriate approach to the "whole child." When parents, communities, and professionals are able to positively influence children's social and emotional needs, they will have maximum impact on the development of strong brains. Public policies that provide parents with viable choices about how to balance their work and parenting responsibilities after the birth of a baby or adoption of a child are critical to establishing strong foundations for the next generation.

The Takeaway

Children only get one chance at learning the fundamentals. Every child deserves an equal opportunity to a quality educational foundation that will prepare them to grow, learn, and succeed in education, society, and life.

THE MARKET-BASED, MIXED-DELIVERY CHILD CARE SYSTEM

Child care is a market-based system where parents choose a provider based on a variety of factors, including quality, structure, cost, needs of their child, work circumstances, location, religious affiliation, and much more. Parents can choose between large child care centers, child care in the

owner's home or in a faith-based setting, or care from a nanny or relative. Parents have the definitive choice of which setting best fits the needs of their family. However, certain factors might limit their options.

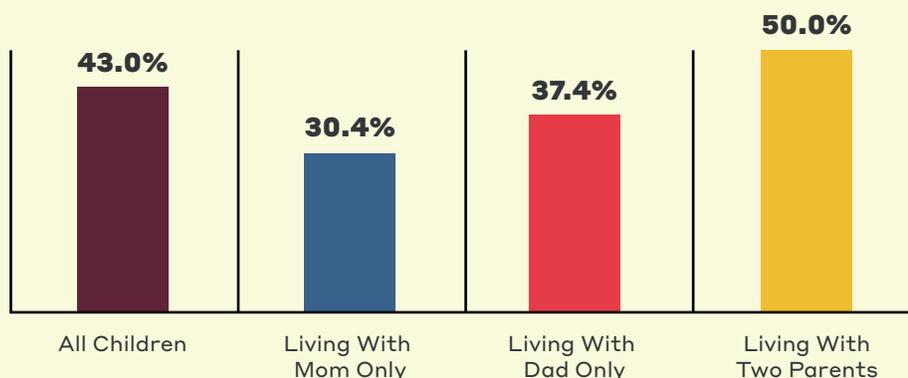
60 percent of children younger than age 5 are in a regular child care arrangement their parent has chosen for them each week.

Cost

Cost is the factor cited most often by families as the primary reason for difficulty finding child care.⁶⁸ The cost of child care is indeed often prohibitive, particularly for low-income, working families—in 33 states and Washington, D.C., infant care costs

exceed the average cost of in-state college tuition at public four-year institutions.⁶⁹ While most parents cannot afford to pay more, providers are operating on razor-thin margins and most child care employees receive poverty-level wages.⁷⁰

Percent of Children Living With A Parent Working A Nonstandard Schedule, 2014⁷¹



Quality

In the early years, the human brain is exceptionally malleable and sensitive to experiences, for better or for worse, based on the quality of children's experiences.⁷² The high-stakes nature of this period makes it critical that young children are in high-

quality environments that are safe and socially, emotionally, and cognitively engaging. While parents seek the highest-quality option for their child, those are often the costlier programs and the hardest to find an open slot in.

Program Structure

Most center-based child care programs have limited hours and days of operation. Because many parents may work outside of a typical nine-to-five, Monday-through-Friday schedule, families may need to choose a family child care or home-based option with more flexible or longer hours. Therefore,

children may receive care in multiple settings throughout the week or attend a public program during the school year then a different type of child care in the summer. Other factors, such as religious affiliation or curriculum, may influence a parent's choice.

Mixed Delivery System includes center- and home-based providers, Head Start and Early Head Start programs and state prekindergarten programs across the public, private, for-profit, non-profit, and faith-based sectors.

Accessibility

The market is poorly distributed, and demand often outgrows supply, leading families to join waiting lists for long periods of time. Finding care is particularly difficult for families in rural areas and parents of infants—nearly 40 percent of parents

find the lack of an open slot the most difficult part of finding child care for their infant.⁷³ Other factors include the location of care (whether it is close to home, work, or whether they have that choice) and considerations for children with special needs.

The Takeaway

Families are the building blocks of a productive society. Equipping families—especially young, first-time parents—with the tools, knowledge, and awareness to make better choices for their children takes so little and yet accomplishes so much. All families deserve the chance to set themselves up for success and to put their own children on the path toward a brighter future.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE CHILD CARE INDUSTRY

Child care plays an increasingly integral role in the nation's economic growth and productivity. The child care sector must continually evolve to meet the demands of working parents and employers, while the industry itself is a powerful force in regional and national economic growth. In

addition to boosting labor participation, workforce productivity, and parents' household earnings, the child care industry contributes to the local economy by employing workers, purchasing goods and services, and stimulating economic activity in other sectors.⁷⁴

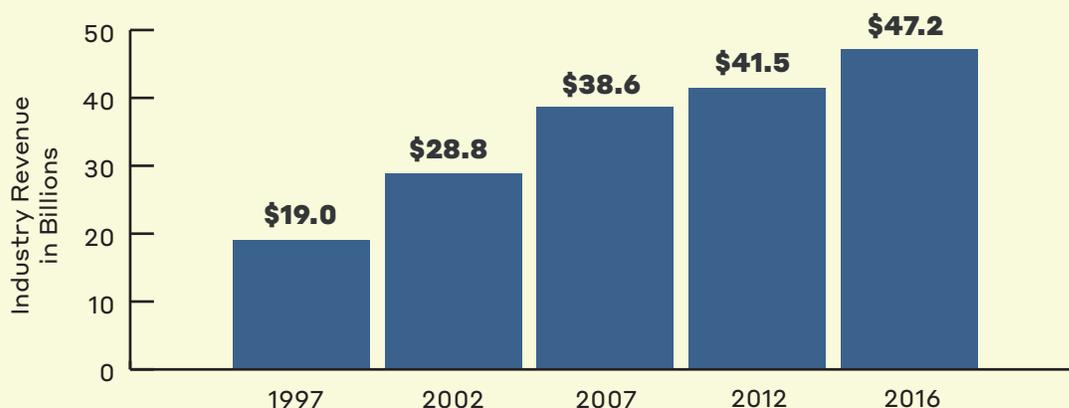
1.1 million part-time workers cited problems with child care as the primary reason for not working full time on a regular basis in 2018.

Working Parents

Access to affordable child care allows for increased labor force participation and education of the workforce. In the United States, 66 percent of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce.⁷⁵ It is an economic reality that working parents need safe, reliable, and affordable child care while they are at work. Without these options, parents will reduce their hours or opt

out of the workforce all together, which will have detrimental effects on the household earnings of the family, their employer, and the broader economy. U.S. businesses lose approximately \$13 billion per year due to employees missing work, leaving work early, or leaving their job completely for child-care-related reasons.⁷⁶

Child Care Industry Revenue : 1997 - 2016⁷⁷



Child Care as a Business

The child care industry consists of a large network of small businesses, often home-based and operated by a sole proprietor. These businesses are sources of income for individuals and sources of economic growth in communities. In 2016, the child care industry was composed of about 675,000 market-based child care providers—most of which were

family child care and home-based—that employed about 1.5 million workers.⁷⁸ With revenue of \$47.2 billion in 2016, the child care industry is comparable in size to outpatient medical care facilities, scientific research and development services, and advertising agencies.⁷⁹

Regional and National Economic Growth

As the child care industry has grown, it has come to play a significant role in regional and state economic productivity and growth. The estimated \$47.2 billion in direct revenue generated within the market-based child care industry is estimated to support about \$52.1 billion in spillover or related productivity in other industry sectors for an estimated combined total economic impact of about \$99.3 billion in the United States.⁸⁰ Further,

the regional impact of that spending is amplified because the production, delivery, and consumption of child care are entirely local. The outcomes include increased output in the broader economy, increased exports, reduced imports, increased competitiveness for industries intensive in the use of low-skilled labor, greater capital spending, and wage increases among high-skilled workers.

The Takeaway

To effectively compete in the 21st-century global economy, the United States must have a highly educated workforce—one that starts with high-quality, affordable child care options for working families. Child care helps create stronger and more prosperous communities and improves the well-being of children and families.

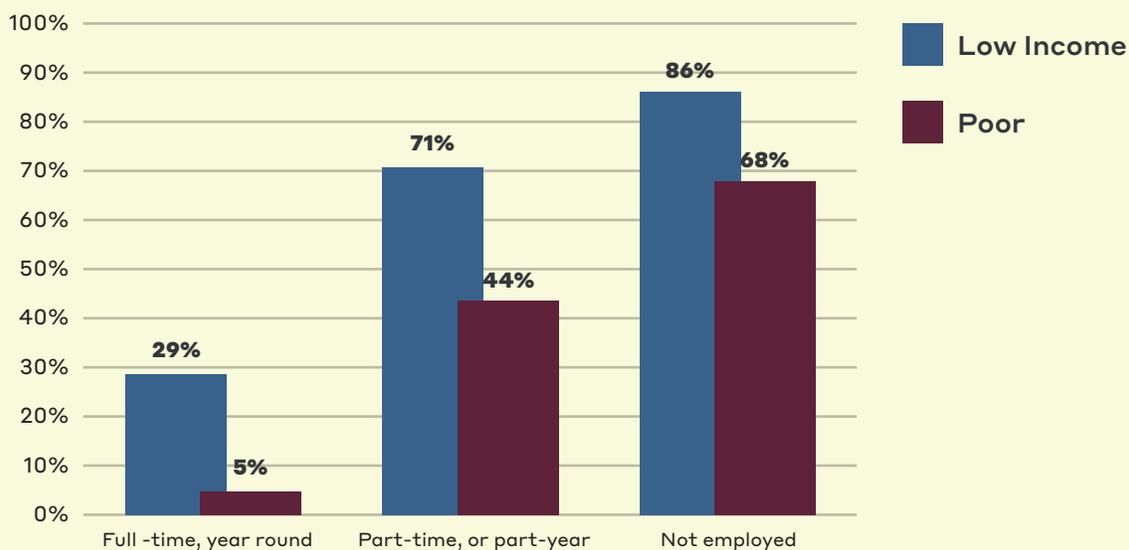
STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH CHILD CARE

Parents and families are the first and most important influence on a child’s well-being and early development. In today’s economy, young children are increasingly growing, developing, and learning both at home and in formal child care settings. Although each setting independently

impacts a child, together the home and formal contexts interact to offer a unique influence. The family’s engagement in their child’s upbringing—both at home and in a formal setting—is critical to that child’s success. Child care and early learning programs help strengthen families in several ways.

Nearly two-thirds of parents with children under age 5 are in the workforce and need safe, trustworthy, and affordable child care while they are at work supporting the well-being of their family.

Percentage of Children in Low-income and Poor Families by Parent Employment, 2016⁸¹



Family Engagement

One of the key predictors of academic achievement is the extent to which families are engaged, both by encouraging learning at home and by involving themselves in their child's education.^{82,83}

When a parent or caregiver is involved in a child's education, the child is less likely to have behavioral problems and more likely to reach

higher levels of achievement.⁸⁴ Engaging parents in becoming their child's advocate at the earliest occasion establishes productive and trustworthy relationships, develops feedback loops, and helps providers and the broader community better understand the needs of the family and child.

Parental Support

Children are more likely to thrive when their parents and families have the support they need. In a 2016 survey, approximately 80 percent of parents with young children agreed strongly that good parenting can be learned, and 69 percent said they would use more positive parenting strategies if they knew what those strategies entailed.⁸⁵ Participation in child care and early

learning programs often provides parents with supports and resources that can increase positive outcomes for children and families, including by building communities of support, offering comprehensive services such as health and mental health resources, and connecting parents to other community resources to help them reach their goals and fulfill their needs.

Family Sustainability

A substantial body of research confirms the link between a family's financial stability in a child's early years and the child's academic achievement, behavioral problems, and mental health.⁸⁶

Similarly, multiple studies have shown that early development suffers when children lack access to basic needs like safe housing, health care,

and nutritious food, and when their parents are financially stressed or overworked.⁸⁷ Access to child care so parents can work is therefore a critical aspect of supporting families with children. The earnings these parents make can promote social mobility and even decrease dependency on public-assistance programs over time.

The Takeaway

Access to high-quality child care creates greater financial stability for families, meaning parents have more time to connect with their children, giving them a strong foundation to achieve their full potential.

TALKING POINTS FOR MAKING THE CASE FOR CHILD CARE

Communicating the Science of Early Childhood Development:

- Avoid talking about the “achievement gap,” which many see as divisive and negative. Instead, focus on the positive.

Early childhood programs provide a foundation for educational success for all children.

- Discuss a child’s “growth and success” instead of “school readiness.”

Early childhood education prepares children to learn, grow, and succeed. You only get one chance at childhood. You only get one chance at learning the fundamentals—how to count, how to talk, how to think.

- Discuss programs with flexibility for “every family” in mind.

Child care and early learning programs should help every family.

- Discuss opportunities as “equal” instead of “fair” or “real.”

Every child deserves an equal opportunity at a quality early childhood education.

Communicating How the Market-Based, Mixed-Delivery System Supports Parental Choice:

- Communicate that parents are ultimately responsible for their child’s upbringing.

Families are the building blocks of society. Parents are their child’s first and most important teacher.

- Discuss the impacts of parental choice and involvement.

Parents know what’s best for their children. That means greater parental leadership in the development of early childhood programs and autonomy in the selection of early child care providers, both of which allow parents maximum choice in deciding what is best for their family.

- Communicate the benefits of child care for children and families.

You only get one chance at childhood. You only get one chance at learning the fundamentals—how to count, how to talk, how to think. And parents get one chance to put their children on the path to success in education, society, and life.

Communicating the Economic Impact of Child Care:

- Discuss the positive financial impact on all families.

With options for affordable child care, families have the freedom to stay in or return to the labor force or to seek the education they need to further their careers. This increases the economic and general well-being of families and can help them lift themselves out of poverty.

- Communicate that child care helps America's economy stay competitive in the global market.

By providing high-quality child care, the nation creates higher-quality and more effective workers, making the country better prepared for a competitive global economy.

- Identify economic benefits, particularly local examples, with spillover to additional community benefits and local businesses.

Child care is an entirely local business operation. By investing locally, you can help create stronger and more prosperous communities.

- Communicate that investing in child care helps local economies prosper.

Higher education and wages allow for more spending and help drive local economic and job growth.

Communicating the Role of Child Care in Strengthening Families:

- Clarify that child care programs and initiatives are not a substitute for the parents' involvement but a partnership with them and their children.

Early childhood initiatives are a partnership with the family, rather than a substitute. Child care opens up the opportunity to meet new families and helps provide links to health and financial resources.

- Communicate the benefits of child care for families, including for their employment and long-term economic outcomes.

Access to child care allows parents the freedom to stay in the labor market, increasing overall lifetime wages that aid the entire family. In addition, parents have more time to be with their children and instill the values and skills they view as important.

- Focus on long-term benefits for their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Greater accessibility to high-quality early learning and child care will benefit future generations by increasing regional economic growth, providing access to higher-salary jobs, and reducing government welfare dependency.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION GLOSSARY

Accessibility: Refers to the availability of child care when and where a family needs it.

Affordability: The degree to which the price of child care is a reasonable or feasible family expense.

Appropriations: Annual decisions made by Congress about how the federal government spends some of its money. In general, the appropriations process addresses the discretionary portion of the budget—spending ranging from national defense to food safety to education to federal employee salaries—but excludes mandatory spending, such as Medicare and Social Security, which is distributed automatically according to formulas. Appropriations may also include programs that are not currently authorized.

Authorizations: Bills that create, extend, or make changes to statutes and specific programs and that specify the amount of money that appropriators may spend on a specific program. In many cases, appropriators may appropriate a different amount of funding than specified in the authorizing bill.

Blending and Braiding: Two financing strategies employed when two or more separate program funds are available to serve a group of children. Officials simply combine blended funds, which are generally not required to be tracked back to the origin, while braided funds must be attributed and tracked to their separate funding streams and must ensure there is no duplication.

Block Grant: A grant from the federal government that provides individual states and local governments broad authority and discretion in determining how to use funds to meet specified program goals.

Center-Based: Child care provided in nonresidential group settings, such as within public or private schools, churches, preschools, day care centers, or nursery schools.

Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG): A federal block grant program that provides grants to states, territories, and tribes to subsidize the child care expenses of low-income working families with children. The program provides discretionary funding and legal requirements for the Child Care and Development Fund.

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF): The combined term for mandatory and discretionary funding for states, territories, and tribes to administer CCDBG.

Child Care Capacity: The number of children that a child care provider can serve based on the number of slots available. Slots are either filled or un-filled.

Comprehensive Services: An array of coordinated services that meet the holistic needs of children and families enrolled in a given program, from health and developmental screenings to family literacy and parent education.

Early Head Start: A federally funded program serving infants and toddlers under age 3, as well as pregnant women, to support child development and to help parents reach economic independence.

Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships: A federal initiative established in 2014 to integrate Early Head Start comprehensive services and resources into the array of traditional child care and family care settings in order to expand availability and improve quality of child care for infants and toddlers.

Eligibility: Refers to one's ability to qualify for a program or service based on program requirements, such as household income and related criteria, like family size, area of residence, and employment status.

Family Child Care: The work of child care providers in a professional caregiver's home who is not related to the children in their care. Also known as "home-based care."

Federal Poverty Level: The measure of a family's annual cash income, used by the government to determine eligibility for many needs-based programs, including Head Start.

Head Start: A federally funded and locally administered program that promotes school readiness for children under 5 from low-income families through education, health, social, and other services.

Home-Based Child Care: Also known as "family child care."

Infants and Toddlers: Generally referring to children ages birth through 3.

Licensed Child Care Provider: Child care programs certified by the state that meet certain requirements.

License-Exempt Child Care Provider: Child care programs that operate legally but that the state has not yet licensed.

Mixed-Delivery System: A term to describe the wide array of provider types, including center- and home-based providers, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and state prekindergarten programs across the public, private, for profit, non-profit, and faith-based sectors.

Nontraditional Hours: Refers to the time outside of a typical nine-to-five, Monday-through-Friday day when a parent might be working or in school and thus might need additional access to child care.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS): A system used by states to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs. Ratings typically apply to providers based on a defined set of standards, and programs continually aim to improve their ratings.

School-Age Children: Generally refers to children older than age 5 who have entered kindergarten. School-age care, also known as out-of-school-time care, often takes place before and after school and during summer breaks.

State Median Income (SMI): The amount that divides a state's income distribution into two equal groups, half having income above the amount and half having income below the amount. SMI determines eligibility for many need-based programs, including CCDF.

Subsidy: Public or private assistance given to a family to reduce the cost of child care.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): A federally funded grant program that provides grants to states to design and operate programs that help needy families achieve economic security and child and family well-being, including through the provision of child care services.

Universal Preschool: A movement to make access to prekindergarten (usually for 4-year-olds) available to all children and families, regardless of the child's abilities or family income.

Vouchers and Contracts: The mechanisms of payment for child care assistance through CCDF. Officials issue vouchers directly to families, while contracts are pre-negotiated arrangements made between jurisdictions and child care providers.

HANDY ACRONYMS

ACF: Administration for Children and Families

CCDBG: Child Care and Development Block Grant

CCDF: Child Care and Development Fund

ECE: Early Care and Education

ED: U.S. Department of Education

EHS-CCP: Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships

ESEA: Elementary and Secondary Education Act

ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act

FCC: Family Child Care

HHS: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

MIECHV: Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program

OCC: Office of Child Care

OHS: Office of Head Start

OFA: Office of Family Assistance

PDG B-5: Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five

QRIS: Quality Rating and Improvement System

SMI: State Median Income

TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

ENDNOTES

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