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Early Childhood Education in U.S. States

A Toolkit for State Policymakers

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Introduction and summary

This toolkit is an update to the Center for American Progress' 2019 early childhood toolkit for state policymakers. It includes new data and policy options, drawn in part from previously published CAP resources, and is organized into three chapters:

1. How To Expand Access to High-Quality Child Care and Preschool
2. Messaging and Communications To Promote Early Childhood Education
3. Related Resources on Child Care and Early Learning

Access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education is essential for children, families, communities, and the economy. Early experiences form the foundation of the physical and cognitive architecture that supports children's health and learning potential throughout their lives. To put children on a trajectory for success, therefore, policymakers must promote their access to experiences that support the development of this architecture, including through enriching early learning environments.

During the first three years of life, babies' brains develop more than 1 million neural connections every second. Safe, nurturing environments and positive social interactions with trusted caregivers during these early years lay the foundation for future development and well-being. Second only to interaction with family, child care is the environment where young children interface the most with trusted caregivers. High-quality child care, even as early as infancy, improves learning, language development, and social-emotional skills that are necessary for children to thrive in kindergarten and beyond.

Child care is a necessity: On average, two-thirds of children in the United States have all available parents in the workforce. But lack of access to affordable care often forces families to make difficult decisions about their work to care for their children. Nationally, an estimated annual loss of $122 billion in earnings, productivity, and revenue is attributed to families' challenges securing infant and toddler care.

Early experiences form the foundation of the physical and cognitive architecture that supports children's health and learning potential throughout their lives.

Over the past few years, the child care industry has seen an unprecedented infusion of federal funding in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the American Rescue Plan allocated $24 billion in emergency funding to help child care providers keep operating, but that funding expired at the end of September 2023. State policymakers, therefore, are in a prime position and can play a critical role in making policy decisions that empower families to access early learning opportunities that prepare children for the future.

About this toolkit

CAP has developed this toolkit for policymakers and state advocates who champion early childhood issues in their states and local communities. The toolkit complements CAP's child care and early learning data dashboard, which provides context and data on the landscape of child care and early learning in each state, by outlining a holistic view of the role that state leadership plays in promoting access to high-quality affordable early learning programs.

The toolkit provides information and resources to help policymakers advocate for increased investments in their state's early childhood system. In addition to including examples of policies that support state child care and early learning, the toolkit provides messaging guidance and talking points to help policymakers and advocates elevate the need for early childhood policies. It also suggests communications strategies and sample messaging to ensure that discussion of child care and early learning permeates state and local policy discussions and reaches constituents.

State leaders can use innumerable strategies to address the needs of children and families in their districts; what this toolkit offers is not an exhaustive list, but rather a sample of evidence-based solutions and a selection of examples from states across the country to illustrate the options available.

For more information on any of the topics outlined in this toolkit, please contact earlychildhood@americanprogress.org.

How To Expand Access to Affordable, High-Quality Child Care and Preschool

A mother holds her child during an event to reintroduce child care legislation at the U.S. Capitol on April 27, 2023, in Washington, D.C. Photo: Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

Background

The need to ensure that all children and families have access to affordable, high-quality early childhood programs and support is clear, and momentum around this issue is building. Policymakers can use this momentum to introduce policies that expand access to child care and early learning programs in their states and to raise awareness of the barriers to accessing quality. While it will often be necessary for policymakers to focus on specific areas of this issue, they should ultimately be working toward the goal of a comprehensive early childhood system that:

- Supports healthy children and families
- Meets family needs
- Eases the financial burden of accessing high-quality care
- Provides sufficient and stable funding
- Prepares children for kindergarten and beyond

This section of the toolkit provides examples of state-level policies that expand access to affordable, high-quality child care and preschool, including:

- Improving the current child care subsidy system
- Targeting support to high-need areas and populations
- Investing in the early care and education workforce
- Implementing a mixed-delivery universal preschool program
- Eliminating preschool suspensions and expulsions
- Supporting the needs of young dual-language learners
- Expanding Early Head Start and increasing supports for infants and toddlers

See also: "Federal Child Care Legislation Over the Past Decade"

The toolkit also includes details about how policymakers can increase the availability of and access to robust data on early childhood issues, as well as strategies to generate revenue to fund policy priorities that support young children and their families.

Policy recommendations

Early learning opportunities are predictive of educational attainment, which in turn corresponds with adult health and earnings. Having access to high-quality early care and education, therefore, sets the stage for longer-term developmental outcomes, while also enabling parents and caregivers to go to work, attend school, or obtain training. Most children have all available parents in the workforce, so having a comprehensive, mixed-delivery child care system is a critical economic resource as much as it is an educational one. But while most children across the country are in nonparental care, more than half live in a child care desert where there are too few slots available.

Policies and programs that help expand supply, adequately compensate the early education workforce, and bring down costs for working families are crucial for giving all children access to high-quality early care and education opportunities. If child care costs were less than or equal to 7 percent of families' incomes—the threshold recommended by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—states' economies would increase by millions of dollars. This would be true even if child care costs were capped at 10 percent of families' incomes. The gain in gross domestic product (GDP) from affordable child care could increase federal tax revenue by more than $70 billion annually.

Improve the current child care subsidy system

States can support working families by providing a significant public investment that guarantees child care assistance to low- and middle-income families and ensures that no family pays more than 7 percent of their income on child care. Eligibility for child care assistance should be broad enough to reach both low-income and middle-class families who struggle to afford care; it should also reflect the true cost of a high-quality program, including a livable wage and benefits for early educators. In the absence of a major federal investment in a significant new child care subsidy system, states can make incremental changes to positively affect young children and their families.

States have significant flexibility under the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to define who is eligible to receive child care assistance and the rates at which providers are reimbursed. This flexibility provides an opportunity for states to make changes that can improve access to high-quality programs for families who rely on child care subsidies. The recent increase in federal CCDBG program funding provides an opportunity for states to enact many of these changes to ensure that subsidy systems meet the needs of low-income families.

In particular, states can **increase reimbursement rates based on the true cost of care.** The true cost of licensed child care for an infant is, on average, 43 percent more than the amount for which providers can be reimbursed through the child care subsidy program—and 42 percent more, on average, than the price that programs currently charge families. States should set subsidy reimbursement rates based on the true cost of quality in order to ensure that higher-quality programs receive higher rates and that rates align with adult-child ratio requirements. States can conduct a cost of quality study, or alternative methodology, to determine rates. In 2019, CAP authored a toolkit for the National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers that provides more information on conducting cost of quality studies.

As an incremental step toward adopting a true cost of care policy, states can set their base reimbursement rates at least at the federally recommended level—the 75th percentile of the most recent market rate. This will allow families who are eligible for child care subsidies to access services in most programs. Recently, the federal Office of Child Care issued letters to state and territory lead agencies that they are considered out of compliance with the equal access provision of the CCDBG Act if their child care subsidy payment rates are set below the 50th percentile of their most recent market rate survey.

Moreover, states should **make changes to income eligibility requirements** to increase the reach of the subsidy program. States can set income eligibility rates to increase with inflation, so that families do not become ineligible just because their income does not keep up with inflation. They should also increase eligibility rates to a level at least 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), commonly understood to be the level at which family income is sufficient to meet basic needs. Finally, states should increase the eligibility ceiling for child care assistance, and develop a modified copayment schedule at higher income levels to eliminate or mitigate the benefit cliff effect. For this to be effective, the increases must be relatively small, and some level of subsidy support should extend beyond the current low eligibility levels.

Examples

- **New Mexico** and the **District of Columbia** use cost estimation models to set child care subsidy rates for providers based on the cost of high-quality care. **New Mexico** also raised eligibility for child care subsidies for families earning up to 400 percent of federal poverty guidelines while waiving copays, effectively making child care free for these families.

- **Vermont** is investing $125 million annually to expand subsidies for families earning up to 575 percent of the FPL.

- **New York** invested in its child care sector by expanding eligibility for subsidies to families earning up to 300 percent of the FPL, waiving copays for families under 100 percent of the FPL, and capping copays for all other families at 10 percent of their income.

- The governor of **North Dakota** signed a bill in April 2023 that eliminates copayments for families with incomes under 100 percent of the FPL.

- **Minnesota** invested $750 million in new funding for child care and early learning programs, expanding eligibility for child care assistance and establishing the Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program for child care providers.

- **Eight states** have set income eligibility at the federal limit of no more than 85 percent of state median income (SMI), and 21 states have set the second tier graduated phase-out level at 85 percent of SMI.

Learn more:
"The True Cost of High-Quality Child Care Across the United States"

- **Washington** state's Fair Start for Kids initiative raises family income limits for child care subsidies to 60 percent of the SMI and caps family copays at 7 percent of income. It also raises provider reimbursement rates to the 85th percentile of market rates and funds health insurance for providers. **Louisiana, Wisconsin, West Virginia,** and **Utah** have also set their reimbursement rates above the 75th percentile of the market rate.

More than 50 percent of the U.S. population lives in a child care desert, where supply does not meet demand.

Target support to high-need areas and populations

In addition to finding a program that is high quality and that meets children's educational and social-emotional needs, families need a program that meets their practical needs—that is, one that is available during the hours they need it, in a convenient location, and affordable. According to 2017 CAP analysis, more than 50 percent of the U.S. population lives in a child care desert, where supply does not meet demand. Yet the undersupply of child care can be even higher for certain populations, including families in rural areas, infants and toddlers, and disabled children.

States can take the following steps to address these deserts and ensure working families can find the care they need:

- **Gather data:** As a first step, states must gather complete data on their child care landscape to understand where programs are located, their capacity to serve children of different ages, and their capacity to serve specific populations. In 2019, CAP authored a toolkit for the National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers that provides more information on conducting a child care deserts analysis, including how to collect data. CAP's child care and early learning data dashboard includes more detailed information on the current status of early learning in each state.

- **Reimburse providers based on enrollment, not attendance:** Child care subsidies are typically administered as portable vouchers that families can use in the child care market to help cover the cost of programs. In many states, however, programs are reimbursed based on child attendance rather than enrollment.

Since providers are not able to anticipate which children will be present on any given day, they cannot anticipate how many staff they will need, and this misalignment can lead to staffing costs that exceed the state reimbursement. To address this issue, states can establish a policy to reimburse providers accepting CCDBG-funded vouchers based on enrollment, not attendance.

- **Contract for slots:** Using data, states can target interventions and incentives to areas of highest need, including by using contracts to encourage providers to serve subsidy-eligible children as well as specific age groups within the subsidy system. States can also modify subsidy reimbursement rates based on geography and provide targeted grants and quality supports to encourage providers to locate in underserved communities.

- **Support family child care and family, friend, and neighbor care:** States should better support family child care providers and family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care, as these are a key pillar of the early childhood system, especially for families in rural areas and families who need care outside the traditional workday. States can offer technical assistance and startup grants to develop staffed family child care networks that allow small family child care providers to access efficiencies of scale, professional development, and peer support. States can also increase assistance and outreach to FFN providers to help them access the formal licensing system and remove barriers to entry.

Reducing child care deserts and expanding services for marginalized populations

Child care deserts – areas where there are too few child care slots for the families who need them – are prevalent across the country. They affect more than half of all families, disproportionately those in rural areas, communities with low incomes, and families with infants, toddlers, or children with disabilities. Low supply drives long waitlists and high costs, often forcing families to make impossible choices about their children's care and their own workforce participation. Changes in working hours, productivity, or job continuation affect both family economic well-being and broader economic security and growth – with costs falling on taxpayers, businesses, and state and national economies. According to a 2023 report by ReadyNation, an estimated $122 billion will be lost every year due to child care issues. West Virginia, for example, is estimated to face nearly $1 billion in economic costs due to lack of child care, while Arizona is estimated to lose between $3 billion and $4.6 billion.

Families of color are disproportionately affected by lack of access to child care. Due to a long history of occupational and racial segregation, such families are overrepresented in low-wage jobs that do not provide paid leave or allow virtual or flexible work arrangements. Child care is important for supporting children's early learning and development and, as an economic driver, enabling parents to go to work, school, or training programs. Without access to care, families of color lose a critical lever for building economic security, and their communities lose a crucial tool for promoting racial and gender equity.

State officials can address child care deserts and promote access by increasing reimbursement rates to providers, investing in the workforce, creating new financing strategies to address the spend-down of pandemic-era rescue funding, and offering incentives, such as grants and contracts, to expand options in areas with large shares of low-income families and families of color.

Examples

- In **Arizona** and **Nevada**, the Kith and Kin Project provides training and support to FFN providers to enhance the quality of care for children. Although the project is currently funded by nonprofit organizations, it provides a model in which states could invest.

- The **Minnesota** Legislature established and dedicated funding to a new FFN care program.

- **Oregon** has set aside funding for the Baby Promise pilot program, which seeks to increase access to high-quality, affordable child care through contracts with child care providers, networks of support for providers, and salary guidelines and standards of quality.

- **North Dakota** has passed legislation providing $15 million to increase reimbursement rates for providers that serve infants and toddlers.

- **Tennessee** is targeting subsidy increases toward counties that are considered child care deserts or economically distressed, as well as toward providers that offer care between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.

- **New York** dedicated $100 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to build and expand child care supply in state child care deserts.

Partnering with businesses

A few states are pursuing innovative partnerships with businesses to increase employees' access to affordable child care. Michigan's Tri-Share Child Care Program provides assistance to qualifying employees who work with participating employers; child care expenses are shared by the employer, the employee, and the state of Michigan, with each contributing one-third of the cost. Tri-Share assists qualifying employees who have an income above 200 percent and below 325 percent of the FPL.

Invest in the early care and education workforce

States can pursue a range of policies to build the supply of child care providers and ensure that they are fairly compensated for the important work they do.

Empower workers to bargain for decent working conditions

States such as California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Oregon, enacted laws that grant the right of publicly funded, home-based child care providers to bargain collectively with the state over rates, benefits, and other working conditions. This kind of collective power gives child care workers, who make up a historically undervalued and underpaid workforce, the ability to improve workplace conditions and promote stronger health protections, increase reimbursement rates, and support provision of benefits and training, thereby stabilizing significant turnover in the workforce.

For example, this past summer, a union representing approximately 40,000 child care providers in California negotiated a 20 percent subsidy rate increase as well as contributions to retirement health care and training. And in Washington state, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 925, the child care workers union, helped establish a substitute pool to guarantee continuity of care for families when providers are sick. The union has also partnered with the state to create high-quality training programs. For a workforce facing widespread staffing shortages that affect the number of child care slots providers can offer, these kinds of job improvement strategies and collective bargaining protections go a long way toward creating good jobs and recruiting and retaining highly qualified workers. Moreover, bargaining can be a jumping-off point for workers and the state to collaborate on multiple strategies—such as high-quality training and support services—that help retain and advance well-qualified providers.

Related reading: "How States and Unions Can Partner To Build the Public Sector Workforce"

Set up a board to establish improved wages and working conditions for early childhood educators

States can show they value early childhood educators by setting up wage boards charged with developing compensation and other work standards, including those around safety, training, and scheduling. These sort of boards, often called wage boards or worker boards, have previously been used to set industrywide working standards and compensation levels in other industries. In the early childhood sector, wage boards should include government officials; representatives of private sector providers; and organizations representing child care teachers, directors, and other staff. The board would gather input from stakeholders and make recommendations to establish a wage ladder or wage scale and compensation standards tied to experience and educational qualifications.

Several states and cities have enacted bills of rights for domestic workers that prevent these workers from being excluded from labor protections that typically guarantee coverage under minimum pay and overtime standards or from protections against discrimination, harassment, and unsafe working environments. They have even been used to establish workers boards, such as the Seattle Domestic Workers Standards Board.

Create wage enhancement initiatives

As teachers are asked to meet higher standards, they must be compensated appropriately. In addition to increasing overall funding for early childhood programs—something that should filter down to teacher salaries—states can pursue the following specific initiatives to enhance teacher salaries, especially for teachers who achieve higher standards:

- **Develop or bolster scholarship programs:** States can develop or bolster existing scholarship programs to support early childhood educators in completing two- or four-year degrees. Evidence shows that these programs can have significant impacts on teachers, including compensation increases, and are particularly beneficial for expanding access to college for people of color and first-generation students.

- **Provide wage supplements:** Many states successfully used federal funding to implement stabilization grants during the COVID-19 pandemic. In most cases, these grants went directly to providers for health and safety measures, quality enhancements, and compensation to retain staff. States can continue offering wage supplements and salary increases to providers to improve retention or to reward providers for completing successive levels of education and training.

- **Provide employment benefits to early childhood educators:** Most early childhood educators do not receive benefits such as health insurance, retirement benefits, or paid time off. States can offer these benefits in addition to creating wage enhancement initiatives.

Develop or modify systems to support the workforce

To bolster the case for increased compensation and help the workforce achieve higher standards, states should develop systems that can be used to direct the following support to teachers and administrators:

- **Create a workforce registry:** A robust workforce registry would allow teachers to track progress toward professional goals; enable programs to verify teacher credentials and experience; and inform state early care and education administrators about the workforce. While more than 40 states have a workforce registry, in many, it is a voluntary system. Making registries mandatory for teachers in licensed programs would help states gather a comprehensive picture of the needs of the early childhood workforce and better direct quality improvement supports.

- **Develop career pathways:** States should develop career pathways that identify a sequence of credentials, reflecting progressively higher competencies tied to roles or job titles. These pathways can provide a clear road map for early childhood professionals to advance and should be applicable across program types as well as coordinated with other state systems. Compensation standards should be established so that progressively higher stages on the career pathway, including participating in paid training opportunities, come with corresponding compensation increases.

- **Build professional development systems:** States should build a comprehensive professional development system that is aligned with career pathways and program standards. Specifically, the system should be accessible to teachers—allowing them to balance coursework with full- or part-time employment—and available through a mixture of online and in-person mediums, during the evenings and weekends, and in accessible locations. Coursework and training must also be available in multiple languages. A comprehensive system should include a mix of learning opportunities; short workshops and training that target specific knowledge or skills; and mentoring and coaching to support ongoing skill development. Mentors and coaches should include those who come from the early care and education field and reflect the same racial and ethnic communities of the providers they support, as these individuals often provide more culturally responsive guidance.

- **Invest in registered apprenticeship programs:** Registered apprenticeship programs provide on-the-job training, allowing the workforce to earn while gaining higher credentials. While many industries offer apprenticeships, they are not widespread in the early childhood field. States can support the expansion of apprenticeships by investing in intermediary organizations to manage administration—limiting the burden on already overworked program directors—and incentivizing partnerships with community colleges.

Examples

- In 2007, **Louisiana** introduced a package of tax credits, known as the School Readiness Tax Credits, that provide support for families, child care providers and teachers, and businesses that invest in child care. Child care directors and staff are eligible for a refundable tax credit if they work at least six months for a licensed provider who participates in the state Quality Improvement System (QIS). In 2022, the credit ranged from $1,894 to $3,787 per teacher per year, and the value varies based on teacher qualifications and experience, as defined by the state's career pathway system.

- **Twenty-three states** and the **District of Columbia** adopted the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program to provide a scholarship that increases compensation and creates access to higher education for teachers, directors, and family child care providers.

- **North Carolina**'s WAGE$ program provides education-based salary supplements to teachers, directors, and family child care educators working with children ages 0 to 5. The program is designed to increase retention, education, and compensation.

- In the **District of Columbia**, the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund provides salary bonuses of $10,000 for assistant teachers and $14,000 for lead teachers. Advocates are now developing a salary scale that provides compensation parity between public school teachers and early childhood educators with similar levels of education and credentialing. Early childhood educators and all eligible employees of licensed early learning facilities in the district also have access to free, publicly financed health insurance coverage.

- **Minnesota** has budgeted $42.5 million in state funds for fiscal year 2024 to continue providing compensation support payments to child care providers once federal COVID-19 relief funds are fully allocated. That amount jumps to $316 million in FY 2025. The state also has proposed a wage scale that is designed for early childhood educators in all settings, including those working in family child care homes. The scale does not change based on the age of the children served. **North Carolina**'s wage scale plan, meanwhile, includes educators in all settings, with credentials ranging from introductory certificates to preschool certification.

- Because of the collective bargaining agreement between SEIU Local 925 and the state of **Washington**, licensed family home child care providers may be eligible for health care and dental care benefits if they care for at least one child whose participation in care was previously funded by the state's child care subsidy program, seasonal child care program, or child welfare subsidy program. In addition, in partnership with the state, Local 925 has created several training programs that prepare participants for certification as licensed family care providers and provide instruction on topics such as business planning, enriching practices and promoting resilience, and anti-racist and trauma-informed care. The program draws on the expertise of incumbent workers who understand how to navigate the industry and are able to offer training in several languages in order to recruit new providers from the communities in which the most need exists.

- Unionized home-based child care providers in **New Jersey** were able to ratify a new agreement with the state that resulted in up to a 64 percent increase in reimbursement rates.

- **Illinois**' Gateways to Opportunity system requires the state's licensed early childhood providers to participate in a workforce registry, which connects the workforce to professional development and scholarship opportunities and provides transparent career ladders.

Implement a mixed-delivery universal preschool program

While most states have some form of state-funded preschool, programs often reach only a limited number of 4-year-olds and even fewer 3-year-olds. Higher-income families are more likely to pay to enroll their preschoolers in full-day, high-quality programs, thus exacerbating the school readiness gap. States can ensure that all 3- and 4-year-olds have the opportunity to attend preschool by investing in a universal statewide preschool program. Priority should be given to low-income families who struggle to afford the cost of preschool and whose children would benefit the most from a high-quality program.

However, to promote equity, it is also important that programs prioritize socioeconomic diversity. Research shows that children benefit from socioeconomically integrated classrooms, and as such, it is important that low-income children are not segregated into classrooms according to whether they qualify for public assistance. For a universal preschool program to contribute to an equitable early childhood system and not negatively affect infant and toddler care, it is important that it offers full-day, full-year programming; is available in multiple settings, including public schools, community-based child care centers, and family child care homes; and is funded at a sufficient level to cover the cost of operating a high-quality program.

State policies that promote high-quality preschool programs

The National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) has identified 10 minimum state policies that support a high-quality preschool program:

1. Establish early learning and development standards that are comprehensive, aligned, supported, and culturally sensitive.
2. Include curriculum supports that incorporate an approval process for curriculum selection and support for curriculum implementation.
3. Require lead teachers in every classroom to have at least a bachelor's degree.
4. Require lead teachers to have specialized preparation that includes knowledge of learning, development, and pedagogy specific to preschool-age children.
5. Require assistant teachers to hold a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or have equivalent preparation based on coursework.
6. Require both teachers and assistant teachers to have at least 15 hours of annual in-service training. In addition, some professional development must be provided through coaching or similar ongoing classroom-embedded support.
7. Limit class size to at most 20 children.
8. Permit classrooms to have no more than 10 children per classroom teaching staff member.
9. Require that preschool programs ensure children receive vision and hearing screenings and at least one additional health screening as well as referrals when needed.
10. Require that data on classroom quality be systematically collected and that local programs and the state both use information from the QIS to help improve policy or practice.

Examples

- NIEER defines states as nearing universal status when at least 70 percent of their population of 4-year-olds is enrolled in pre-K. As of 2022, the **District of Columbia**, **Florida**, **Iowa**, **Oklahoma**, **Vermont**, **West Virginia**, and **Wisconsin** met the NIEER universal status benchmark. Meanwhile, state-funded programs in **Alabama**, **Hawaii**, **Michigan**, **Mississippi**, and **Rhode Island** meet all 10 of NIEER's benchmarks for preschool quality standards.

- **California**, **Colorado**, **Hawaii**, and **New Mexico** recently passed laws establishing universal preschool policies.

Learn more: "6 Ways To Ensure Preschool Contributes to an Equitable Early Childhood System"

Eliminate preschool suspensions and expulsions

Access to high-quality preschool programs is an important strategy to close the achievement gap. Currently, more than 250 preschoolers are suspended or expelled every day across the United States. African American preschoolers are disproportionately affected, potentially expanding the preschool-to-prison pipeline down to the youngest learners.

Successful policies must also address the root causes of challenging behavior and provide support for children and teachers. Specifically, states should provide teachers with access to behavioral health consultants and training to help them identify and address behavioral problems and connect children with early intervention services. Investing in programs such as Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation helps promote positive child development and equip adults with the tools necessary to identify and prevent potential mental health issues in infants and toddlers. In addition, policies banning suspensions and expulsions should include clear guidelines to prevent "soft expulsions," by which, in the absence of formal disciplinary procedures, parents are pressured to voluntarily remove their child from a care provider.

CAP's child care and early learning data dashboard includes more information on state policies regarding preschool suspension and expulsion.

Examples

- As of 2023, **31 states** and the **District of Columbia** reported having an expulsion or suspension policy in early care and education settings.

- In 2022, **California** modified provisions relating to the expulsion or disenrollment of children from the state preschool program. The policy is inclusive of child care and family child care and requires all programs to maintain records on expulsion and suspension.

- **Maryland** policy restricts suspension and expulsion in pre-K through second grade and mandates the use of nonpunitive behavioral interventions.

- **Arizona**, **Colorado**, **Texas**, and **Oregon** have policies limiting disciplinary removals in early care and education settings.

- Pennsylvania incorporated the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation program into its Quality Rating System, and one of its stated goals is to reduce expulsions in early care and education settings. The state has also adopted a policy statement and provides resources to programs to support inclusion and reduce suspension and expulsion.

Support the needs of young dual-language learners

According to the Children's Equity Project at Arizona State University and the Bipartisan Policy Center, an estimated one-third of U.S. children under age 8 are dual-language learners. Several strengths are associated with being a dual-language learner. In fact, cognitive advantages are shown to be associated with bilingualism, including improved executive function and attention. Indeed, research shows that dual-language immersion models are associated with improved developmental, linguistic, and academic outcomes for all students.

However, a lack of bilingual learning programs exists nationwide; the same is true of preschool policies for dual-language learners. States can adopt the following policies to better support these students:

- Adopt the Head Start dual-language learner standards in state-funded preschool programs and incorporate those standards into preschool accountability frameworks.

- Invest in the workforce needed to support dual-language learners, as well as in strategies that create new nontraditional pipelines, and improve existing teacher preparation pathways in higher education to reflect research on dual-language learning.

- Revise workforce credentialing and licensing standards to include competencies related to dual-language instruction.

- Expand the availability of dual-language immersion programs.

Examples

- Several states are seeking to expand access to dual-language early learning programs, including **Utah**, **Delaware**, **North Carolina**, and the **District of Columbia**.

- Illinois requires bilingual instruction if there are 20 or more dual-language learners with the same home language enrolled in the same early childhood program.

- In **New Jersey**, all school districts are required to provide "appropriate instructional programs" to eligible preschool dual-language learners based on need, including programs and activities that promote oral language and early literacy skills in both the home language and English. These guidelines are closely aligned with those of Head Start.

- **Texas** requires dual-language bilingual education programs for students in preschool through fifth grade for a district with at least 20 dual-language learners in any language classification and in the same grade level.

Expand Early Head Start and increase supports for infants and toddlers

Early Head Start is a federally funded, community-based program that provides comprehensive child and family services, such as health screenings and parenting support to low-income pregnant women and children under age 3. Its mission is to support healthy prenatal and birth outcomes and to enhance the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development of infants and toddlers. Early Head Start services are available as both center-based and home-based programs. The program currently reaches only about 11 percent of eligible children. Yet those who participate experience a range of positive benefits, including higher scores on indicators of kindergarten and school readiness; higher gains in socioemotional, language, and cognitive development; and improved access to critical wraparound supports, such as home visiting services and housing and employment supports.

Expanding Early Head Start

To increase participation in Early Head Start (EHS), states can take the following steps:

- Augment federal EHS funding: States can provide state funds to augment federal resources for Early Head Start. Setting a goal of serving all low-income families could be part of supporting children's education from birth to college.

- Encourage partnerships between EHS and other services for pregnant women, infants, and toddlers: Fostering connections between EHS and programs such as home visiting and child care is an effective way to leverage state and federal investments in services for very young children. States should lessen the financial burden of partnership by providing supplemental funding to programs that partner with other services. These partnerships also improve the effectiveness of professional development and quality improvement efforts across the early childhood system.

How to invest in early childhood data

In order for policy development and implementation to be successful, accurate and robust data are necessary to inform the need for, and impact of, proposed policy solutions. States should invest in data collection strategies and systems as well as data analysis capabilities, including by taking the following steps:

- **Coordinate among agencies and data collectors:** State agencies should be directed to link data from early learning programs or to compile data in one central repository such as a state early childhood data system. Creating data-sharing agreements can help facilitate the ability of state agencies and local governments to coordinate and to make data available to nongovernment agencies that support young children and their families. States can use these data to better understand the reach of current services and gaps that need addressing.

- **Conduct early learning landscape and supply-demand analysis:** CAP has developed interactive maps detailing the prevalence of child care deserts in many states. Using detailed licensing information and additional state data on demographics and community level services, states can expand this concept to produce in-depth analysis about the supply and demand of child care and preschool at the state, community, and neighborhood levels.

- **Understand the true cost of high-quality child care and preschool:** A cost of quality study can estimate the cost of operating an early childhood program that meets specific state standards. Policymakers can use it in conjunction with revenue data to quantify gaps between current funding streams—such as child care subsidies, preschool initiatives, Head Start, QIS financial incentives, and private tuition—as well as the actual cost of providing high-quality services. These results can be used to more accurately determine reimbursement rates,

Explore CAP's research on child care deserts
https://childcaredeserts.org

tax credit levels, and financial incentives for high quality. State policymakers can use CAP's "Where Does Your Child Care Dollar Go?" tool to better understand estimated costs; and for a more tailored analysis, they can utilize the "Provider Cost of Quality Calculator" or engage experts to develop a state-specific analysis tool.

Examples

- **Pennsylvania** links child-level data across all early childhood programs and to the state K-12 data system. The Pennsylvania's Enterprise to Link Information for Children Across Networks (PELICAN) system collects data from multiple agencies and informs early childhood initiatives and services across the state.

- **West Virginia**'s Mapping the Gap child care access dashboard allows users to filter the supply, demand, and gap statistics of child care by county or state legislative district, showing varied child care situations across the state. Users can also filter the map by type of child care setting.

- The **District of Columbia**, **Nebraska**, **New York**, **Michigan**, **California**, and **Washington** have all engaged in cost modeling studies to estimate the true cost of child care, with the goal of informing provider reimbursement rates.

Funding considerations

Although a number of the policies in this toolkit can be implemented using current funding, the early childhood system in every state needs increased investment in order to meet the needs of all young children. Policymakers should acknowledge that access to high-quality early childhood education is a public good, with long-term benefits for children, parents, and society at large. In the absence of a federal solution that provides stable, sufficient funding to support early learning, states can step up to help fill the gap.

Ideally, states would increase general revenue and direct it toward spending to address the policies outlined in this toolkit. For example, states can close tax loopholes that disproportionately benefit large corporations or the wealthy, increase tax rates on high-income earners, and identify areas where the tax system disproportionately favors higher-income families and corporations at the expense of services for low- and middle-income households. The funds generated by these changes can be used to support early childhood education initiatives or to reduce low- and middle-income families' financial burdens so that child care and other family programs are within reach.

Policymakers should acknowledge that access to high-quality early childhood education is a public good, with long-term benefits for children, parents, and society at large.

Examples

- In 2023, **New Mexico** voters approved a ballot measure—by an overwhelming margin of 70 percent—allocating 1.25 percent of the five-year average of year-end market values to a Land Grant Permanent Fund for early childhood education and the public school permanent fund. This is projected to generate $236 million for early childhood education across the state.

- In 2021, **Washington** state passed the Fair Start for Kids Act to establish a capital gains tax that will provide funding for early care and education. The tax applies to those making more than $250,000 from sales of investment assets and was upheld by the Washington state Supreme Court in a March 2023 ruling. The act, which is expected to raise more than $400 million over its first two years (2022–2024), requires the state to expand access to early learning and child care programs.

See also: "Policymakers Must Understand How Education, Health Care, and Economic Security Shape Early Child Development"

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Messaging and Communications To Promote Early Childhood Education

A teacher leads a preschool class at an early learning public charter school in Washington, D.C., on October 5, 2023. Photo: Jahi Chikwendiu/Getty Images

To make progress on early childhood policies, states must build a broad coalition that understands the importance of investing in and prioritizing young children. Early childhood policies have broad bipartisan support, with voters seeing this period of life as providing unique opportunities at the nexus of a range of policy issue areas that have lasting impacts on children's futures. Policymakers should review the messaging guidance below and highlight the messages that they believe will resonate most strongly with their audiences.

The following talking points use national numbers. To incorporate state-specific numbers, see CAP's child care and early learning data dashboard or the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count Data Center. It is important to consider that while these estimates are powerful tools, allowing one to capture the scope and impact of various issue areas, significant improvements must be made to the nation's collective data systems to account for the impacts of systemic racism. Centering racial equity in data collection, policymaking, and community building is critical to supporting children and families across racial, economic, and social spectrums.

Learn more about the data dashboard: "Data Dashboard: An Overview of Child Care and Early Learning in the United States"

Talking points on child care and early learning

Child care is a foundational social, educational, and economic resource for families across the country. A 2021 national survey found that 70 percent of voters say "access to high-quality child care for all infants and toddlers is a high/very high priority," and 69 percent consider spending on high-quality preschool programs a priority. By December 2022, support had grown: 78 percent of all voters—including 83 percent of suburban mothers, 75 percent of independents, and 62 percent of Republicans—expressed support for expanding child care funding while letting parents choose their providers.

Child care support: By the numbers

78%
Share of voters who support expanding child care funding (2022)

83%
Share of suburban mothers who support expanding child care funding (2022)

75%
Share of independents who support expanding child care funding (2022)

62%
Share of Republicans who support expanding child care funding (2022)

Despite this widespread bipartisan support, however, increased federal spending in the child care sector has been hard won, and legislators have yet to enact a robust national public investment. With a divided 118th Congress, states will need to take the lead on enacting solutions to the child care crisis in order to ensure that they are providing an adequate supply of high-quality options, equitable access for all families, and investments in the workforce—largely made up of women and overwhelmingly women of color—that recognize their invaluable professional and societal contributions.

Child care costs are out of reach for most families

The child care market is "a textbook example of a broken market," as noted by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. Families cannot afford the current price of child care, but child care tuition rarely covers the true cost of providing a high-quality program, which cuts into the supply of available slots and the capacity of child care providers to invest meaningfully in their workforce, nearly half of whom are eligible for some form of public assistance.

Now, with the expiration of pandemic-era relief dollars, and in the absence of robust federal investment, the child care sector faces a new wave of uncertainty that could ultimately limit options for parents and drive up enrollment prices.

Read more

- Across nearly every category – whether it be marital status, race, age, education level, or income – families paying for child care spend, on average, a greater share of their income than the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services affordability benchmark, which is 7 percent of family income.

- The price of child care outpaces inflation: Since 2000, child care prices have risen 115 percent, exceeding the 74 percent growth in overall inflation. This squeezes parents' budgets, sometimes edging them – particularly mothers – out of the workforce altogether.

- The average price of licensed child care is more than $10,000 a year, and families with infants and toddlers spend nearly $16,000 per year for child care, on average.

- Across the United States, the average national price of child care comprises 33 percent of the median household income for single-parent families.

- More than half of parents with children under 15 spend at least 20 percent of their household income on child care; and that cost has increased over the past few years, rising by an average of 41 percent since the COVID-19 pandemic.

- In 32 states and the District of Columbia, full-time center-based child care is more expensive than the average annual tuition and fees for a public four-year university.

- The price of tuition for two children in a child care center exceeds the median rent in every state.

Child care can be hard to find, and child care deserts will grow without robust public investment

More than half of the country's families live in child care deserts, where there is only one licensed child care slot for every three children. This lack of access to care especially affects parents of infants and toddlers and families with disabled children who require special services. Programs for infants and toddlers, in particular, require higher staff ratios to meet safety standards.

Child care deserts also disproportionately affect low-income communities, rural communities, and Hispanic/Latino communities.

Read more

- A 2021 study across 35 states and the District of Columbia found that about 12.3 million young children in the United States needed child care that year, but only about 8.7 million licensed child care slots were available. This meant that there was a gap whereby about 3.6 million children went without options for care – not including school-age children in need of before- or after-school and summer care.

- Child care shortages often cause parents to make career sacrifices and hinder workforce and economic development. One study found that the infant and toddler child care shortage cost the economy $122 billion each year, across costs to parents, employers and businesses, and taxpayers at large. In particular, productivity impacts associated with child care issues cost employers $23 billion annually.

- Child care is particularly difficult to find for families with nontraditional needs, including those families who need care on late nights, on weekends, and during holidays. For parents of children with disabilities, English-language learners, and parents who work late shifts or have unpredictable work schedules, it is especially difficult to find an adequate program.

- As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, between December 2019 and March 2021, more than 8,000 child care centers, as well as almost 7,000 licensed home-based child care providers, closed across 37 states. This represented a 9 percent loss in licensed centers and a 10 percent loss in licensed home-based child care programs.

- As of August 2023, child care employment was still down 39,400 jobs – 3.7 percent below February 2020 levels. Loss of staff makes it harder to both satisfy safety ratios, particularly in infant and toddler programs, and offer more slots to families, thus hindering providers' ability to offer services, driving down supply and limiting parents' options.

The current system has a disproportionate impact on infants and toddlers, with consequences stretching into schooling and beyond

The earliest periods of life are foundational to supporting the development of the brain architecture that shapes all future learning; how the brain and body react to stressful experiences throughout life; and the emotional and physical health, social skills, and cognitive-linguistic abilities that help children become independent and successful adults. Unfortunately, due to inadequate access to high-quality child care options, particularly for infants and toddlers, many young children face disadvantages starting very early in life.

Read more

- It is especially hard to find licensed child care for infants and toddlers. A study of nine states and the District of Columbia found more than five infants and toddlers for every slot of licensed child care.
- On average, a family making the state median income would have to spend 18 percent of their income to cover the cost of child care for an infant and 13 percent of their income to cover the cost of care for a toddler.
- On average, the true cost of center-based child care is 61 percent higher for an infant than a preschooler, but subsidy reimbursement rates are only 27 percent higher.
- Infants and toddlers are the age group most likely to be in poverty, with disparities by race and ethnicity, meaning that at the time children are most vulnerable, support is insufficient.
- Parents of infants and toddlers are often at the lowest earning level of their professional lives; in addition to the high cost of care for infants and toddlers, rising housing costs, and other barriers to family economic security, approximately 40 percent of children under age 3 belong to low-income families, with 18 percent living in poverty and 9 percent living in deep poverty.
- Gaps in measures of cognitive performance between lower- and higher-income children emerge at just 9 months of age and continue to grow by the time they reach age 2.

The child care workforce bears the brunt of the insufficient child care assistance system

Current child care subsidy rates—the amount that providers receive for each eligible child served by the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)—are too low, and many child care centers do not accept subsidies. Low reimbursement rates mean that providers who do accept subsidy-eligible children are not compensated at a level that allows them to provide high-quality care. As of March 2023, just 15 states offered a reimbursement rate at the recommended 75th percentile of the most recent market rate for all combinations of care for children ages 0 to 5.

Meanwhile, the low salaries, lack of benefits, and reliance on public assistance that plague the child care workforce—largely women and disproportionately women of color—lead to economic stress, which has a profound negative impact on early educators' physical and mental health and often drives many out of the sector. When early educators are worried about paying their bills and feeding their families, it is much harder to focus on the needs of the children in their care. As of September 2023, the child care sector was still more than 39,000 jobs below its February 2020 levels, and it has been recovering at a slower rate than other pandemic-affected industries. Despite elevated numbers of job postings, low wages and challenging working conditions have prolonged the sector's struggles to recruit and retain staff.

Read more

- The CCDBG reaches only 14 percent of eligible families and just 1 in 9 children under age 6. Families with incomes above 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) – $46,060 a year for a family of three – do not qualify for child care assistance in 24 states.
- The child care workforce is more than 95 percent women, 38 percent of whom are women of color. Notably, 17 percent of women of color in the United States are Black women and 16 percent are Hispanic women.
- Typically, child care teachers earn $13.71 per hour, and higher education does not provide a significant benefit: Early education has the lowest lifetime earning potential of all college majors.
- In 2019, Black women and Hispanic women who were child care providers earned 76 percent and 85 percent, respectively, of what their white counterparts earned.

- More than half of all child care workers are enrolled in at least one public assistance program, and only 40 to 50 percent have access to health insurance through their employers.

- In 2021, a quarter of child care providers reported difficulty affording housing expenses, regardless of whether they rented or owned their homes, with the highest rates of hardship reported among family, friend, and neighbor providers.

- Estimated annual turnover rates in licensed facilities are between 26 and 40 percent, causing instability at a time when children most need consistency and structure.

- In May 2022, the average child care worker earned just $29,570 per year – only about $2,000 more than the FPL for a family of four in 2022 and less than the FPL for a family of four in 2023 income dollars. Research shows that the interaction between children and caregivers is one of the most important indicators of quality care, but poverty wages can undermine early childhood workers' effectiveness in the classroom.

Investing in high-quality early learning programs grows the economy

Access to high-quality, affordable early childhood education helps parents—especially mothers—enter and stay in the workforce and helps employers attract and retain talented, productive workers. Across U.S. states, the annual economic losses in productivity and tax revenue due to child care issues range from $500 million to $3.5 billion. In 2023, the nation's economy was estimated to lose nearly $122 billion annually in wages, productivity, and tax revenue solely due to families' challenges securing infant and toddler care; this is more than double the estimated losses just five years earlier, in 2018.

Read more

- The early childhood education industry positively affects state economies, providing millions of dollars in additional earnings due to spillover impacts from revenue and increased employment. The Committee for Economic Development's 2019 update to its "Child Care in State Economies" report details the state-specific economic impacts of child care.

- In 2022, 68 percent of women with children under age 6 participated in the labor force, compared with 77 percent of mothers with children ages 6 to 17. Among employed mothers, those with older children were more likely than those with younger children to be employed full time – 82 percent versus 78 percent.

- In 2021, Black mothers had a slightly higher labor force participation rate than women in general – 75 percent among Black women with children under age 6 and 81 percent among Black women with children ages 6 to 17. In contrast, men with children under age 6 were more likely to be employed (94 percent) than those whose youngest child was between the ages of 6 and 17 (92 percent) and much more likely to be employed than women with children.

- The District of Columbia's implementation of universal preschool in 2008 caused a 10 percentage point increase in maternal labor force participation.

- Nearly 2 million parents of children ages 5 and under report quitting a job, not taking a job, or greatly changing a job because of problems with child care. Mothers who were unable to find a child care program were significantly less likely to be employed than those who did find a program. They also reported that if they had access to more affordable and reliable child care, they would take steps to improve their earnings and advance their careers.

Tell a story and use data to make a case

The significant underinvestment in children and families means that there is a large gap to fill. But while the cost may be large, the data support that child care is a smart and worthy investment. When making the case for these investments, it is important to let the data and research make the case, rather than lead with a big number.

Building a story for child care investments could look like this:

1. Children, families, and economies benefit from access to high-quality child care programs.
2. High-quality programs, therefore, must offer high-quality jobs that attract well-trained and highly skilled teachers who have the time and resources to maximize every interaction.

3. To recruit and retain these teachers, employers must offer better compensation, family-sustaining benefits, empowerment and representation, job security, and better working conditions.
4. Yet these costs can amount to $[XX], and current revenue streams are insufficient.
5. In light of this, additional public investment is needed to achieve a comprehensive early care and learning sector and all the benefits that come with it.

See also: https://www.americanprogress.org/article/we-cant-afford-not-to-fix-child-care/

The following resources from the FrameWorks Institute may also be useful in developing a story to support child care investments:

- **"Building a Strong Frame: Reorganizing points makes a difference"**: A resource that details the ways in which providing context and deeper information around an issue can help build lasting public understanding and investment

- **"Why aren't kids a policy priority? The cultural mindsets and attitudes that keep kids off the public agenda"**: A resource that details some of the historical and cultural barriers to centering children and families in public policy and discusses how leaders and legislators can garner collective support

Use local data when possible

The numbers behind the stories families and providers are telling demonstrate that child care challenges are widespread and that structural policy change is needed to address them. Specific data can highlight the issues and areas where solutions are most urgently needed and help prioritize energy and funding. Having up-to-date and locally tailored data lends credibility to the results, with numbers that are more tangibly relevant to the child care struggles that many families are experiencing.

In addition to the child care and early learning data dashboard, CAP has developed several interactives that provide state and/or local data:

- **"U.S. Child Care Deserts"**: An online map that allows users to see the supply and demand of licensed child care down to the census tract area

- **"Where Does Your Child Care Dollar Go?"**: An online tool that provides state-level estimates of the cost of providing quality center-based child care

- **"The Hidden Cost of a Failing Child Care System"**: A calculator that estimates the amount lost, in future earnings, by parents who leave the workforce due to child care issues

Develop a communications strategy using earned media

In order to reach a broad audience, policymakers should write about their personal experiences and support for child care. They can do so through "earned media," or media published by another source, including:

- **Press releases from the policymaker's office** to respond to new reports, research, or current events involving the limited access to and high costs of child care and preschool for working families
- **Op-eds and blogs,** which are a powerful source for expressing views on the need to put affordable, high-quality child care within reach for families (see a sample op-ed below)

Sample op-ed in support of investments in child care and early learning

Right now, millions of Americans are facing a crisis: High-quality child care is out of reach for working families. Early childhood education prepares children for school, gives families a fair shot to make ends meet and get ahead, and strengthens our economy. A strong economy starts with strong families. But low supply and skyrocketing costs are putting child care out of reach for millions of hard-working **[state residents]**, leaving families struggling to choose between their paychecks and their children's care.

[Insert a few sentences with a story, if you have one, about how the high cost of and lack of access to child care affects your district/state or a personal story about how it has affected you.]

Affordable, high-quality child care strengthens our economy today and tomorrow—when families can access it. Currently, the cost is too high, and the supply of high-quality care is too low. In 34 states and the District of Columbia, full-time center-based child care costs more than the average annual tuition and fees to attend a public four-year university, and the price of tuition for two children in a child care center exceeds the median rent in every state. **[Insert state specific costs from CAP's child care and early learning data dashboard.]** To make matters worse, only 10 percent of child care programs in the United States are considered high quality.

The simple truth is that access to quality child care is a game-changer for children, affecting the entirety of their lives. Children are our nation's future innovators and workers, and high-quality child care helps lay the developmental foundation for preschool, elementary school, and beyond. In fact, differences in children's cognitive abilities by income are evident at only 9 months old and significantly widen by age 2.

But child care isn't just about kids. Current child care options are financially squeezing working families, who need access to affordable care to make ends meet. Sixty-seven percent of American children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, which means that parents, especially working mothers, are often left to make an impossible choice between accepting low-quality care so that they can maintain their jobs and forgoing needed pay to stay at home and care for their children themselves.

Access to high-quality child care ensures that parents can stay in the workforce, which allows employers to retain talented, productive workers who contribute to the economy. High-quality care also improves child outcomes, which means less spending on child welfare services, special education, and the criminal justice system in the future. Early childhood education not only levels the playing field for children as they begin kindergarten but also builds a workforce that will drive future economic growth, secures long-term economic competitiveness, and develops our nation's future leaders.

Share personal experiences

Offering personal stories about how you, your family, and/or your friends have struggled to access affordable, high-quality early care and education is an important tool to effectively advocate for child care investments. Consider sharing stories that touch on child care and preschool struggles:

- Have you or someone you know faced barriers to accessing affordable, high-quality child care?
- Did you or someone you know take time out of the workforce or leave the workforce entirely to care for children because of the high cost of child care?
- Have you or someone you know struggled with the cost of child care?

- Have you or someone you know struggled with finding a provider who could offer services to a child with a disability?

- Have you or someone you know had to consider relocating to a new community or state that is not a child care desert?

Visit a child care center or meet with a family child care provider

Policymakers can reach out to their child care resource and referral agency or contact a local child care center to conduct a visit and/or read to a classroom of children—and invite members of the press to document the visit so that child care is given a more public platform.

Sample social media posts

Leverage social media by using CAP's child care and early learning data dashboard to share why child care is important for specific states. Below are some examples:

- **[XX]** percent of children under 6 in [state] have both parents in the workforce. We must ensure that they all have access to high-quality & affordable care.

- Every year, **[XX]** parents in **[state]** make career sacrifices due to child care issues. Ensuring #ChildCareForAll is important for the well-being of families & our economy.

- **[XX]** percent of people in **[state]** live in child care deserts, meaning child care is hard to find & often unavailable #SolveChildCare

- Annual costs for center-based care in **[state]** average $**[XX,XXX]** for infants & preschoolers. That's not affordable for far too many families.

- Average child care costs take up **[XX]** percent of **[state]**'s median income. We need to make child care affordable for all #SolveChildCare

- The average child care worker in **[state]** makes only $**[XX.XX]**/hour. It's time to raise wages for the dedicated workers taking care of our children.

Read more: "Increasing America's Child Care Supply"

- An additional **[XX]** children in **[state]** would be served by expanding child care subsidies to all low- & middle-income families #ChildCareForAll #SolveChildCare

- Making child care affordable for all would benefit the **[state]** economy by an estimated $**[XX]**/year #ChildCareForAll #SolveChildCare

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Related Resources on Child Care and Early Learning

A 3-year-old walks to a park with her family in Rockville, Maryland, on August 27, 2020. Photo: Jahi Chikwendiu/Getty Images

CAP work on child care and early learning

- "**Child Care and Early Learning Data Dashboard**": A data dashboard that highlights data, context, and trends on each state's child care and early learning landscape
- "**Top 5 Actions Governors Can Take To Address the Child Care Shortage**": A report detailing actions governors can take to improve the supply of child care in their states
- "**Early Childhood Agenda for Governors in 2019**": An outline of what governors can do to improve early childhood programs in their state
- "**America's Child Care Deserts in 2018**": A report detailing the lack of supply of child care across the United States

- "**Where Does Your Child Care Dollar Go? Understanding the True Cost of Quality Early Childhood Education**": A report detailing the costs of high-quality early childhood education, including a state-by-state breakdown of the true cost of care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers

- "**Conducting a Child Care Cost of Quality Study: A Toolkit for States and Communities**": A toolkit guiding readers through the process of conducting a cost of quality study and using the results for change

- "**Identifying Child Care Deserts: A Toolkit for Child Care Advocates, Administrators, and Analysts**": A toolkit explaining the child care deserts framework and guiding readers through studying child care supply in their area

- "**Understanding the True Cost of Child Care for Infants and Toddlers**": A report with state-specific data detailing the costs of providing high-quality care for young children and how subsidy rates are falling short

- "**Understanding Infant and Toddler Child Care Deserts**": A report examining child care supply for infants and toddlers in nine states and the District of Columbia in order to better understand why child care shortages are worst for the youngest children

- "**The Child Care Crisis Is Keeping Women Out of the Workforce**": A report examining how more mothers would increase their earnings and seek new job opportunities if they had greater access to reliable and affordable child care

- "**Still Underpaid and Unequal: Early Childhood Educators Face Low Pay and a Worsening Wage Gap**": A report demonstrating that new, comprehensive data on child care workers in center-based programs reveal widening pay gaps and inequality

- "**The True Cost of High-Quality Child Care Across the United States**": A report examining why increased public investment in child care is needed to help families access high-quality, affordable child care that meets their needs

- "**State Responses To Address the Shortage of Infant and Toddler Child Care**": A report that includes examples of state solutions to address the shortage of infant and toddler child care

- "Grants and Contracts: A Strategy for Building the Supply of Subsidized Infant and Toddler Child Care": A report with state examples of how to use grants and contracts to build the supply of infant and toddler care

- "Child Care Spending Generates Massive Dividends": A report that details how public investments in child care and early learning programs pay for themselves through a range of benefits, including improved child and family health, better educational outcomes, and broader economic recovery and growth

- "Increasing America's Child Care Supply": A resource that outlines key structural issues plaguing the child care sector and points to state actions that can help stabilize providers' finances and build a more robust sector

CAP interactive and online resources

- "The Hidden Cost of a Failing Child Care System": A calculator that estimates the amount lost, in future earnings, by parents who leave the workforce due to child care issues

- "U.S. Child Care Deserts": An online map that allows users to see the supply and demand of licensed child care down to the census tract area

- "Where Does Your Child Care Dollar Go?" (interactive): An online tool that provides state-level estimates of the cost of providing quality center-based child care

- "Federal Child Care Legislation Over the Past Decade": An interactive look at how federal legislators have engaged with the child care crisis over the past 10 years, highlighting the need for broader congressional action to support a federally funded comprehensive child care system

Policy resources from outside organizations

- "Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap 2022" (Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center): Policy guide that provides detailed information on five effective policies and six effective strategies that foster the nurturing environments infants and toddlers need, with the goal of reducing long-standing disparities in access and outcomes among racial and ethnic groups and socioeconomic statuses

- “**State Policy Lever Checklists**” (Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center): A set of guides for state leaders that consider the impact various policy levers have on prenatal-to-3 program design and implementation

- “**Child Care and Development Block Grant**” (National Association for the Education of Young Children): An overview of the federal child care assistance program—the Child Care and Development Block Grant

- “**Tax Credits for Working Families**” (Tax Credits for Working Families): An overview of tax credits for workers and their families by state, refundability, and a range of tax credit programs—such as the earned income tax credit, child tax credit, and child and dependent care tax credit

- “**Precarious Progress: State Child Care Assistance Policies 2022**” (National Women’s Law Center): A report that includes state-by-state indexes of reimbursement rates, waitlists, eligibility cutoffs, and other child care assistance policies

- “**Catalyzing Growth: Using Data to Change Child Care**” (Child Care Aware): A report detailing the price of care in each state

- “**Child Care for All: A Blueprint for States**” (The Century Foundation): A guide for implementing comprehensive child care reform at the state level

- “**Improving Child Care Compensation Backgrounder 2021**” (BUILD Initiative): A report providing strategies for improving compensation for early care and education providers

- “**CCDBG FY 2023 State-by-State Appropriations Distribution Estimates and Increases**” (Center for Law and Social Policy): A fact sheet showing state-by-state impacts of the FY 23 increases to the Child Care and Development Fund program

- “**The State of Child Care in America**” (StateOfChildCare.org): State-by-state data on the usage and impact of Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act funds

- “**It’s time for an ambitious national investment in America’s children**” (Economic Policy Institute): A report that makes the economic case for investing in child care through state-by-state data

- "**Child care costs in the United States**" (Economic Policy Institute): State-specific data on the costs of child care and the benefits of greater investment

- "**The First Five Things to Know: The Child Care and Development Block Grant**" (First Five Years Fund): An explainer that walks through what CCDBG is, how it works, and who it helps

- "**FFYF'S 2023 State Fact Sheets**" (First Five Years Fund): A high-level overview of the various public early learning and care opportunities available in each state, including those made possible with federal funding, as well as unmet need

- "**ABCs of Federal Early Learning and Child Care Funding Streams**" (First Five Years Fund): A guide that details key federal programs and sources of funding that support the care, education, and healthy development of children

- "**50-State Progress and Landscape Report**" (Alliance for Early Success): A 2022 overview of developments and trends in state early childhood policy and advocacy

Additional data resources

- "**2023 Kids Count Data Book: 2023 State Trends in Child Well-Being**" (Kids Count Data Center): National and state data presented across four domains—economic well-being, education, health, and family and community

- "**Early Childhood State Policy Profiles**" (National Center for Children in Poverty): 50 state profiles highlighting two-generation state policy choices that promote health, education, and strong families alongside other contextual data related to the well-being of young children

- "**State of Preschool Yearbook**" (National Institute for Early Education Research): State-specific data and information on preschool investments and policies

- "**State of Babies Yearbook 2023**" (Zero to Three and Think Babies): State-specific data and rankings on a range of indicators related to infant health and well-being

- “**2022 Home Visiting Yearbook**” (National Home Visiting Resource Center): State-specific numbers regarding home visiting programs
- “**BUILD Initiative Quality Compendium**” (BUILD Initiative): Resource detailing quality improvement systems in each state
- “**National Database of Childcare Prices**” (U.S. Department of Labor): County-level database offering child care price data by child care provider type, age of children, and county characteristics from 2008 to 2018

For more information on any of the topics outlined in this toolkit, please contact earlychildhood@americanprogress.org.

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