

Policy Recommendations to Support Quality Child Care

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High-quality, affordable, and reliable child care options are not accessible across the country. [Child care deserts](#)—areas with an insufficient supply of licensed child care options—are most frequently observed in marginalized and rural communities. It is estimated that [51% of people in the country live in a child care desert](#), with 60% of rural communities classified as child care deserts. This creates staggering consequences for children and parents, but also for the health and economy of communities.

Barriers to Accessing Quality and Affordable Child Care

- Rural communities often experience a [limited supply of child care programs](#) available to them. [A recent study](#) found that 29% of rural families reported lack of access to necessary child care. Further research has found that [3 in 5 rural communities lack adequate child care supply](#). Hispanic/Latino populations disproportionately live in areas with an [insufficient supply of licensed child care](#).
- Families have a [general lack of awareness and misinformation](#) regarding the full [range of child care options](#) available to them. For example, families have a vague understanding of subsidy programs and their eligibility requirements. Families who do not qualify for these childcare subsidies are less likely to find and enroll in child care.
- Families [need support to match with child care providers](#) that have unique eligibility requirements, waitlist protocols, locations, schedules, costs, curricula, languages, class sizes, safety guidelines, and supports to best meet their needs.
- **COVID-19:** Many families have had to [change their child care arrangements](#), citing child care closures, reductions in days or hours of operation, reductions in number of children able to be cared for, and fears about safety are new barriers. Moreover, COVID-19 has complicated financial well-being, resulting in increased difficulties affording child care, which was a barrier even before the pandemic.

Read these studies' reports for more details on their findings [here](#) and [here](#).

Policy Recommendations

Expand Child Care Resources

- The creation of new as well as the expansion of existing child care resources and facilities, especially in marginalized communities and child care deserts, is needed.
- Sustainable financing options for safe and high-quality child care (e.g., CCDBG, TANF, or local initiatives) is encouraged.

Promote Equity

- Address the unequal access between families of color and their white peers. While universal prekindergarten presents opportunities to build school-readiness skills for all, there remains a need for equitable access to quality childcare for families with children birth to three and for minority parents.
- Incentives can be created for providers who serve families of color, non-English speakers, and regions with child care deserts. This may include priority points for stimulus grants or technical assistance for providers to support sustainability or expansion.

- Expand support for child care workers and early childhood educators from and who serve marginalized and underserved communities.
- Consider child care options for parents working nontraditional hours: Policymakers may engage businesses in creating flexible options for balancing work and child care. This may include an expansion of trainings and technical assistance (e.g., through the state’s child care resources and referral agencies) and partnerships with businesses as they work toward policies that support family child care needs (e.g., flexible family leave, onsite childcare, and improved access to cafeteria plans).

Streamline Child Care Administrative Processes

- A sustainable online system for child care resource and referral agencies may enable the creation of lists of available providers and may benefit families by streamlining the current matching approach. Though information should be disseminated to the community in multiple manners: online resources, phone, paper, etc.
- Families would benefit from increased transparency of and dissemination of information about eligibility requirements. This may be achieved by better coordination across different types of providers and by equipping existing community access points (e.g., libraries, home visiting programs, health clinics, and community-based organizations) with information and resources that would help families enroll in child care that meets their needs.
- Support for data collection and research activities on the barriers of enrollment in child care programs and the impact this has on families is crucial for supporting families.

Ensure Child Care is High Quality

- Deliberate and thoughtful hiring of a professionalized early childhood workforce, including child care providers and early childhood educators, is recommended for oversight and supervision.
- It is critical that our early childhood workforce receives a fair and competitive compensation (currently nearly 50% of child care professionals receive some kind of government assistance such as food stamps, welfare, or Medicaid, 15% live below the federal poverty line, and 85% do not have health insurance).
- Each state has local child care resources and referral agencies and a quality rating system that can be used to assist families and support high quality child care. It is recommended that the workforces for these resources in each state are well-staffed, trained, and funded to provide successful oversight of expansion.
- Policymakers may consider incentivizing ongoing quality improvements and updated trainings (e.g., tax credits for qualified, highly-rated child care providers).

Address Child Care Affordability Issues

- The expansion of current subsidy programs, including income eligibility for subsidies and tax credits, would aid in making child care more affordable. This is especially important during the ongoing pandemic.
- Better methods of coordination between child care resource and referral agencies and local childcare providers would be helpful to disseminate information on subsidy programs.
- Policymakers may consider increasing Child Care and Development Fund reimbursements to the federal recommended level (currently, most states reimburse at lower levels).

Further suggestions outlined by the Office of Child Care can be found [here](#).



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