

Gaps in Support for Early Care and Education

High-quality child care and early education is essential to enable parents to get and keep a job and to give children a strong start toward success in school and life. Yet many families—particularly low-income families—lack access to the high-quality child care and early education that parents need to work and children need to grow and thrive.

- Only one in six children eligible for federal child care assistance received it in 2009 (the most recent year for which data are available).¹ In the past few years, we have not made progress in addressing this unmet need. The average number of children receiving federal child care assistance each month in 2012 (the most recent year for which data are available)—1.5 million—was lower than in 2009, and actually at the lowest level since 1998.²
- Many families with incomes too low to afford child care on their own are not able to receive child care assistance under their states' restrictive eligibility limits. In 2013, a family with an income above 150 percent of poverty (\$29,295 a year for a family of three) could not qualify for assistance in 14 states. A family with an income above 200 percent of poverty (\$39,060 a year for a family of three) could not qualify for assistance in 38 states.²
- Even if families are eligible for child care assistance, they may not necessarily receive it. Nineteen states had waiting lists for child care assistance or turned families away without taking their names in 2013.³ In a number of states, these waiting lists are quite long—over 60,000 children in Florida, nearly 40,000 children in North Carolina, and over 10,000 children in Virginia as of early 2013.⁴ Studies show that many families on waiting lists struggle to pay for stable, good-quality child care as well as other necessities, or have no choice but to use low-cost—and frequently low-quality—care. In some cases, families on the waiting list cannot afford any child care, making it nearly impossible for parents to work.⁵
- Only three states set their basic reimbursement rates for child care providers serving families receiving child care assistance at the federally recommended level in 2013.⁶ Thirty-three states had higher reimbursement rates for higher-quality care, but in nearly three-quarters of these states, even the higher rates were below the recommended level. Low rates deprive child care providers of the resources necessary to hire and retain well-qualified staff, purchase toys and books, maintain facilities, and cover other costs involved in offering children a good learning experience. Low rates may discourage high-quality providers from even enrolling children receiving child care assistance.
- Only about half (52 percent) of three- and four-year-olds (not yet in kindergarten) are enrolled in public or private preschool programs. Children in low- and moderate-income families are less likely to be enrolled than children in higher-income families.⁷
- A national study found that only about one-third (35 percent) of four-year-olds in center-based programs were receiving high-quality child care.⁸

- Head Start reaches only about two-fifths of eligible preschool-age children,⁹ and Early Head Start reaches less than 4 percent of eligible infants and toddlers.¹⁰
- Total state prekindergarten funding fell by \$548 million and spending per child dropped by \$442 (after adjusting for inflation) between the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years. In addition, just 28 percent of four-year-olds and 4 percent of three-year-olds were served in state prekindergarten programs in 2011-12. Only five states had prekindergarten programs that met all of ten important quality benchmarks.¹¹

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Services Policy, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, *Estimates of Child Care Eligibility and Receipt for Fiscal Year 2009* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012), available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/12/childcareeligibility/ib.pdf>.

² Hannah Matthews and Stephanie Schmit, *Child Care Assistance Spending and Participation in 2012* (Washington, DC: CLASP, 2014), available at <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/ccspending2012-Final.pdf>.

² Karen Schulman and Helen Blank, *Pivot Point: State Child Care Assistance Policies 2013* (Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center, 2013), 7, available at http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/final_nwlc_2013statechildcareassistancereport.pdf.

⁴ Pivot Point, 8.

⁵ Pivot Point, 23.

⁶ See, e.g., Karen Schulman and Helen Blank, *In Their Own Voices: Parents and Providers Struggling with Child Care Cuts* (Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center, 2005), 10; Children's Action Alliance, *The Real Reality of Arizona's Working Families—Child Care Survey Highlights* (Phoenix, AZ: Children's Action Alliance, 2004); Deborah Schlick, Mary Daly, and Lee Bradford, *Faces on the Waiting List: Waiting for Child Care Assistance in Ramsey County* (Ramsey County, MN: Ramsey County Human Services, 1999) (Survey conducted by the Minnesota Center for Survey Research at the University of Minnesota); Philip Coltoff, Myrna Torres, and Natasha Lifton, *The Human Cost of Waiting for Child Care: A Study* (New York, NY: Children's Aid Society, 1999); Jennifer Gulley and Ann Hilbig, *Waiting List Survey: Gulf Coast Workforce Development Area* (Houston, TX: Neighborhood Centers, Inc., 1999); Jeffrey D. Lyons, Susan D. Russell, Christina Gilgor, and Amy H. Staples, *Child Care Subsidy: The Costs of Waiting* (Chapel Hill, NC: Day Care Services Association, 1998); Casey Coonerty and Tamsin Levy, *Waiting for Child Care: How Do Parents Adjust to Scarce Options in Santa Clara County?* (Berkeley, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education, 1998); Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, et al., *Use of Subsidized Child Care by Philadelphia Families* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, 1997); Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association, *Valuing Families: The High Cost of Waiting for Child Care Sliding Fee Assistance* (Minneapolis, MN: Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association, 1995).

⁶ Pivot Point, 10.

⁸ National Women's Law Center calculations based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment in the United States: October 2012, Detailed Table 3. Nursery and Primary School Enrollment of People 3 to 6 Years Old, by Control of School, Attendance Status, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, Mother's Labor Force Status and Education, and Family Income: October 2012*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/2012/tables.html>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2011, Table 57. Percentage Distribution of Quality Rating of Child Care Arrangements of Children at About 4 Years of Age, by Type of Arrangement and Selected Child and Family Characteristics: 2005-06*, available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_057.asp. (Table prepared in December 2010 based on data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort.)

¹⁰ National Women's Law Center calculations based on data on Head Start enrollment in FY 2012 from Fiscal Year 2014 Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees, 102, available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/olab/sec2d_cfsp_2014cj.pdf; and data on the number of three- and four-year-old children in poverty from U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2013 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Detailed Poverty Tables, POV34. Single Year of Age-Poverty Status: 2012*, available at http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032013/pov/pov34_100.htm.

¹¹ National Women's Law Center calculations based on data on Early Head Start enrollment in FY 2012 from Fiscal Year 2014 Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees, 102, available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/olab/sec2d_cfsp_2014cj.pdf; and data on the number of children under age

three in poverty from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2013 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Detailed Poverty Tables, POV34. Single Year of Age-Poverty Status: 2012, *available at* http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032013/pov/pov34_100.htm.

¹² W. Steven Barnett, Megan E. Carolan, Jen Fitzgerald, and James H. Squires, *The State of Preschool 2012: State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2012), *available at* <http://nieer.org/yearbook>.