

STATE
PLAY
BOOK

FOR GENDER EQUITY

HELP PARENTS EARN
WHILE CHILDREN LEARN:
INVEST IN CHILD CARE
AND EARLY LEARNING**The Problem**

Child care and early learning opportunities help children get the strong start they need to succeed and enable parents to work so they can support their families and/or go to school to attain the skills they need to improve their economic circumstances. Yet, many families—particularly low-income families, families with infants or children with special needs, and parents working nontraditional hours (evenings, nights, weekends, or irregular schedules)—struggle to find and afford child care. The average annual cost of child care for one child ranges from nearly \$3,000 to over \$20,000, depending on where the family lives, the age of the child, and the type of care.¹ The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the major federal child care program, is aimed at helping low-income families afford these costs, but it falls far short of meeting the need. Fewer than one in six children eligible for federal child care assistance receives help.² Many children—particularly low-income children who stand to benefit the most—also lack access to high-quality preschool. Some support for prekindergarten is provided through federal and state programs, but these programs serve at most 44 percent of four-year-olds and just 16 percent of three-year-olds, and most state programs lack sufficient quality standards.³ In addition, the child care and early education professionals who care for and teach our children typically earn low wages that leave them straining to support themselves and their own families.

The Solution

States should significantly expand their investments in child care and prekindergarten. Child care and prekindergarten policies should be designed to ensure that children have healthy, safe, stable environments that promote their growth and learning. Policies should also be designed to meet the varied needs of families, including those who work non-standard hours or have other special circumstances that can make it difficult for them to access child care and early education programs. In addition, states should support initiatives that increase professional development opportunities and compensation for the child care and early learning workforce.

For help
crafting
legislation,
talking points,
fact sheets, and for
state-specific policy
research and data,
please contact
us at
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Basic Elements of the Solution

- Provide help in paying for child care to additional low-income families.
- Ensure parents who work non-traditional and unpredictable hours have child care options that meet their needs.
- Increase payment rates to child care providers that serve families receiving child care assistance, and offer additional incentives and supports to encourage providers to improve their quality.
- Fully implement the requirements and provisions of the CCDBG reauthorization law designed to ensure the health and safety of child care, improve the quality of care, and make it easier for families to access child care assistance.
- Invest in increasing the supply of affordable, high-quality child care for infants and toddlers, children with special needs, and for children in underserved areas, including low-income communities and rural areas.
- Support initiatives to expand child care providers' professional development opportunities and increase their compensation.
- Ensure your state (if it has a personal income tax) has a fully refundable child and dependent care tax credit (CDCTC) so that families with little or no tax liability can take advantage of the credit.
- Make high-quality, full-school-day prekindergarten programs available to all four-year-olds whose families want them to participate.

- Once prekindergarten is universally available to four-year-olds, expand prekindergarten opportunities for three-year-olds, beginning with low-income children.
- Allow state funding for prekindergarten programs to be available to schools, child care providers, Head Start programs, and other community-based providers that meet high-quality standards.

Talking Points on the Solution

- High quality child care is essential to enable parents to get and keep a job and to give children a strong start toward success in school and life.
- But right now, the average cost of full-time center care for an infant ranges from over \$5,000 to over \$20,000 a year, putting it out of reach for many families.
- Families on waiting lists for child care assistance are often forced to use a patchwork of unstable arrangements, causing disruption for children, more stress for parents, and a risk of job loss. Families that stretch to pay for reliable child care often struggle to pay for other necessities.
- Child care assistance helps everyone—more parents are able to work, children can learn and thrive, and employers can keep skilled, productive workers.

- 1 Child Care Aware of America, The US and the High Cost of Child Care: 2018 Appendixes (2018), http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/appendices18.pdf?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fusa.childcareaware.org%2Fadvocacy-public-policy%2Fresources%2Fresearch%2Fcostofcare%2F.
- 2 Nina Chien, Factsheet: Estimates of Child Care Eligibility and Receipt for Fiscal Year 2013, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (2017), <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/258491/ChildCareSubsidyEligibility.pdf>.
- 3 W. Steven Barnett, Allison H. Friedman-Krauss, G.G. Weisenfeld, Michelle Horowitz, Richard Kasmin, James H. Squires, The State of Preschool 2018: State Preschool Yearbook, National Institute for Early Education Research (2019), http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/YB2018_Full-ReportR2.pdf.