



child care
is a
public good

Invest in Child Care and Early Learning for Families, Businesses, and Our Economy

High-quality, affordable child care is critical to the success of our children, families, and economy. It lays the foundation for our nation's current and future prosperity by enabling families to work or go to school, as well as by supporting the healthy development of our youngest learners. But right now, our child care system fails to meet the needs of children, families, workers, or businesses. Insufficient public investment in child care leaves families having to pay too much for care, while child care providers are not making enough to meet their basic needs.

Invest in Child Care in Fiscal Year 2026

As Congress debates Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations, we urge you to **adopt the bipartisan Senate Labor, Health and Human Services (LHHS) bill, which includes \$8.8 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and \$12.4 billion for Head Start**. This increased funding will help address the current child care crisis, while helping to ensure that all families can find and afford high-quality child care and that early educators are fairly compensated for their critical work.

Why CCDBG & Head Start Investments Are Needed Now

- Due to limited federal funding, **CCDBG only served 15% of eligible¹ children** in 2021.
- For most families, child care is unaffordable and hard to find. For families with low incomes, child care expenses for children under 5 eat up 35 percent of their income.² There is also not enough supply to meet demand. In 2021, there were only 8.7 million licensed child care slots available for the 12.3 million children who have all parents in the workforce.³ That's a **3.6 million slot gap that can leave parents on waitlists for years**.
- **Child care is one of the lowest-paid professions** in the US, despite rising requirements for credentials and education for providers due to the extensive research pointing to the importance of the early years for young children's healthy development.
 - **Wages average \$13.71/hour⁴**, and nearly **one in four child care providers receive federal food assistance⁵** and over a **quarter depend on Medicaid for health care⁶**.
 - 94% of providers are women⁷ and 1 in 5 early educators are immigrants.⁸
- The recent federal government shutdown underscored both Head Start's critical role and the importance of increased and stable funding. Head Start programs in 40 states plus Puerto Rico were in jeopardy of closing, risking access for 65,000 children.

Why Flat Funding for CCDBG is Actually a Funding Cut

Flat funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) will mean that **24,000 fewer children have access to child care** in FY2026. Compounded with level funding from past years, **nearly 50,000 fewer children** would have access to child care.

That's why it is **critical to pass the bipartisan Senate version of the FY26 LHHS bill, which includes an \$85 million increase for CCDBG** over FY2025.

- 1 Chien, Nina Chien. "Factsheet: Estimates of Child Care Subsidy Eligibility & Receipt for Fiscal Year 2021." ASPE, September 11, 2024. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/child-care-eligibility-fy2021>.
- 2 Rasheed Malik, "Working Families Are Spending Big Money on Child Care," CAP, June 20, 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/working-families-spending-big-money-child-care/>.
- 3 "Catalyzing Growth: Using Data to Change Child Care," Child Care Aware® of America, May 3, 2023, <https://www.childcareaware.org/catalyzing-growth-using-data-to-change-child-care/#2021DataAnalysisandRecommendations>.
- 4 "Early Educators' Wage Growth Lagged behind Other Low-Paid Occupations, Jeopardizing the Supply of Child Care as Relief Dollars Expire," National Women's Law Center, July 14, 2023, <https://nwl.org/resource/educators-wage-growth-lagged-behind-other-low-paid-occupations-jeopardizing-the-supply-of-child-care-as-relief-dollars-expire/>.
- 5 Dynia, Jaclyn M., Abel J. Koury, Randi A. Bates, and Colin Page McGinnis. Food Insecurity in a Nationally Representative Sample of Child Care Workers, n.d. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TUlsKYpJFkftAnuUXykfe67ThldaPEK/view>.
- 6 1. Joan Alker, Natalie Lawson, and Kelly Whitener, "Medicaid Is a Critical Support for the Early Childhood Education Workforce," Center For Children and Families, April 30, 2025, <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2025/04/21/medicaid-is-a-critical-support-for-the-early-childhood-education-workforce/>.
- 7 Brooke LePage, "The Child Care and Early Learning Workforce Is Underpaid and Women Are Paying the Price," National Women's Law Center, May 31, 2023, <https://nwl.org/resource/the-child-care-and-early-learning-workforce-is-underpaid-and-women-are-paying-the-price/>.
- 8 Karla Coleman-Castillo and Veronica Faison, "Four Things You Should Know about How Immigration Impacts Care Work," National Women's Law Center, September 16, 2025, <https://nwl.org/resource/four-things-you-should-know-about-how-immigration-impacts-care-work/>.