

Helping state and local officials advocate for child care^[1]

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Source: Centre for American Progress

Format: Article

Publication Date: 5 Apr 2017

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EXCERPTS

Access to affordable, high-quality child care is essential for children and families. On average, 65 percent of children in the United States have all available parents in the workforce, making child care a necessity for parents to maintain employment. In fact, it can cost families hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost wages, wage growth, and retirement assets to leave the workforce to care for their children.

Learning begins at birth, making it critical that all children, including infants, have the opportunity to access high-quality care. In the first five years of life, children gain skills such as language and socio-emotional regulation that provide the foundation for learning before they enter kindergarten. Disparities in cognitive ability between lower- and higher-income children are evident at just 9 months of age, growing even wider by the time children reach age 2. Parents understand the importance of early development and want their children in an environment that is not only safe but that also provides positive teacher-child interactions and developmentally appropriate activities.

Families have long faced the burden of finding and paying for child care alone, but child care should not solely be a private responsibility. Access to affordable, high-quality care serves a public good: It benefits the economy by ensuring that parents can continue to work, and it fosters the health and development of the United States' future workforce and innovators. By investing in its youngest citizens, the country would be investing in its current and future economy.

How state legislators can make progress

State lawmakers are in a prime position to have a direct impact on the lives of families by making high-quality child care more affordable and accessible. While there are federal programs that work to ease the financial burden on parents—namely the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit—these programs do not do enough to support children and families. Even if parents receive assistance or tax credits from these programs, the amount does not fully cover the cost of high-quality care.

It is an important time for states to lead on this issue. In recent years, strong state and local leaders have turned their focus to early childhood issues. When the federal government stalled on creating a universal preschool program, states took up the cause and began creating and implementing their own programs. This led to an increase in the number of 4-year-olds attending preschool but also to a greater call to action to federal legislators and policymakers. It's time to do the same for children from birth to age 3.

CAP has developed a toolkit for policymakers championing early childhood issues in their states and local communities. The toolkit provides resources to help advocate for expanded access to affordable, high-quality child care, complementing CAP's state-by-state factsheets on early learning. Specifically, the toolkit provides:

Messaging guidance and talking points to elevate the need for child care for children, families, and the economy

Suggested communications strategies and sample tweets to ensure that policymakers' message permeates the policy discussion and reaches their constituents

Examples of state child care policies that policymakers can pursue in order to:

Ease the financial burden on families

Increase the quality of early learning programs

Increase funding for early learning programs

Support the early childhood workforce

Next steps

CAP experts are available to support state and local policymakers and advocates who want to lead the charge on early childhood issues. By combining CAP's policy expertise and communications capacity, the Early Childhood Policy team can provide the resources and messaging tools needed to create momentum for comprehensive child care policies that ease the

financial burden for parents, ensure children's healthy development, and support the early childhood workforce.

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