

Advocating for child care during and after a pandemic ^[1]

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Source: Child Care Exchange

Format: Article

Publication Date: 1 Jul 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online [PDF] ^[2]

Excerpted from introduction

The coronavirus pandemic shows just how essential child care is.

Since March, many working parents across the country have scrambled to find alternative child care arrangements as schools and some child care providers closed because of the coronavirus outbreak. Those parents who were able to “work from home” struggled to balance work and being present for their young children, and less than 30 percent of workers can even work from home, according to the Economic Policy Institute. And while health care providers and other essential personnel put their lives on the line caring for others, who was taking care of their children?

Health care workers in the U.S. have over 3.5 million children, according to an interactive map developed by Yale University professors and based on census data. These children needed care, in order for health care workers to respond to COVID-19, but 2.3 million of them had no obvious child care providers available.

A nurse in Kansas told us, “I absolutely have to work. My child care closed with one day’s notice. I found another child care program and asked if I could count on them to be open. They told me that they are open today and plan to be open tomorrow, but due to the coronavirus and uncertain times, they could not promise me anything.”

Meanwhile, we were hearing from child care providers across the country that were laying off staff, did not know how they would pay their rent and other expenses, and were running out of funds because their programs are only supported by monthly tuition payments. A provider from Washington highlighted the urgency of the situation by saying, “We are going under, absolutely no money. We stand to lose everything.”

According to a national survey of over 5,000 child care providers from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, in April of this year, nearly 40 percent of child care providers reported that they either had to lay off or furlough workers, or that they themselves had been laid off or furloughed.

A few states were out front in supporting child care providers. Child Care Aware of Minnesota administered and distributed state grants for emergency child care services. The grants were included as part of the state legislature’s COVID-19 Response Supplemental Budget, and provided about \$10 million per month to support basic infrastructure needed to keep child care capacity available.

In Vermont, child care programs that provided emergency child care for essential workers received supplemental payments per child per week from the state. Vermont also created a program to help child care providers that serve families who were unable to pay their regular tuition during the pandemic.

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