

# The American rescue plan: Recommendations for addressing early educator compensation and supports <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Access report online [PDF] <sup>[2]</sup>

## Excerpts from introduction

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) represents unprecedented federal investment in early care and education, with new and broader allowances for workforce compensation (H.R. 1319, 2021). The early care and education (ECE) workforce deserve economic dignity, including the resources to care for their own families and children (Sperling, 2019). Yet, wages remain low and poverty rates high among this essential workforce as workers in nearly all other occupations are paid more (McLean, et al., 2021). There is an urgent need to utilize ARPA funding to get much-needed relief in the form of direct cash assistance to ECE workers in recognition of their historic underpayment, their key contribution to the nation's infrastructure before and during the pandemic, and the financial and psychological toll the pandemic has imposed on these critical workers.

But ARPA funding alone is not enough to make the long-term investments or radical reforms that our ECE system so desperately needs. Since few resources have reached individual early educators over the course of the pandemic, ARPA funding for the ECE workforce could be framed as rapid relief, possible only because of public investment. This acknowledgement can motivate lead agencies to create streamlined channels to provide easy-to-access relief funding to all individual ECE workers now. However, ARPA funding is time-limited, which is leading some decision-makers to exhibit excessive caution when it comes to direct payments to the workforce. Yet, creating barriers to payment and/or leaving workforce support totally at the discretion of individual programs exacerbates structural inequities and disparities within the ECE workforce.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only revealed child care as a pillar of the national infrastructure, but has also underscored the gross deficiencies and inequities that were pre-existing conditions before the pandemic. Some programs and early educators will weather this crisis, but many others will not, further aggravating unequal access for children and families. Emergency provisions and processes can lay the foundation for the establishment of universal access to early care and education, fair wage standards for this workforce, and certification and data systems that enable assessment of immediate and long-term impacts on the essential ECE workforce.

The child care relief fund should be designed in such a way that it becomes a foundation for public policies and investments to address the underlying systemic deficiencies that have made this sector and its workforce especially vulnerable in this crisis. Ensuring a portion of ARPA funds get directly into the hands of individual workers sets the stage for compensation investments to become a cornerstone of public investment, not an optional use. This precedent could help embed dedicated resources for sustained levels of appropriate wages and benefits in broader ECE reform, fundamentally shifting the paradigm for the way we prioritize and recognize the ECE workforce. The ARPA provides multiple opportunities for lead agencies to address compensation and benefits, while building out mechanisms for getting cash directly to the early education workforce in amounts that go beyond current levels of compensation. In addition to the specific ARPA provisions in the table that follows, the Biden-Harris administration has stated clearly that increasing pay is an appropriate use of funds (The White House, 2021).

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** child care workforce <sup>[4]</sup>

care work <sup>[5]</sup>

economic recovery <sup>[6]</sup>

**Source URL (modified on 7 May 2021):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/21/05/american-rescue-plan-recommendations-addressing-early>

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