

Child care in America: 2015 state fact sheets ^[1]

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Introduction

To remain competitive in the 21st-century global economy, the United States must recognize the value of child care as an investment in early childhood education and as a support system for working families. Child Care in America: 2015 State Fact Sheets provides important data to better understand America's working families and the circumstances they face. As such, it is a critical tool for child care advocates, policymakers and program administrators to guide decision-making about child care programs and costs.

Throughout the United States, many parents struggle to access safe, healthy child care that promotes early learning. This annual report uses federal and national data and information from state Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies and other state agencies to analyze:

- Family characteristics related to the need for child care.
- The use of child care.
- The supply of child care.
- The cost of child care.
- The child care workforce.
- Services provided by CCR&Rs.

The first section of this report documents the need for and use of child care as a nation. The second section details facts about individual states, including the District of Columbia.

Every week in the United States, child care providers care for nearly 11 million children younger than age 5 whose mothers are working. On average, these children spend 36 hours a week in child care, and one quarter (nearly 3 million) are in multiple child care arrangements because of the traditional and nontraditional working hours of their parents.

Research has continually illustrated the importance of quality early experiences in achieving good health, especially within the most vulnerable populations.

Families, child care providers and state and federal policymakers share responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of children while they are in child care settings. Basic state requirements and oversight help lay the foundation necessary to protect children and promote their healthy development while in child care.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program serves approximately 1.45 million children annually in communities across the country. CCDBG is the primary federal grant program that provides child care assistance for families and funds child care quality initiatives. Funds are administered to states in formula block grants and states use the grants to subsidize child care for low-income working families.

In November 2014, President Barack Obama signed S.1086, the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014 into law. The new law includes several measures focused on quality, including requiring states to:

- Promote quality child care by increasing activities to improve the care, enhancing states' ability to train providers and develop safer and more effective child care services.
- Strengthen health and safety requirements in child care programs and providers.
- Improve access to child care by expanding eligibility for participating families and helping families connect with quality programs that meet their needs by enhancing consumer education, providing greater options for quality child care and working to ensure continuity of care, essential for both the well-being and stability of a child.

With the new federal child care measures set to take effect, states are rapidly building, evaluating, and changing their early care and education quality focused systems [Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), professional development, licensing and standards]. Implementation of the new regulations must align with these efforts for sustainability and maximum impact.

The cost of child care

Annually, states spend more than \$10 billion in government money for child care. For the most part, public funding for child care comes from the CCDBG, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG or Title XX) and state funds.

In the United States, parents assume almost 60 percent of the cost of child care, and the percentage is even higher for middle income families. For several years now, Child Care Aware® of America has surveyed CCR&Rs to gather current information about the average cost of child care in child care centers and family child care homes for infants, 4-year-old children and school-age children. Our 2014 Cost of Care report indicated that the average annual cost of full-time care for an infant in center-based care ranges from \$5,496 in Mississippi to \$16,549 in Massachusetts. For an infant in a family child care home the cost ranges from \$4,560 in Mississippi to \$10,727 in New York. For a 4-year-old, center-based care ranges from \$4,515 in Tennessee to \$12,320 in Massachusetts. Care in a family child care home for a 4-year-old ranges from \$4,039 in South Carolina to \$9,962 in New York.

The child care workforce

Approximately 2.2 million individuals earn a living caring for children under age 5.

The early care and education landscape remains fairly complex, with programs offered in a variety of settings, designed to accommodate varying traditions and cultures, funded through multiple sources, and subjected to disparate regulations. Currently, there is national momentum to promote agreement on core knowledge and competencies for child care educators. Still, we must develop a better understanding of the complexities of the child care workforce in order to identify the knowledge and skills that these providers most need. There is a lot of work to be done in order to determine the exact components in this continuum of early educator core knowledge and competencies. Understanding the complexities of the child care workforce is a critical piece of this discussion.

Like many service industries, approximately 80 percent of the cost in a child care program is for payroll and payroll-related expenses. Despite tremendous responsibilities, the average income for a full-time child care professional in 2014 was only \$21,710, making child care one of the lowest paying professional fields and, more importantly, one of the lowest paying occupations in early care and education.

In general, early childhood education workers earn about half of what full-time workers with similar levels of education earn. The gap becomes even more pronounced when college degrees are taken into consideration, with early childhood education workers earning only one-third of the average income of other workers in the country. Further, while the number of immigrant workers in the field of early childhood education has tripled since 1990, these workers are significantly more likely to live below the poverty line than their native counterparts.

Not surprisingly, it is difficult to recruit credentialed child care professionals when compensation is so low. In addition, more than half of the states only require that licensed child care providers possess a high school diploma.

- Thirty-one states require a high school diploma or less for child care center lead teachers.
- Forty-one states require a high school diploma or less for regulated family child care providers.

The changing demographics

An evaluation of care centers and homes reveals a diverse group – both among the children being cared for and, as we shared above, their providers. Children of refugees and immigrants now account for 25 percent of the 23 million children under the age of 6, compared to 14 percent in 1990. Gateway states like California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois account for half of the number of children in immigrant families. Research has shown that these young children, especially dual language learners, benefit from quality child care. Further, the expansive growth of this demographic highlights the need for settings that consider the language and culture of the children being served.

The quality of child care

Child Care Aware® of America has reviewed and scored state licensing regulations for child care centers and small family child care homes. The 2013 We Can Do Better report assessing state laws, policies and oversight for child care centers showed that state requirements were minimal. The average score was 92 out of 150 possible points, or 61 percent. In the 2012 Leaving Children to Chance report evaluating state regulation and oversight of small family child care homes, states earned an average of 69, only 46 percent of all available points.

With CCDBG reauthorization, there are stronger provisions for health, safety and quality measures, particularly for low-income working families who rely on state child care subsidies to stay employed or enrolled in education programs. Thus, child care assistance is an important two-generation strategy that helps parents and their children simultaneously.

Though the exact definition of quality child care evolves with new research, experts agree on some general characteristics that enrich early childhood environments, including:

- Low child/teacher ratios.
- Small group size.
- Professional development opportunities for workforce.
- Positive provider/child interactions.
- Accreditation or high licensing standards.
- Age appropriate activities.

- Family engagement.
- Good health and safety practices.

The science is clear: there are long-term positive outcomes for children who begin learning from birth, and for 15 million children in America each week, the child care setting is an opportunity to learn and set healthy habits for life. Decades of research emphasize that quality child care has a lasting positive impact, particularly for children from low-income homes. Additionally, money spent on quality care for young children is a wise investment. According to the President's Council of Economic Advisors' 2015 report, the Economics of Early Childhood Investments, investments in high-quality early education generate economic returns of over \$8 for every \$1 spent.

Unfortunately, poor-quality care has negative impacts on development, especially for low-income and minority children. According to a March 2014 U.S. Department of Education report, boys and African American children are disproportionately expelled or suspended from early care and education programs. For preschool programs outside state prekindergarten systems, the rates were far higher. Thirty-nine percent of child care providers reported at least one expulsion in the past year, an expulsion rate more than 13 times higher than in K through 12 schools.

Methodology

Early in 2015, Child Care Aware® of America surveyed State CCR&R Networks and other CCR&Rs and asked questions about child care capacity, requests for referrals, training and technical assistance provided by CCR&Rs and the average price for full time care child care centers and family child care homes for three age groups. For schoolage children, CCR&Rs reported on the price of before- and after-school care for a nine-month school year. We defined child care centers as all center-based child care providers, including Head Start programs, license-exempt programs, school-based programs and state-funded prekindergarten. Information about school-age-only programs was asked in a separate question. CCR&Rs work with parents, child care providers and local and state governments within communities in every state to strengthen the quality of care and are uniquely positioned to provide this data.

Additional national and state data were gathered in the spring of 2015 from the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau; the Office of Child Care, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor; and the College Board Annual Survey of Colleges.

For some states, the cost of care was derived from the latest market rate survey available. Rates based on information collected prior to 2014 were adjusted by the Consumer Price Index (i.e., reported in 2014 dollars using the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator). National totals are rounded estimates. All missing information is reported as "NR" (Not Reported). Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota and West Virginia did not respond to our survey. In these states, cost of care data were pulled from our 2014 survey and were adjusted for inflation where applicable.

Conclusion

Ensuring that all children have access to high quality and affordable early childhood programs is essential; however, in every state, this type of care can be hard to find and difficult to afford. Although the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act, state programs to increase quality programming and provider supports have made progress on requiring quality environments, there is still much work to be done. In particular, researchers have identified the education and training of child care providers as one of the most important components of a quality child care setting.

Quality child care benefits everyone: it promotes positive developmental outcomes for children and allows parents to pursue their own education and career goals, eventually increasing their earning potential and their contribution to the economy. To improve the state of U.S. child care nationally, we MUST work together to find meaningful solutions that support working families and their children.

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