



**114<sup>TH</sup> & 115<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

**2016 - 2017**

# AGENDA IN BRIEF



# ABOUT CHILD CARE AWARE OF AMERICA'S AGENDA

Over the past several years, Child Care Aware® of America has surveyed and conducted focus groups with parents of young children, grandparents, national child advocacy organizations, and state and local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies. Our findings have been published in national reports that describe the current cost, quality, and availability of child care in every state.

During those conversations it was reaffirmed that child care is an essential building block of any community and that investments in child care are investments in our children, our economy, and our future. Child care plays an important role in the economy, helping to generate 15 million jobs and more than \$500 billion in income annually. Families need child care so they can work and children need a safe place where they can learn and continue their healthy development.

To ensure access to affordable, quality child care, Child Care Aware® of America has created a Public Policy Agenda to address the following documented issues.



## **1. CHILD CARE IS EXPENSIVE.**

The cost of child care in every state rivals families' annual expenditures on almost every other household expense, including housing, transportation, and the cost of tuition at a four-year, public university. Furthermore, in 38 states, the cost of infant care exceeds 10 percent of the state's median income for a two-parent family. While many families are able to take advantage of child care subsidies offered by state and federal organizations, there is not enough funding to cover all need. In fact, Child Care Aware® of America estimates that child care assistance funds reach fewer than 18 percent of eligible children. Families who earn between \$25,000 and \$50,000 annually are among those who stand to benefit most from increased subsidy support for child care, as these families tend not to be eligible for subsidies, and therefore rely on unlicensed, unsafe, or unreliable care.

Parents also rely on federal tax credits—for both families and employers—to help pay for child care. However, available tax credits are piecemeal, and vary significantly from state to state, and the average tax credit of \$550 per year falls well short of average child care costs. Further, benefits such as the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) are not available for parents who attend school part-time, which means that parents who both work and attempt to improve their economic condition through furthering their education are unable to receive additional support, thus fostering an unending cycle of poverty.

**Child Care Aware® of America Recommends that Congress address the following issues related to the high costs associated with child care:**

## ► FUNDING

- Increase significant federal investments in child care assistance for eligible children and increase requirements for states' use of federal funds toward quality improvement efforts.
- Provide resources for planning and developing child care capacity to increase the availability of and access to high-quality child care options for working families.
- Reduce barriers in the subsidy administration process.
- Require HHS to undertake a study of high-quality child care to assist all families with young children in affording quality child care.
- Ensure that developmentally appropriate public pre-kindergarten programs are designed to meet the developmentally appropriate child care needs of working families. Including the use of partnership models with market-based child care.
- Authorize funds for pilots in high poverty rural communities to explore strategies that blend multiple funding sources to better meet the child care needs of working parents (meeting the criteria of the strongest funding stream to ensure safe, quality care for children).
- Increase funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program to \$250 million per year. Over 25 percent of undergraduate students and two-thirds of nondependent women students have children.
- Provide paid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and expand FMLA to cover all workers. Current law provides unpaid leave for those who work in companies of 50 or more employees only.
- Pass the Healthy Families Act to require employers to provide at least seven sick days per year for full-time employees – enabling employees to care for themselves, or their children, when necessary.
- Fund research on assistance policies, funding streams, licensing requirements for child care providers, reimbursement rates, and other factors that impact low-income, nonstandard-schedule parents' access to child care.
- Address the child care stability of parents who work nonstandard schedules because such families experience a multiplicity of care arrangements.
- Increase the availability of flexible, convenient child care during the evening, night and weekend. Meeting the nonstandard-schedule parents' child care needs will likely involve a focus on meeting family demand for all types of child care programs.
- Establish a sliding fee scale that is not a barrier to families receiving federal child care assistance.

## ► TAX CREDITS

- Expand the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) to help working families cover the rising cost of child care. The credit should be improved through the following changes: To help low-income families, the credit should be made refundable. To help middle-income families, the percentage of expenses used to determine the amount of the credit should be increased to 50 percent of expenses for families with incomes of \$35,000 or less, decreasing as income increases on the same sliding scale

as under current law. To help all families, the current expense limits of the credit should be increased to more accurately reflect the actual costs of care.

- Review and consider what policy options are available to help families offset the rising cost of child care, including, but not limited to raising dependent care limits for deductions or providing additional tax credits for families and providers, creating public-private partnerships, and looking to states that have already developed successful financing models.
- Simplify the process whereby families qualify for these various child care tax incentives so they can easily access them.
- Ensure that parents who are enrolled in and attend college full or part-time are permitted to take advantage of the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.



### ► TRIBAL CHILD CARE

- Increase the CCDBG Tribal CCDF Funding set aside from not less than 2 percent to not less than 5 percent. (Currently at 2 percent.)
- Update OCC's Tribal Health and Safety Standards in consultations with tribes and the ability to incorporate tribal culture, customs and traditional care.
- Support legislation for the rights and abilities of tribes to participate in federal domestic assistance programs.
- Encourage relationships between tribes and states in order to support tribes' abilities to fully implement needed services for children and families.

### ► NONTRADITIONAL HOURS

- Address the child care stability of parents who work nonstandard schedules because such families experience a multiplicity of care arrangements.
- Fund research on assistance policies, funding streams, licensing requirements for child care providers, reimbursement rates, and other factors that impact low-income, nonstandard-schedule parents' access to child care.
- Increase the availability of flexible, convenient child care during the evening, weeknights and weekends. Meeting the nonstandard-schedule parents' child care needs will likely involve a focus on meeting family demand for all types of child care programs.

## ➤ BEFORE AND AFTERSCHOOL CARE

- Expand the [21st Century Community Learning Centers \(21st CCLC\)](#) program, which is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to afterschool programs.
- Reauthorize funds for Expanded Learning Time (ELT). Expanded learning time – adding time to the school day, week or year – is a relatively new approach to expanded learning opportunities. [ELT](#) is a key issue in Elementary and State Education Agency reauthorization and in the out of school time field.
- Increase STEM in after school because 80 percent of future jobs will require STEM literacy and skills, proficiency in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) is crucial in successful participation in contemporary society and the workplace.
- Expand the [Investment in Afterschool Programs Act](#). Afterschool programs are uniquely positioned to meet the needs of young people in rural communities. In light of this, the Afterschool Alliance is working with Congress to create a funding stream specifically for afterschool programs in rural communities.
- Expand [Active Hours Afterschool](#), which provides tools and information on afterschool and healthy lifestyles, including local wellness policies and partnership opportunities. Programs can play an important role in promoting health, from physical activity to healthy snacks, and are therefore well-positioned to be key partners in health initiatives.

## 2. QUALITY CHILD CARE MUST BEGIN EARLY.

Early, quality child care provides the solid foundation for children’s academic and behavioral success. For instance, research has demonstrated that children and families who attend Early Head Start programs fare better than their peers in several domains; however, Early Head Start is underfunded to the point that it can only serve 4 percent of eligible children.

Low-income populations, in particular, struggle to gain access to quality early child care due to barriers such as lack of transportation options and irregular work schedules. Existing child care centers in underserved areas must work to address these issues by expanding child care hours and working with state and federal agencies to secure access for all families. Without these measures, families in these areas may be forced to rely on unlicensed care providers that will not be able to provide the emotional and academic support children need in order to be school-ready by the time they enter Kindergarten.

**Child Care Aware® of America Recommends that Congress address the following issues to ensure access to quality early child care for all children and families:**

### ➤ EARLY ACCESS TO CARE

- Promote early identification and treatment of developmental disabilities and emotional and behavioral disorders in

children, including expansion of Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Section 619 Preschool Program, and the Children’s Mental Health Services Grant Program.

- Support a federally funded MIECHV program which is necessary for healthy development of infants and toddlers, and extend this program by March 2017.
- Continue State Early Learning Councils and require that all councils include CCR&Rs to ensure that resource and referral plays a key role in working with parents to access early learning settings for their children.

➤ **HEAD START & EARLY HEAD START**

- Support HHS to implement the revised performance standards.
- Provide sufficient funds both to serve more eligible children in Head Start and Early Head Start to expand the number of programs operating full-day, full week.



### 3. THE QUALITY OF CARE VARIES WIDELY BY STATE.

Despite the reauthorization of the CCDBG—which increases requirements related to children’s health in child care settings—states are still not doing enough to ensure that all children are afforded access to safe, healthy care settings. Children in unlicensed care or family care may not be protected by regulations surrounding physical activity time, developmental screening practices, or food safety guidelines. This lack of oversight exposes children to unnecessary risks that could potentially lead to long-term health problems or lifelong negative consequences.

**Child Care Aware® of America Recommends that Congress address the following issues to ensure the quality and consistency of child care across states:**

#### ➤ SUPPORT STATES WITH IMPLEMENTING CCDBG

- Increase the resources available to the Secretary for technical assistance to ensure appropriate and timely implementation of the law as well as ongoing compliance.
- Provide sufficient funding to states to ensure that both parents and child care providers have the resources they need to support health, safety, and quality child care goals of the reauthorization.

#### ➤ HEALTH & WELLNESS

- Reauthorize the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, and continue to expand access to healthy foods in preschool and child care settings.
- Reauthorize the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act which authorizes all of the federal child nutrition programs, including School Breakfast, National School Lunch, Child and Adult Care Food, Summer Food Service, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Programs, and WIC.

#### ➤ DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

- Work with HHS to improve disaster preparedness capabilities in child care settings.
- Direct DHS/HHS to establish an inter-agency partnership to assist with temporarily shifting children into non-impact programs, and/or support temporary child care programs in shelters, if necessary.
- Require Head Start programs to develop emergency preparedness and response plans.
- Instruct FEMA to define child care as a “critical service” thereby ensuring that federal disaster relief funds are available to child care providers in the aftermath of a disaster.
- Provide timely and more flexible funding for protecting, restoring and accessing child care in emergencies.
- Provide sufficient funding to support the training of providers on emergency planning, response, and recovery needs.

## 4. CHILD CARE PROVIDERS MUST RECEIVE ADEQUATE TRAINING AND COMPENSATION.

On average, child care providers earn less per hour than many other professions within the personal care industry, including barbers, hairdressers, baggage porters, and manicurists. Further, investments in professional development for child care providers are minimal, at best. And yet, research indicates that there is a direct link between caregiver training and quality of care. Adults who receive quality care as children tend to fare better than their peers on metrics such as high school completion, annual salary, and participation in criminal behavior. Yet to date, sustained investments in child care providers—both through compensation and training—have not been sufficient to ensure that all care centers meet minimal quality standards.

**Child Care Aware® of America Recommends that Congress address the following issues to ensure that all child care providers receive adequate training and compensation:**

- ▶ Provide resources for child care providers to strengthen skills and competencies of the workforce, aligned with the National Academy of Sciences report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children for Children Birth through 8*, which offers providers the skills they need by coordinating activities with other community service providers.
- ▶ Require community-based training that is intentional, sequential, competency-based, tied with coaching and mentoring, and tied to outcomes.
- ▶ Require all individuals who are paid as part of the child care workforce (i.e., caring for unrelated children on a regular basis) to have a minimum of 40 hours of training in child development and behavior guidance, learning activities, finance aid/CPR, recognizing child abuse, and basic health and safety practices prior to working with children.
- ▶ Require all individuals who are paid as part of the child care workforce (i.e., caring for unrelated children on a regular basis) to attend at least 24 hours of training annually.
- ▶ Expand minimum training requirements for directors of child care programs and ensure that their training leads to a credential for directors and administrators of early care and education programs.
- ▶ Encourage states to expand online training opportunities.
- ▶ Encourage states to expand training to better address children with special needs, and to more effectively work with children whose first language is not English.
- ▶ Expand training in other languages where a community needs assessment shows the need for training in language other than English to better meet the needs of a diverse array of providers.

### ▶ INFANT & TODDLER CHILD CARE

- Provide adequate funding to create systemic supports for improving the quality of child care services for infants and

toddlers by promoting the establishment of high-quality services that are designed for their unique needs.

- Establish a statewide network of infant and toddler specialists who provide technical

assistance and support to individuals who are providing care to children under the age of four.

- Provide adequate CCDF funding to allow states to set rates at the levels sufficient for families to access high quality infant and toddler care.

### ➤ BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES

- Invest in Workforce Preparation and Development. States have a significant role to play in ensuring that the early childhood workforce has a strong knowledge base and skills, and access to behavioral specialists or mental health consultants, to prevent expulsion, suspension, and other exclusionary discipline practices.
- Work with ACF to develop a program of technical assistance to connect licensed social workers with parents and providers to offer coaching and strategies for managing expectations and child behavior, similar to the 12-year-old Early Childhood Consultation Partnership in Connecticut.

### ➤ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Provide resources for child care providers to strengthen skills and competencies of the workforce, aligned with the National Academy of Sciences report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through 8*, which offers providers the skills they need by coordinating activities with other community service providers.
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- Expand training in other languages where a community needs assessment shows the need for training in a language other than English to better meet the needs of a diverse array of providers.
- Increase the resources available to the Secretary for technical assistance to ensure appropriate and timely implementation of the law as well as ongoing compliance.

### ➤ CULTURAL COMPETENCY

- Fund and promote models that adapt to their geographical, cultural, and linguistic

experiences. Locally-designed options should also be considered as the foundation for a new research-base on the efficacy of models designed specifically for populations of children and families with particular profiles of risks and strengths including encouraging bilingual/bicultural staff.

- Promote National Association Education Young Child (NAEYC)'s four underlying principles of cultural competence standards.

### ➤ **FAMILY, FRIEND, & NEIGHBOR CARE**

- Enable policymakers, funders, and family, friend and neighbor leaders to work together to create statewide networks of local resources and supports and other options for FFN caregivers and the children in their care.
- Create and participate in private/public and collaborative FFN efforts.
- Develop new strategies to finance and sustain FFN supports. Funders and policy makers should consider devoting more funding to FFN care development efforts, including program design and innovation, provision of services and research on all aspects of this new arena.
- Provide incentives that encourage early learning system development leaders to include strategies to help FFN caregivers in their efforts, and build bridges with policy makers and funders engaged in work with other related systems.

### ➤ **CHILD CARE SERVICES FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES**

- Prioritize access to services for homeless families including families who are temporarily homeless due to a disaster.
- Allocate funds for activities that improve access to child care services, including procedures to permit enrollment of homeless children (after an initial eligibility determination) while required documentation is obtained.
- Institute a grace period that allows children experiencing homelessness to receive child care while their families take action to comply with immunization and other health and safety requirements.
- Provide training and technical assistance on identifying and serving homeless children and their families, and specific outreach to homeless families.
- Coordinate services with early childhood programs serving children experiencing homelessness.
- Establish a sliding fee scale that is not a barrier to families receiving federal child care assistance.
- Require states to collect and submit data on homeless children receiving federal child care assistance.

### ➤ **CHILD CARE DESERTS**

- Authorize funds for pilots in high poverty communities to explore strategies that blend multiple funding sources to better meet the child care needs of working parents (meeting the criteria of the strongest funding stream to ensure safe, quality care for children).

### **FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- Build and expand capacity at the state and local levels for family, child care, and community engagement.
- Urge government and community agencies and organizations to encourage and provide meaningful and culturally respectful organizational supports to families that allow them to be the best first teacher for their children.
- Create awareness surrounding the importance of family engagement and empower families to take steps to optimize their children’s learning and development.
- Work to bridge gaps of inequalities for the most vulnerable children, support the service needs of children with developmental delays, and provide supportive infrastructure for family circumstances that fall outside the traditional two-parent home environment (e.g., homeless, single parent, multi-generation, refugee, etc.).



## CONCLUSION

The reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant of 2014 represents an enormous step forward in establishing access to quality, affordable child care for all children and families. However, more work still needs to be done to ensure that Congress and states are implementing all of the CCDBG requirements effectively, and expanding access to child care for all—regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or location. Child Care Aware® of America has worked closely with child care stakeholders to establish a list of policies that it believes are of most importance—and of highest value—to children and their families. In the coming years, Child Care Aware® of America will work with Congress and states to ensure that additional policies, supports and resources are implemented to further the health, safety, wellbeing, and care of all children in child care.

To read Child Care Aware® of America’s comprehensive Public Policy Agenda, visit [www.usa.childcareaware.org](http://www.usa.childcareaware.org).