

Child Care and Early Education

Child care and early education programs are critical to promoting child development, school readiness and helping parents work. Today, primary sources of care and education for young children are child care, Head Start and Pre-Kindergarten programs.

Child care, a necessity for many working families across the United States, can range from informal care provided by family and friends to formal child care programs. High quality, affordable child care provides an important environment for children to grow and develop. Head Start and Pre-Kindergarten programs are also important for promoting positive child-wellbeing including assisting with child development and school readiness. For example, high quality early childhood education programs have been found to promote long-term positive child development both academically and socially.

For many parents however, finding affordable, accessible and quality child care and early education programs is difficult. Many families earn too much money to qualify for assistance, yet struggle daily to meet their basic needs including paying for housing and food. Many low-income families and families in poverty also struggle with the high cost, while also finding themselves with the additional burdens of needing care for their children during non-traditional hours such as evenings and weekends and/or a lack of quality care in their communities.

In addition to the high cost of care, many families who are eligible for assistance are unable to access care. Today, the need for early childhood education programs has outpaced the supply. It is estimated that only 1 in 7 eligible children receives child care assistance and only three out of five eligible children are being served by the Head Start program.ⁱ Adding to the need, states are cutting back child care services, making cuts to their infant and toddler programs, pre-kindergarten programs, after-school programs and resource and referral programs further limiting affordable programs for children and their families.

VIEW POINTS

One of the main arguments surrounding childcare and early education programs in the United States is the role of government and government funding. Supporters of high quality child care and early education programs argue that government investments in childcare and early education programs not only assist children and parents but society as a whole because these children are the future workforce of our country.

Others argue that while high quality child care settings and early education programs such as Head Start are important to child well-being a child development, both state and federal governments have limited amounts of money in their budgets and funding decisions for all things-child care and early education, health care, job training and education programs, etc. should be made on a case by case basis.

YWCA POSITION

Since 1868, the YWCA has been providing early childhood programs for millions of children across the United States. Currently, many YWCAs are involved in providing childcare and early education programs. The YWCA supports quality, affordable and accessible early childhood education that assists adults in moving towards economic independence and provides children with culturally sensitive, developmentally appropriate activities that enable children to succeed in school.

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FACTS

- **Many families rely on care outside of the home.** 61% of children under age six in the United States are in some kind of care outside the home, including children of both low-income working parents and non-working mothers. ⁱⁱ Nearly 13 million pre-school aged children, including six million infants and toddlers, spend part of their day being cared for someone other than their parents. ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Head Start serves many children who live in poverty, yet many more children are in need of Head Start services.** In 2002, more than half of the children served in Head Start Centers came from families making between \$9,000 and \$11,999 a year. ^{iv} However, nearly 40% of children eligible for Head Start do not receive services.
- **Working women and families rely on many forms of care for their children. However, low-income families' choices are limited due to the high cost of care, transportation barriers, and a lack of affordable and accessible options in their communities.** ^v
- **Many low-income children are unable to access needed care and not receiving the childcare for which they are eligible.** According to the General Accountability Office, states give families on welfare and families transitioning off welfare higher priority than other low-income working families when child care funds are unable to cover all who apply. ^{vi}

ⁱ Children's Defense Fund (February 2003) Head Start Fact Sheet.

ⁱⁱ National Conference of State Legislatures: Child Care and Early Education Issues Overview <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/cyf/ccoverview.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Fight Crime Invest In Kids (April 2004) Early Childhood Development Programs. <http://www.fightcrime.org/>

^{iv} Children's Defense Fund (February 2003) Head Start Fact Sheet.

^v Kathryn Tout, Martha Zaslow, Angela Romano Papillo and Sharon Vandivere (September 2001) *Work Supports for Families and Development Opportunity for Young Children*. Urban Institute.

^{vi} *Child Care: Recent State Policy Changes Affecting the Availability of Assistance for Low-Income Families*. GAO-03-588. Washington, D.C.: May 2003.