

CHILD CARE

FACT SHEET

Expand Access to High-Quality Early Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers

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High-quality early care and education is essential for children in their earliest years of life when they are first learning and exploring. Infants and toddlers need early care and education providers who have specialized knowledge of the development of infants and toddlers, provide a consistent relationship, respond to their individual needs, and nurture their growth and development. A young child's relationship with his or her provider affects the child's cognitive, language, social, and emotional development. Yet, high-quality infant and toddler programs are in short supply.

Very young children need high-quality care during the critical early years.

- The science is clear about the important brain development that occurs in the first three years of life. As stated in the landmark study, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, "What happens during the first months and years of life matters a lot, not because this period of development provides an indelible blueprint for adult wellbeing, but because it sets either a sturdy or fragile stage for what follows."¹ The science also demonstrates the influence that children's experiences and environments both in and out of the home have on this early development.
- Infant and toddler caregivers who provide stable relationships, protect children from serious and prolonged stress, and nurture children physically, emotionally, and cognitively provide the foundation for children's ongoing development, encouraging their future success in school and adulthood.²

Child care is a necessity for millions of families across the country with young children.

- Approximately 5.8 million (50 percent) children under age three are in child care on a regular basis.³
- Three-fifths (60.6 percent) of women with children under age three are in the labor force.⁴ These mothers need reliable, high-quality care for their infants and toddlers.

Care for infants and toddlers is difficult to afford and hard to find for many families.

- The average cost of full-time infant care ranges from approximately \$4,500 to nearly \$15,000 a year, depending on where a family lives and the type of care.⁵ These costs can be a particular burden for young families with infants since the parents may be just starting to work and have not had time to accumulate any savings. Nearly half (49 percent) of children under age three—5.6 million infants and toddlers—live in low-income families (families with incomes under 200 percent of poverty).⁶
- Thirty-five percent of requests for child care referrals made to California's resource and referral agencies are from families looking for care for children under age two, but only 6 percent of child care slots in licensed child care centers are for children this age.⁷

- A study of thirteen economically disadvantaged communities found that slots in licensed or regulated centers and family child care homes for infants and toddlers were in short supply. For example, in one economically disadvantaged community in Oakland, only 63 out of 1,147 (5 percent) total child care slots were for infants and toddlers, and in one economically disadvantaged community in Indianapolis, only 172 out of 1,551 (11 percent) total child care slots were for infants and toddlers.⁸

Far too few child care programs provide the high-quality care that infants and toddlers need to learn and grow.

- A four-state study of child care centers conducted in 1995 found that only 8 percent of centers providing care for infants and toddlers were rated as good quality, over half were rated as mediocre quality, and 40 percent were rated as poor quality.⁹
- A 2000 study of child care settings in four Midwestern states rated nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of center-based care for infants as mediocre quality and another 8 percent as poor quality.¹⁰
- High-quality infant and toddler care is often more difficult to find than high-quality care for preschoolers. For example, in April 2008, less than half (46 percent) of infants and toddlers in regulated care in North Carolina were in centers or homes with the highest quality ratings (four or five stars under the state's five-star rating system). In comparison, 58 percent of the state's preschoolers who were in regulated care were in centers or homes with the highest quality ratings.¹¹
- Many child care providers working with infants and toddlers lack sufficient training for working with young children. The NICHD Study of Early Child Care found that nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of providers and caregivers of infants in the study had no specialized training in child development or infant care, and nearly half (48 percent) had only a high school diploma or less education.¹²

While there are some federal resources to support high-quality early learning opportunities for very young children, these resources fall short of meeting the need.

- The federal Early Head Start program, which was established as part of the 1994 reauthorization of Head Start and began with 68 programs in 1995, offers comprehensive supports for vulnerable infants, toddlers, and their families through center-based, home-based, and combination program options. Yet, less than 4 percent of eligible infants and toddlers are able to participate in this high-quality early learning program.¹³

- 1 Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips (Eds.), *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, 2000).
- 2 Shonkoff and Phillips; Erica Lurie-Hurwitz, *Early Experiences Matter: Making the Case for a Comprehensive Infant And Toddler Policy Agenda* (Washington, DC: Zero to Three, 2009), available at http://www.zerotothree.org/public-policy/policy-toolkit/case_statementsingmar5_2_.pdf; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, *Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships: Working Paper No. 1* (2004), available at http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp1/.
- 3 National Women's Law Center calculations based on data in U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Initial Results from the 2005 NHES Early Childhood Program Participation Survey* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2006), 7, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006075.pdf>.
- 4 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Characteristics of Families – 2011*, Table 6. Employment status of mothers with own children under 3 years old by single year of age of youngest child and marital status, 2010-2011 annual averages, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.t06.htm>. This percentage understates how many women raising children are in the paid labor force because it reflects only women raising their own children, and does not include the many women who are raising grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, or other related children. Note that the labor force includes those who are working and those who are looking for work.
- 5 Child Care Aware of America, *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2012 Report* (Arlington, VA: Child Care Aware of America, 2012), 7, available at http://www.naccrra.org/sites/default/files/default_site_pages/2012/cost_report_2012_final_081012_0.pdf.
- 6 Sophia Addy, Will Engelhardt, and Curtis Skinner, *Basic Facts About Low-income Children: Children Under 3 Years, 2011* (New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, 2013), available at http://nccp.org/publications/pub_1077.html.
- 7 California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, *2011 California Child Care Portfolio* (San Francisco, CA: California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, 2011), 7, available at <http://www.rnetwork.org/rr-research-in-action/2011-portfolio/2011-statewide-portfolio-page.pdf>.
- 8 National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, *Child Care in Thirteen Economically Disadvantaged Communities* (Arlington, VA: NACCRRRA, 2006), 15, available at <http://www.naccrra.org/randd/data/CaseyReport.pdf>.
- 9 Suzanne Helburn, Mary L. Culkin, Carollee Howes, Donna Bryant, Richard Clifford, Debby Cryer, Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, and Sharon Lynn Kagan, *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers* (Denver, CO: University of Colorado, 1995).
- 10 Helen Raikes, Brian Wilcox, Carla Peterson, Susan Hegland, Jane Atwater, JeanAnn Summers, Kathy Thornburg, Julia Torquati, Carolyn Edwards, and Abbie Raikes, *Child Care Quality and Workforce Characteristics in Four Midwestern States* (Omaha, NE: The Gallup Organization, 2003), 68, available at http://ccfl.unl.edu/projects_outreach/projects/current/ecp/pdf/final_11-25-03.pdf.
- 11 Mary Carpenter, Mary Martin, and Sue Russell, *Who's Caring for Our Babies Now? Revisiting the 2005 Profile of Early Care and Education for Children Birth to Three in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: Child Care Services Association, 2008), 20, available at http://www.childcareservices.org/downloads/research/IT_State%20report_08.pdf.
- 12 NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, "Characteristics of infant child care: Factors contributing to positive caregiving," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 11 (3), 1996, 269-306.
- 13 National Women's Law Center calculations based on data on Early Head Start enrollment from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Fiscal Year 2013 Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees* (2012), 103, available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/CFS%20final.pdf>; and data on children under age three in poverty from U.S. Census Bureau, *Detailed Poverty Tables, POV34: Single year of age – poverty status: 2011*, available at http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032012/pov/POV34_100.htm.