



Over 11 million children under age 5 spend a portion of their week in the care of someone other than their mother - on average, about 36 hours per week. About one-quarter of these children are in multiple child care settings strung together by their parents in order to meet the hours required by their jobs. The quality of much of this care varies greatly and many working families struggle with the costs.

In a weakened economy, the stress placed on families makes high-quality child care even more important to the healthy development of children.

NACCRRA supports a stronger federal commitment to quality child care so that children are safe and can learn and parents can work. The policy improvements below reflect NACCRRA's priorities in 2009. Please contact us for information about our complete policy agenda or see www.naccrra.org.

About NACCRRA's Agenda

NACCRRA's public policy agenda is both **grass roots-inspired** and **research-based**. What we have learned about child care in the United States from our member agencies, reports, state surveys, and national polling:

- Child care is expensive.
- There are no universal minimum standards and as a result the quality of care varies by state.
- Many parents do not have a real choice: the income eligibility threshold for child care assistance is very low and the cost of care is high.
- Many families, not just poor families, struggle with the cost and quality of care.
- The training of the workforce is weak, mostly a scattershot approach where few providers have the training they need.

- State and federal oversight is weak and infrequent, with some states inspecting child care settings once every 5 or 10 years.

The Child Care & Development Block Grant

The Child Care & Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the primary federal grant program that provides child care assistance to states through a formula. Most of this assistance is administered through vouchers or certificates, which can be used by parents for the setting of their choice. The law requires no less than 4 percent of CCDBG funds to be used for activities to improve the quality of care.

NACCRRA calls on Congress to reauthorize and strengthen CCDBG in the 111th Congress so that parents have choices among quality child care providers in their community.

- Require **complete background checks** on paid providers who regularly care for unrelated children;
- Require **quarterly unannounced** inspections of licensed providers (the same Congress required of the military);
- Require all paid providers who care for unrelated children on a regular basis to **complete 40 hours of pre-service initial training** (*primarily CPR and other basic safety & health training in addition to child development*) as well as **24 hours of annual training**; and
- **Increase the quality setaside to 6 percent of the base** and 25 percent of new funds bringing child care on parity with Head Start.

Requiring Accountability for CCDBG Funds

Despite low standards in many states, half the states use federal funds to pay for a large portion of the children receiving federal subsidies to be in license-exempt care (*care that is legally operating but not subject to state licensing standards or regulation*).

For example, in Michigan, 66 percent of children receiving subsidies are in license-exempt care. In Oregon, 58 percent of children receiving subsidies are in license-exempt care. **There is little accountability with regard to state standards, but nothing is known about the quality of license-exempt care.**

NACCRRA 2009 Agenda-In-Brief

NACCRRA recommends:

- ✓ Requiring all paid child care providers who regularly care for unrelated children to have a comprehensive background check, including federal and state fingerprint checks;
- ✓ Requiring basic health & safety standards to be met;
- ✓ Requiring child care providers to have training in child development and health & safety practices;
- ✓ Requiring that age-appropriate curriculum be used; and
- ✓ Requiring that parents be actively involved and have access to information about licensing and oversight through the internet.

Completing Background Checks for All Providers

Most parents assume that states have conducted a background check on providers - particularly for providers of licensed care or care subsidized by the government. The reality is that only 10 states conduct a comprehensive background check: state & federal finger print check, child abuse & neglect registry check, and a check of the sex offender registry. NACCRRA recommends:

- ✓ Requiring comprehensive background checks for all paid providers;
- ✓ Prohibiting the use of CCDBG and TANF funds to be used to pay convicted felons to provide child care; and
- ✓ Requiring all paid providers caring for unrelated children on a regular basis to have a state license or permit.

Providing Oversight to Protect Children

When child care settings are inspected on a regular basis, there is accountability for how federal, state, and parent funds are spent. Without regular inspections, state standards are hollow. NACCRRA recommends:

- ✓ Quarterly inspections (similar to the nation's military system);
- ✓ Reasonable caseloads per inspector;

- ✓ Requiring states to post inspection findings on the internet where parents can access the information to be better informed when selecting care; and
- ✓ Granting HHS the authority to withhold funds from states without adequate oversight.

Training for a Quality Workforce

Every day 1.2 million center based teachers and family child care providers care for our nation's youngest children. Yet, most child care providers lack the training and education needed to provide a quality child care environment. NACCRRA recommends:

- ✓ Requiring 40 hours of pre-service initial training and 24 hours of annual training;
- ✓ Expanding minimum training requirements for center directors; and
- ✓ Creating and expanding more on-line training to reach more providers, to better address children with special needs, and to provide training in languages other than English.

Ensuring Affordable Care for Families

Families across the United States (of all income levels) are struggling to find and afford the cost of quality child care. In a 2008 NACCRRA parent poll, the top two concerns of parents were quality of care and cost. NACCRRA recommends:

- ✓ Increasing federal investments in child care fee assistance (subsidies) and quality improvement efforts;
- ✓ Requiring states to conduct and use current market rate studies, and ensure that families can access no less than 75 percent of providers in the community;
- ✓ Providing resources for planning and developing child care capacity to increase the availability of quality care;
- ✓ Requiring states to have more effective sliding fee assistance phase-out plans to avoid the "cliff effect" when families lose help and are worse off for receiving a modest increase in income; and
- ✓ Improving federal and state tax codes to help families at all income levels pay for quality care.

NACCRRA, the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, is our nation's leading voice for child care. We work with more than 800 state and local Child Care Resource & Referral agencies to ensure that families in every local community have access to high-quality, affordable child care. To achieve our mission, we lead projects that increase the quality and availability of child care, offer comprehensive training to child care professionals, undertake groundbreaking research, and advocate child care policies that positively impact the lives of children and families. To learn more about NACCRRA and how you can join us in ensuring access to high-quality child care for all families, visit us at www.naccrra.org