

A VISION FOR THE REAUTHORIZATION OF CHILD CARE

Child care helps children, families, and communities prosper. With the increasing participation of women in the workforce, many parents use child care from the time their children are infants into their school-age years. Almost 12 million children under age 5 are in some type of child care setting each week. They spend an average of 36 hours per week in these settings. In addition, more than 10 million children 5 to 14 are in care during the week while their mothers work. Therefore, child care helps our nation stay competitive with a stronger workforce now and in the future. When America supports child care, we encourage children, families, and our nation to reach their full potential.

Research on the brain shows that the first years of life are critical to a child's overall development, specifically in the areas of intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, physical, and cultural development. In fact, research shows that 80 percent of a child's brain develops by the age of three, and 90 percent by the age of five. Furthermore, research on the effect caregivers have on children during these early years clearly shows that the caregiver's education, training, and ability to provide a safe and stimulating environment have an impact on children's cognitive and emotional development.

With more than 60 percent of children cared for regularly in a child care setting, parents should be able to count on these settings to safeguard their children's health and well-being and promote their development and learning.

National and state organizations dedicated to improving the quality of our nation's child care have developed a "Vision" blueprint for the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the strengthening of the Dependent Care Tax Credit. This "Vision," when realized, will expand families' access to high-quality learning opportunities for their children and help ensure all children are cared for in child care settings that enhance their readiness for and success in school.

THE VISION

Four key national agenda items will enhance the overall quality of child care and learning activities and help families, particularly low-income families, obtain that care.

- 1 Ensure Children and Families Have Access to Affordable, Healthy and Safe Care
- 2 Improve Quality to Promote Early Learning
- 3 Improve and Expand Care for Infants and Toddlers
- 4 Provide Needed Research and Technical Assistance

ENSURING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, HEALTHY AND SAFE CARE

All parents want their children to be in safe and healthy environments. States will develop specific minimum health and safety standards for all child care providers caring for children not related to the provider for a fee on a regular basis that will address requirements for first-aid, CPR, SIDS prevention, sanitary methods, child abuse identification, developmental screening, business practices, emergency procedures, and other basic child guidance policies. States will require these providers to have comprehensive background checks that include an FBI fingerprint check and participate in 40 hours of appropriate health and safety pre-service training and 24 hours of annual training.

To ensure compliance with these requirements, states will inspect child care settings at least twice a year, once on an unannounced basis.

To improve low-income families' access to high-quality child care settings, states will double the number of children in low-income families who currently receive child care assistance. They will set a one-year assistance eligibility period for families, reimburse providers who serve children receiving assistance at no less than the 75th percentile of currently valid market rates, and develop and implement strategies to increase the supply of care for underserved children, such as children with special needs, children in limited-English-speaking families, and children whose parents work non-standard hours.

In addition, the Dependent Care Tax Credit will be made refundable to help low-income families, the sliding scale for determining the amount of the credit will be expanded to help middle-income families, and the credit will be indexed for inflation to preserve its value to all families.



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IMPROVING QUALITY TO PROMOTE EARLY LEARNING

To improve the quality of child care settings to promote early learning and to help parents identify high-quality child care settings, states will develop a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The QRIS will rate providers on the quality of care they offer, beginning at the level of quality needed for providers to become licensed or regulated and increasing to nationally recognized high standards. Ratings will be based on the extent to which child care centers and family child care homes meet specific criteria related to staff:child ratios, group size, development and learning activities, cultural and linguistic competency, staff qualifications and credentials, and staff retention, among others. Reimbursement for providers serving children receiving child care assistance will be based on their quality rating. Grants will be available to help programs achieve and maintain the higher standards of the QRIS, including to assist providers in obtaining training, credentials, and degrees, and to increase providers' compensation commensurate with their education. Programs and providers serving low-income children will receive priority for these grants.

To continually improve child care settings, funds will be made available through grants and loans for facility renovation and construction, with a specific focus on providers in low-income communities.

IMPROVING AND EXPANDING CARE FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

To improve the availability of high-quality infant and toddler care, states will administer grants to top-level QRIS providers to provide high-quality, comprehensive child care and development services, to organizations to operate family child care networks and provide technical assistance to other infant and toddler providers in their communities, including relative caregivers, and to support a statewide network of specialists to provide training and consultation on high-quality infant and toddler care. Priority for these grants will be given to low-income communities.

PROVIDING NEEDED RESEARCH AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

To increase the depth and availability of research on child care, research on topics such as the disaggregated demographic data of children receiving child care assistance, and credentials, compensation, and other characteristics of the child care workforce will be conducted. The National Academy of Sciences will be commissioned to determine key components of quality and study the cost in each child care setting placing special attention to the cost of infant and toddler care. In addition, technical assistance will be provided to states on conducting valid market rate surveys and developing their QRIS.

ACHIEVING THE VISION

In order to realize this "Vision," federal funding for child care must be significantly increased. Currently, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the major source of federal funding for child care initiatives, authorizes the federal government to provide funds to states to help low-income families pay for child care and to strengthen the quality of child care. CCDBG's reauthorization is long overdue. In addition, in 2010 recent improvements to the Dependent Care Tax Credit (DCTC) will expire unless extended. This Vision offers a road map for the next reauthorization of CCDBG and for the protection and expansion of the DCTC that will help to ensure that children have access to the child care that they need to develop their full potential and that their families will have the support they need to work and be productive.

SUPPORTING THE VISION

The Vision is supported by a growing number of national and state organizations including the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, the National Women's Law Center, the Center for Law and Social Policy, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association of Family Child Care, the Early Care and Education Consortium, The Children's Project, and the National Council of La Raza.

