

Affordable Child Care for Families



Improving access to affordable, quality child care is one of NACCRRRA's top goals. Although child care is a necessity to enable parents to work, the high price of child care in every community strains household budgets and forces parents to make compromises about the quality and safety of the care they choose for their children.

Every year, NACCRRRA reports on child care prices based on surveys of Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) State Networks, who collect price data from local CCR&Rs in their states.¹ The 2011 report once again found:

Child care costs are high.

- The average annual cost of full-time child care for an infant in a center in 2010 ranged from \$4,650 in Mississippi to more than \$18,200 in the District of Columbia.
- The average annual cost of full-time care for a 4-year-old child in a center ranged from \$3,900 in Mississippi to more than \$14,050 a year in the District of Columbia.
- The average annual cost for care for a school-age child for part-time care in a center in 2010 ranged from \$2,450 in Louisiana to \$10,400 in New York.
- The average annual cost for full-time care in a family child care home for an infant in 2010 ranged from \$3,850 in Mississippi to \$12,100 in Massachusetts.
- The average annual cost for full-time care in a family child care home for a 4-year-old child ranged from \$3,600 in Mississippi to \$11,300 in Massachusetts.
- The average annual cost for part-time care in a family child care home

for a school-age child in 2010 ranged from \$2,300 in South Carolina to \$9,000 in New York.

Child care costs are rising.

- In 2010, the cost of infant care in a center increased 2.3 percent while the cost of infant care in a family child care home increased 2.6 percent.
- In 2010, the cost of care for a 4-year-old in a center increased 1.5 percent while the cost of care for a 4-year-old in a family child care home increased 1.1 percent.

Child care costs are high compared to family income.

- In 40 states, the average annual cost of center-based infant care exceeded 10 percent of the state's median income for a two-parent family.

Child care costs are high compared to household expenses.

- Center-based child care fees for an infant exceeded annual median rent payments in 24 states.
- Center-based child care fees for two children (an infant and a 4-year-old) exceeded annual rent payments in every state.

Child care costs are high compared to college costs.

- In 36 states, the average annual cost for center-based care for an infant was higher than a year's tuition and related fees at a four-year public college.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) allocates funds to states to be used for child care for families with low incomes. However, only one in every six

eligible children receives assistance. According to the 2010 report released by the Government Accountability Office, assistance between FY 2006 and FY 2008 declined by 170,000 children (10 percent).² The United States Department of Health and Human Services estimates that only 17 percent of eligible children receive fee assistance.³

The high cost of care forces many families to make difficult choices. Some parents sacrifice quality for affordable care. Others create informal, makeshift arrangements for child care. CCR&Rs continue to report this year that parents are responding to hard economic times by moving their children from licensed programs to informal settings.

The CCDBG law does not require the use of licensed care for families who receive assistance. The reality is that the quality of unlicensed care is unknown because unlicensed care is not required to meet licensing standards (e.g., basic health and safety standards, minimum training requirements for providers or background checks).

NACCRRA Recommends that Congress:

- Require the Department of Health and Human Services to define minimally acceptable quality child care for families earning low incomes.
- Require the National Academy of Sciences to study the real cost of quality care and to offer recommendations to Congress for financing to support quality options for parents.

- Reauthorize CCDBG and add requirements to improve the quality of care.
- Require 40 hours of initial training and 24 hours of annual training in key areas such as CPR, first aid, early childhood development, child behavior/discipline and child abuse detection and prevention.
- Require provider background checks, including fingerprint checks, to ensure that children are in the care of someone without a history of violent offenses.
- Require quarterly inspections to ensure effective oversight.
- Invest in Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) to:
 - Assist providers in becoming licensed and in maintaining compliance with licensing standards.
 - Help parents identify quality settings.
- Increase the quality set-aside to 12 percent increasing over several years to 25 percent (on par with Head Start).
- Provide resources to expand the availability of quality child care, particularly in low-income neighborhoods where there is a shortage of licensed care.
- Reduce barriers that prevent families from easily accessing child care assistance.

¹ NACCRRA. (2011). *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2011 Update*. Retrieved October 14, 2011 from <http://www.naccrra.org/publications/naccrra-publications/publications/Cost%20Report%202011.pdf>

² U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2010). *Child care: Multiple factors could have contributed to the recent decline in the number of children whose families receive subsidies*. Retrieved October 14, 2011, from <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10344.pdf>

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care. (2010). *Child care development fund 2009 program data*. Retrieved October 14, 2011, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/data/ccdf_data/09acf800_preliminary/table4.htm