



Recommendations for Supporting Child Care Programs and Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the role of child care as a backbone to our economy and a key facet of public health. Among the unsung heroes of the pandemic response are essential workers playing critical roles in our public infrastructure. People of color, immigrants and refugees make up a significant portion of the workforce, and many work in hourly, low-wage positions with limited safety nets. The inability to go to work due to a loss of child care can be devastating for these families. In areas of our state where the housing crisis is most acute, shelter-in-place may not be a safe option. Child care providers across the state are stepping up to support these families, but face many concerns of their own for how to sustain their services financially, protect the health of an aging provider workforce, and keeping their children healthy and safe.

The child care industry in Washington has been deeply underfunded and overburdened for decades, with child care providers making little over minimum wage while the monthly cost of infant care surpasses tuition at our public universities. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing an acceleration of our child care crisis. The National Association of Young Children (NAEYC) anticipates that more than half of child care programs will close in the next three weeks, and two-third will not be able to reopen after an extended closure. Without immediate cash assistance and deep investments, much of our child care industry will not exist when they are most needed to reopen.

Child Care Aware of Washington and Child Care Resources (CCA of King & Pierce Counties) have listened to providers and parents struggling to navigate this crisis and have captured the following five themes. Under each theme, we have identified options for addressing needs. We urge swift action on these recommendations:

- **Financial Support: Addressing wages and benefits to keep our existing child care system solvent and strong**
- **Health Care: Supporting child care providers in keeping themselves, children and families healthy**
- **Regulatory Changes & Guidance: Clear and culturally-informed guidance for navigating the pandemic**
- **Supplies: Accessing critical resources for meeting Department of Health recommendations and supporting families**
- **Navigation & Support: Ensuring access to needed trainings and supports for families**

Financial Support:

Addressing wages and benefits to keep our existing child care system solvent and strong

- Ensure continuity of pay for providers facing economic loss due to COVID-19:

- Child care subsidy payments should be issued based on enrollment, not attendance. Providers – including Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers -- should be issued payment whether they remain open or close temporarily because of a suspected COVID infection or because staff is not able to work due to being at a high risk of illness from COVID-19.
- Supplement child care providers for the loss of income from private pay slots.
- Authorize summer subsidy rates for school-aged children across the board.
- Offer hazard duty pay for providers:
 - Provide enhanced wages for all providers offering child care during the pandemic.
 - Allow a per child differential for Working Connections Child Care payments for providers who remain open.
 - Change WCCC rates for FFN caregivers to be per child per day (instead of per hour).
 - Increase WCCC rates for FFN caregivers to be more closely aligned with Family Child Care rates during pandemic.
 - Pay FFN caregivers to care for the school-age siblings of the young children they provide care for.
- Offer grants that are accessible to child care providers:
 - Provide funding to cover fixed costs, paid leave for staff that need to stay home because they are at a high risk of illness due to COVID-19, or because they do not have child care due to school closures, funding for substitutes and additional staff needed to serve children with disabilities and behavioral needs.
 - Create a grant program specifically for programs at risk of closing permanently.
 - Provide funding for training and staffing to ensure providers who are open during the crisis have skills, expertise, resources and support to do so.
 - Provide technical assistance for providers applying to grants.
- Expand unemployment insurance to serve child care providers:
 - Cover child care providers -- including those who are considered self-employed -- whose programs have to close because they do not have the resources and support to continue to meet public health guidance.
- Housing relief:
 - Offer rent deferrals or grants and mortgage forbearance. Automatically enroll providers in these programs to reduce the paperwork burden on programs with little Human Resources capacity.
- Tax relief: Waive employment taxes for quarters that overlap with the pandemic.
- Ensure access to financial counseling to help providers navigate their financial options.
- Ensure essential workers and vulnerable populations have support in paying for child care:
 - Expand eligibility to WCCC to all essential personnel as defined by Governor Inslee's Stay Home Stay Safe order, regardless of documentation status.
 - Waive co-pays for WCCC throughout pandemic.
 - Expedite WCCC applications for essential personnel.
 - Expedite approvals for new FFN caregivers.
 - Issue guidance to providers to continue serving and prioritizing care for children experiencing homelessness.

Health care:

Supporting child care providers in keeping themselves, children, and families healthy.

- Establish a health care program for providers that will be accessible to all providers beyond the pandemic emergency. Many child care providers do not currently have health insurance.

- Provide access to care if infected with COVID-19:
 - Access to testing for teachers and directors;
 - Free testing; and
 - Coverage of medical costs if positive for COVID.
- Provide paid leave:
 - Provide funding for programs to offer extended paid sick days to staff who are unable to work because of school closures and they don't have child care, or because they are at a high risk of illness due to COVID-19.
 - Expand Paid Family & Medical Leave to include child care providers.
- Provide public & mental health supports to all child care providers, including FFN caregivers
 - Access to public health and mental health advice, training and services by phone, online, etc. for providers
 - Ensure providers have information needed to share these resources with families
 - Coordination between state and local health departments and child care agencies for a streamlined message to providers and families

Regulatory changes and guidance:

Clear and culturally-informed guidance for navigating the pandemic

- Offer clear, child-care specific guidance on a regular basis, in appropriate languages and formats, including video or audio. Ensure that guidance documents are not simply translated from English, rather, originated in home languages to ensure intentions of messaging are clear.
- Consult providers and FFN caregivers on WAC changes, and include providers in emergency management and advisory committees or task forces.
- Convene facilitated task forces centering immigrant and refugee communities to develop resources and share input specific to cultural community needs throughout the pandemic.
- Licensing adjustments:
 - Pause health, safety, and licensing enforcement.
 - Authorize new hires to start work without completing pre-service requirements during emergency.
 - Expedite background checks within 24 hours for child care employees and FFN caregivers.

Supplies:

Accessing critical resources for meeting Department of Health recommendations and supporting families

- Sanitation: Procure and distribute health and safety supplies, including bleach, wipes, toilet paper, paper towels, hand soap, and diapers made available to all child care providers, including FFN caregivers.
- Access to supplies necessary to avoid contraction of COVID-19, such as thermometers and PPE supplies for high-risk staff and children.
- Nutrition:
 - Provide nutritional support, especially milk to programs.
 - Ensure providers and FFN caregivers have information in their home languages about locations of free meals to share with parents and caregivers.

Navigation & Support:

Ensuring access to needed trainings and supports for families

- Offer trainings for providers offering services that are new to them: Trauma-informed care, Non-Standard Business Hours and extended hours. Make available in appropriate languages.
- Provide support for immigrant providers and families: Halt deportation efforts and enforcement actions during pandemic.
- Sustain and increase funding to grassroots networks that reach and support our state's most vulnerable families through facilitated play groups, *promotores*, cultural navigators, and other community-based outreach programs that serve as trusted advisors and sources of information in their cultural communities. Many of these programs have shifted focus and service delivery to provide families of color and immigrant and refugee families with information and resources critical for families' health and safety during the pandemic.