

5 CRITICAL NEEDS FOR BABIES IN COVID-19: Sustaining Child Care & Early Learning



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ZERO TO THREE
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Supporting Families by Sustaining Child Care and Early Learning During COVID-19

The Investment:

- \$57 billion to stabilize and support the child care sector through the crisis.
- \$11.2 billion through FY 2021 to cover additional COVID-19 related costs, increased comprehensive services, and rising need for Early Head Start/Head Start programs
- \$500 million increase for Part C of IDEA for early intervention to keep development on track

Why is this need critical?

- **Critical developmental support:** Babies' rapid brain development means ensuring positive early learning opportunities helps assure a strong future for them and our country.
- **Critical for essential workers:** Child care providers are playing a key role so other essential industries can meet the nation's health care and other needs during this crisis.
- **Critical for the economy to reopen:** The rest of our economy rests on the foundation of child care and other early learning supports. More than 60 percent of mothers of infants and toddlers are in the workforce. As parents return to work, child care professionals will make that possible.
- **Critical for hardest-hit families:** Early learning services support family resilience and keep child development on track, especially in families hardest hit economically and socially.

Investment Details:

Congress should provide at least \$57 billion in dedicated child care funding through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to ensure essential care now and long-term viability of the broader child care system once this crisis passes.

The pandemic has hit the child care system incredibly hard. Months after the pandemic's initial impact, child care is still struggling. Providers are facing varied situations, after many closed early on. Some are still closed and may never reopen. And reopening does not lead to financial viability. Most of those that have reopened are operating far below the capacity they need to cover costs, which have also increased. About two-fifths of providers responding to a recent survey of more than 5,000 child care providers by the National Association for the Education of Young Children said they are certain they will close permanently without additional financial assistance. Child care will be a foundational necessity for any future economic recovery. Yet, the landscape is shifting in such a way that parents' work efforts may be hamstrung by a system that Congress did not care to save.

Providers throughout the system, whether serving children with subsidies or private pay, need support to stabilize the industry. The \$3.5 billion in supplemental funding the CARES Act provided to CCDBG was an important first step in supporting child care during this crisis, but far more support is needed to meet the multitude of challenges that the system is currently facing - as much as \$9.6 billion per month

according to one expert analysis. In many parts of the country families already had a difficult time finding affordable high-quality child care. This crisis will only exacerbate that situation.

Pili, a dad from Alaska writes:

"Alaska is starting to open up, but we and other families aren't going to be able to return to work in the same way without having someone to take care of our children. Many child care facilities had to temporarily close due to the pandemic. Now, they're struggling to open back up and remain open. This forced many child care workers to find other jobs while their facilities were closed, and while they loved their work, they are often able to make more money in their new positions. Licensed and unlicensed child care facilities need more help if they are going to survive this crisis."

To stabilize the child care system now and for the future, we recommend Congress provide at least \$57 billion in dedicated child care funding through the Child Care and Development Block Grant. Funds should be flexible to address the specific needs of individual communities and providers, while also maintaining critical existing safeguards for children being served, including key health and safety requirements. Activities to ensure child care sustainability include: Covering operating costs for providers, regardless of subsidy status of the children they serve, that are closed or do not have a full complement of children; providing essential duty pay for providers caring for essential workers' children; providing materials, resources, training, and other public health supports regarding health and safety practices; covering parents' costs when they are not able to pay; and, providing mental health supports for children and families.

Some segments of the child care system, such as some family child care and family, friend, and neighbor providers, require special efforts to reach. State agencies should ensure they reach these providers as well, including sending funding to the local level, through early childhood councils or entities such as Resource and Referral Agencies and Staffed Family Child Care Networks to quickly and efficiently reach home-based providers to help them stay afloat.

Congress should provide an additional \$11.2 billion through FY2021 to support sustained Head Start and Early Head Start program operations, support families' access to comprehensive services, and address the rising needs for services.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs are on the frontlines of outreach to families most vulnerable to the economic and social impact of the pandemic and its aftermath. While Head Start and Early Head Start are in a more stable funding position than child care providers, who largely rely on parent fees, both still face increased costs specific to the pandemic and are in need of financial support. Additionally, the economic impact of this crisis will surely increase the number of babies and toddlers in poverty, with families struggling to get back on their feet. Early Head Start can be an effective disaster mitigation tool for low-income families with infants and toddlers, both now and particularly once the crisis passes.

Child Care and Early Learning Programs: A Critical Need for Babies in COVID-19

It is also critical that programs have the necessary funding to expand comprehensive services, where they wish to increase their offerings. The Office of Head Start is allowing great flexibility for programs, which will become increasingly important as COVID-19 proliferates to help Head Start/Early Head Start families access comprehensive support services, especially referral to essential nutrition, health, and mental health services, even as program sites close to mitigate the spread of the disease. Considering the breadth of the pandemic, it is likely that program funds will be stretched thin, muting the potential impact of this flexibility without additional federal funds being made available. While the CARES Act

Nicole, an Early Head Start Director from Chambersburg, PA writes:

"We are finding that families with children ages 0-3 who were over income on the waitlist for our services [before COVID] are now quickly becoming eligible due to cut hours, lay-offs, and furloughs. We are calling all over income families on our waitlist to see if their situations may have changed. We realize we are not the first thought that comes to mind in a time like this, but if a family can get access to our services that can be a big support."

provided increased funds for Head Start, the bulk of those funds were directed toward summer programs primarily needed by preschool Head Start and the remainder will be needed for cleaning and other pandemic-related maintenance.

To meet these myriad needs and allow Head Start and Early Head Start to continue to serve as stabilizing forces in struggling communities, we recommend Congress provide \$11.2 billion in additional funding through FY2021. Additionally, we recommend that Congress move to include a substantial increase in expansion funding for Early Head Start in its regular appropriations cycles, to ensure this center of strength for more families in the most precarious financial situations and as a down payment on additional full funding to reach all eligible infants and toddlers and significantly more pregnant women.

Congress should provide an increase of \$500 million for Early Intervention through Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities continue to need early intervention services throughout this crisis to ensure their development stays on track. In addition, Part C could see an uptick in children needing and qualifying for early intervention services as a result of disruptions in their early care and learning programs. The early interventionist serves as a support for the family as well. Continued services through a virtual platform serves as a point of contact with a family that may be isolated, as well as therapy for their baby or toddler. Such contact is important, because children with disabilities are at higher risk for child maltreatment.

Ada, who works in Early Intervention in Takoma Park, MD writes:

"I work as a 'Child Development Specialist' [and] one resource that our families will benefit from, will be to have access to technology during this time of crisis. Some of them only have their phones."

An additional \$500 million for Part C of IDEA would cover the costs of items related to the virtual delivery of services, but also to respond to already occurring cuts in state and local budgets, which often cover early intervention costs. In addition, some of the innovative approaches states are using with virtual tele-intervention may not be reimbursed by existing funding sources like insurance or Medicaid, and additional federal funds could ensure that babies and toddlers can continue to receive these critical developmental services. Finally, the need of infants and toddlers to be evaluated and receive services does not pause because of the pandemic. States and local programs are working every day to accept new referrals, evaluate and assess children, and work with their families to provide services as best they can virtually.