

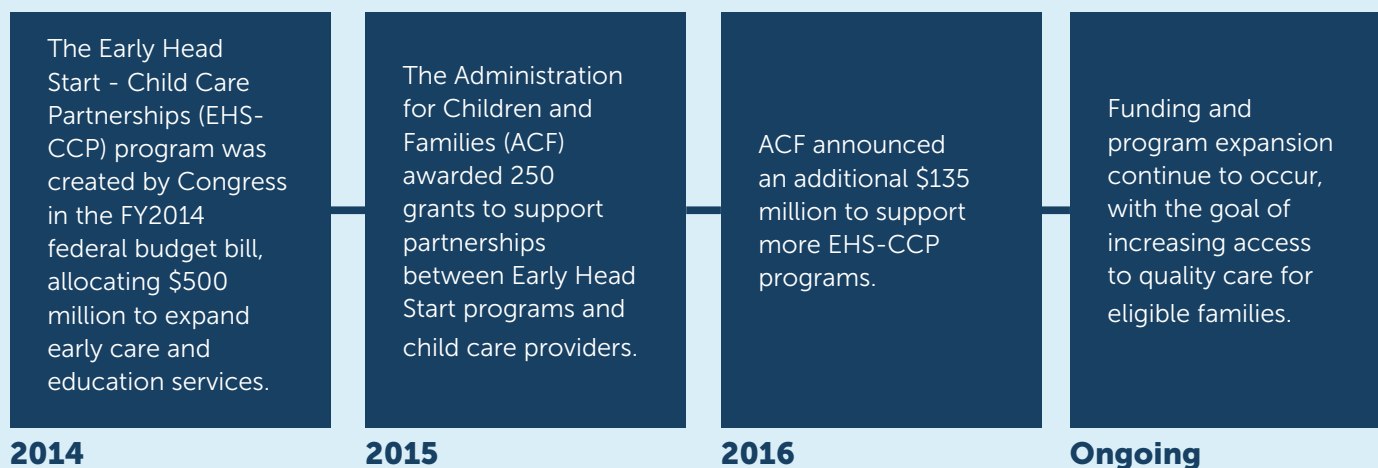
# Early Head Start - Child Care Partnerships: State Investment Strategies



## Introduction

The Early Head Start - Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CCP) program was created in 2014 to increase access to high-quality early care and education for infants and toddlers living in families with low income. The partnerships integrate Early Head Start's standards, comprehensive services and resources into traditional child care and family child care settings, providing additional support for families. State and community systems leaders can use these partnerships to expand access to early childhood programming for families with infants and toddlers.

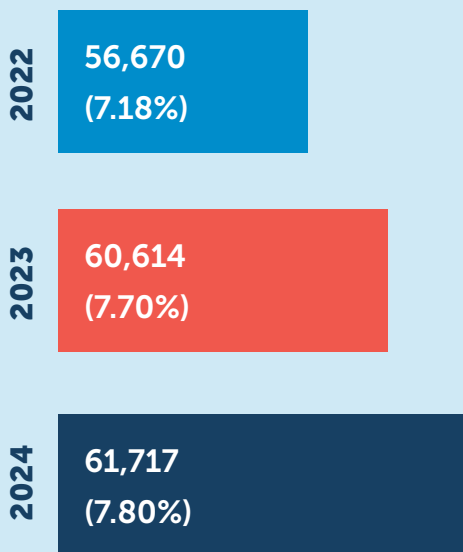
## History Timeline



EHS-CCP programs have gradually increased both in number and percentage of all Head Start enrollment. This change is likely the result of grantees either converting their Head Start slots to Early Head Start or moving existing Early Head Start slots into partnerships.

Through these partnerships, funding from Early Head Start, child care subsidies and other resources are layered to support comprehensive, full-day, full-year services for children and families prenatal to 3 years old. The Early Head Start grantee works closely with the childcare provider to meet Head Start standards related to curriculum, developmental screenings, family engagement, and supports for children's health, nutrition, and development. Families are provided with resources and support, including help with social services, health monitoring, and access to diapers and wipes.

## Children enrolled in EHS-CCP



### Benefits of EHS-CCP Programs

EHS-CCP Programs help communities increase the number of high-quality early learning environments for infants and toddlers in families with low income. Early Head Start is a program for families with low income, but when the services are delivered through partnerships with child care programs it can help increase access to high-quality early education for children and families who do not otherwise qualify for Early Head Start as well. Often, programs combine slots funded by different sources in classrooms, and the programming is delivered to meet whatever is the highest standard of each funding source.

EHS grantees can provide services in communities with the greatest need. Grantees are required to conduct an annual needs assessment and adapt where and how they provide services based on that information. Developing partnerships with child care providers in those communities provides more flexibility for the grantee.

By partnering with an Early Head Start grantee, child care providers can gain access to coaching, technical assistance, and training to help them meet and maintain high-quality standards. Early Head Start programs emphasize parent involvement and provide resources and support to help parents build strong relationships with their children.

The capacity of child care providers to meet the needs of low-income families, providing full-day, full-year care as well as support navigating other systems (health care, social services, WIC, etc.) is increased because of the comprehensive services that are a cornerstone of Early Head Start.

### Challenges with EHS-CCP Partnerships

Building and maintaining EHS-CCP programs is not easy. Some of the challenges include: navigating conflicting regulations, funding streams, and eligibility criteria; ensuring staff compensation is competitive; and addressing workforce shortages and high turnover.

Early Head Start and child care programs have different regulations regarding eligibility criteria, application cycles, group size/ratio limits, and reporting requirements, which can complicate collaboration. Partnerships can face challenges navigating the different requirements each partner has (e.g., nutrition, health, screenings, licensing regulations).

Administrative funding streams and eligibility criteria for Early Head Start / Head Start and child care programs don't always align, leading to administrative burdens. Early Head Start does not require families to be employed, but if the EHS-CCP is also dependent on child care subsidies, the family may now have a work requirement. Income eligibility for each funding stream is different, and ensuring that enrolled families qualify for both programs can require a significant amount of administrative time and impose additional burdens on families.

Early Head Start standards require child care providers to have a much smaller child-adult ratio and group size than required by state licensing. This reduction in ratio and group size directly translates to a reduction in revenue for child care providers. Therefore, it's important that government payments to child care providers are high enough to cover the cost of lower ratios.

## Solutions

### *Local*

Successful EHS-CCP programs are built on strong relationships, emphasizing mutual respect and collaboration. This is accomplished by establishing and maintaining clear and consistent communication channels, having strong memoranda of understanding and ensuring that both partners feel able to address concerns and are committed to problem-solving together.

### *State*

In every state, there is a lack of affordable, quality infant-toddler childcare. Strengthening the opportunities for EHS-CCP can be one strategy to solve this problem. States can supplement federal funding to increase the total number of Early Head Start slots available, use state funding to create programming like Early Head Start, or act as grantees themselves in the federal funding of EHS-CCP programs.

State early childhood systems leaders can foster the creation and sustained implementation of EHS-CCP programs by aligning child care subsidy policies to encourage stability and continuity of care, streamlining administrative processes, and providing training and technical assistance about these partnerships. Providing clear guidance on the various funding streams that can support the partnerships (child care subsidy, private fees, Medicaid, philanthropic funding) and examples of appropriate cost allocation can make things significantly less complicated at the local level.

States have flexibility within the parameters of the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), including how they define work, education, training and income eligibility. Some states have defined work as participation in Head Start or Early Head Start. The recent rules changes for CCDBG that support EHS-CCP include the requirement to pay childcare providers based on enrollment and establishing eligibility and redetermination processes that minimize the disruption of work, school or job training for families. States can also use grants or contracts to support EHS-CCP, which would meet a portion of the new rules as well.

The 2024 rule changes to the CCDBG include several things that can facilitate less cumbersome partnerships. The requirement that childcare providers be paid based on enrollment, a practice grounded in the reality of the childcare market, means the subsidy funding is more reliable than in the past. The requirement to simplify eligibility and redetermination processes is expected to lead to far fewer disruptions to parents' schedules. Despite recent changes at the federal level, states can still implement these changes to strengthen the child care sector, as well as improve the experience for families when interacting with the early childhood system.

### *Federal*

The Office of Head Start provides guidance for grantees who are interested in converting Head Start slots to Early Head Start. Allowing grantees to be flexible and serve the communities with the greatest need is essential for Head Start to achieve its promise. EHS-CCP programs are one way for the federal government to create enabling conditions for increasing access to quality early childhood programming for more infants and toddlers.

### Conclusion

EHS-CCP programs enhance early learning opportunities for low-income families, improve access to high-quality childcare, and promote child development and family well-being. These partnerships integrate Early Head Start services into existing childcare settings, expanding resources and support for infants and toddlers. Additionally, these partnerships create opportunities for stronger networking across the different sectors of the early childhood system. This can contribute to a less confusing system for families.

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