

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Multiple Early Learning Efforts Maximize Effectiveness

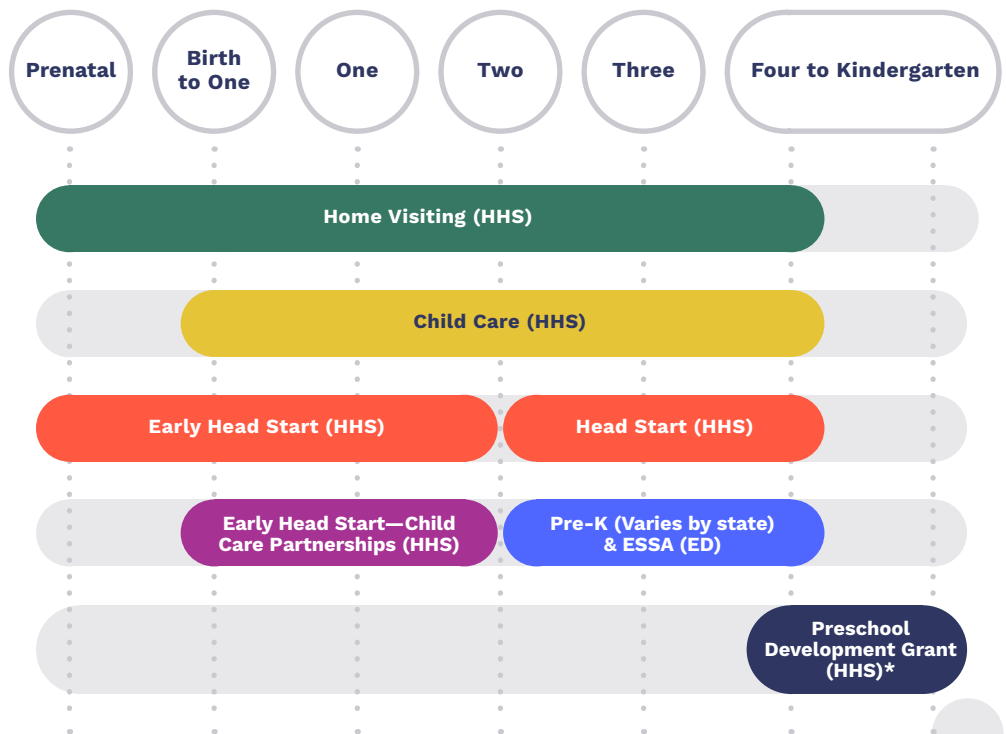
A 2017 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) finds that the federal government’s early childhood education programs function symbiotically and collaboratively to benefit the eligible population of children and families they serve, assuaging questions about program overlap, fragmentation, or duplication.

The GAO, which serves as the official audit, evaluation, and investigative institution for the federal government, regularly reports on government programs and policies. The July 2017 GAO report, **Early Learning and Child Care: Agencies Have Helped Address Fragmentation and Overlap Through Improved Coordination**, provides an informative update to a 2012 GAO report, taking a more in-depth look at the field’s program composition and offering important clarifications about the efficacy and intentional targeting of the federal mixed-delivery system.

Early Learning Federally Supported

(BY AGES)

Infants, toddlers, and children at ages three and four all benefit from targeted, high-quality early learning opportunities that are developmentally appropriate to their age and stage in development. Inter- and intra-agency coordination of birth through five programs fosters continuous access to a mixed-delivery system of high-quality ECE that supports healthy development.



*Legacy PDG program ended in 2017. New PDG program serves birth through five.

Key findings from 2017 GAO report on early learning and care



1

There Are Not 45 Early Learning and Care Programs Being Funded by the Federal Government

Updated guidance from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) impacts Early Childhood Education (ECE) program count.

- **In the same** year GAO reported that the federal government administers 45 early learning and child care programs, [OMB issued guidance on program definitions](#) in response to finding that a “one-size-fits-all” definition of “program” does not work well because different federal agencies achieve their missions through different programmatic approaches.
- **The previously** reported and inaccurate count of 45 programs was derived from the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA), which included programs that merely mention ECE.
- **35 of** the 45 programs counted in the 2012 GAO report do not have an explicit early learning or child care purpose, meaning that [those 35 programs do not require spending on early learning and/or child care.](#)

2

Two Programs Are Main Providers of Federal Early Learning and Care Services

[Head Start and the Child Care and Development Fund \(CCDF\) comprise over 90% of ECE federal funding.](#)

- **Of the** \$15 billion in federal funding spent on early learning programs in FY 2015, more than \$14 billion was allocated to CCDF and Head Start.
- **Head Start and CCDF make it possible for children from low-income families across the country to benefit from quality early learning and care.** Additionally, the funding streams can be blended together in order to offer full-day services for working parents and others.
- **The eligible** population of low-income children exceeds the current capacity of any one existing early learning and care program. Coordinating targeted, early learning programs, such as Head Start and child care, form the mixed-delivery system that is vital.

3

Coordination Expands Reach of Early Learning and Care Programs.

[Bridging programs is an effective approach for optimizing funds and leveraging program strengths.](#)

- **The Early Learning Interagency Policy Board** is co-lead by the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education (ED). It was formed to improve program coordination and quality across federally funded early learning and development programs serving children from birth through age eight.
- **In 2016**, GAO estimated that 1.5 million children received CCDF subsidies, out of an estimated 8.6 million eligible children. Blending and braiding funding with other programs, such as Head Start, increases the number of eligible children who can participate in early learning and child care programs.
- **Early learning programs target specific populations that vary by age and needs.** For example: Early Head Start serves children from birth through age two, while Head Start serves three- and four-year-olds. Access to screening services through Early Head Start and Head Start can connect children to intervention services, such as the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C and the Preschool Grants under IDEA Part B. These targeted programs are essential components to an effective mixed-delivery system that places high importance on parental choice and [supporting children's individual needs that are developmentally appropriate.](#)