

In the U.S., federal and state early learning opportunities serve more than **4,665,379** children,¹ or **20%** of children ages 5 and under.²

High-quality child care and early learning programs support children's healthy development while giving parents peace of mind as they work or attend school.

While several federally funded programs help working families access quality child care, limited funding leaves many eligible children unserved. These challenges not only affect families but also employers and the broader economy. Each year, child care shortages across the country impose significant economic costs on families, businesses, and state tax revenues.

State early learning landscapes operate through mixed-delivery systems of diverse programs, each with distinct eligibility requirements, funding structures, and service delivery models designed to maximize parental choice.

U.S. AT-A-GLANCE

NEED

22,648,902

Children 5 & Under³

65%

Children 5 & Under with All Available Parents in the Workforce⁴

28%

Gap in Supply of Child Care vs. Potential Need⁵

COST

\$15,799

Average Annual Price of Center-Based Care (\$1,317 per month)⁶

\$11,761

Average Annual Price of Home-Based Care (\$980 per month)⁷

IMPACT

\$172B

Estimated Annual Economic Impact of the Child Care Crisis⁸

FEDERAL INCOME ELIGIBILITY

CDCTC

Available to families of all income levels (higher credit for lower incomes)

CCDBG

Up to 85% of state median income (varies by state)¹⁰

HEAD START

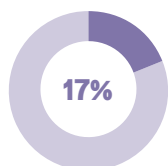
100% of the federal poverty level, **\$27,320** for a family of 3⁹

U.S. PROGRAM REACH

Existing federal child care and early learning programs, combined with state-funded pre-K, form a mixed delivery system that aims to meet children's individual needs. However, at current funding levels, only a fraction of eligible families are served.

CHILD CARE & DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CCDBG)

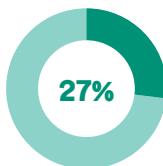
6,005,867 CHILDREN 5 & UNDER ELIGIBLE¹¹
1,049,770 CHILDREN 5 & UNDER SERVED¹²



ELIGIBLE CHILDREN 5 & UNDER SERVED¹³
Based on federal eligibility (85% SMI)

HEAD START PRESCHOOL

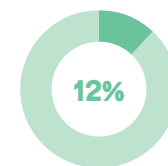
1,918,960 CHILDREN ELIGIBLE¹⁴
515,543 CHILDREN ENROLLED¹⁵



ELIGIBLE CHILDREN SERVED¹⁶

EARLY HEAD START

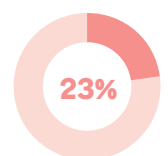
1,918,960 CHILDREN ELIGIBLE¹⁷
236,170 CHILDREN ENROLLED¹⁸



ELIGIBLE CHILDREN SERVED¹⁹

STATE-FUNDED PRE-K

1,745,982 CHILDREN ENROLLED²⁰



3- & 4-YEAR-OLDS SERVED²¹

IDEA PART C (EARLY INTERVENTION)

460,321 CHILDREN SERVED²²

IDEA PART B, SEC. 619 (PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION)

581,437 CHILDREN SERVED²³

MATERNAL, INFANT, & EARLY CHILDHOOD HOME VISITING (MIECHV)

76,156 CHILDREN SERVED²⁴

CHILD & DEPENDENT CARE TAX CREDIT (CDCTC)

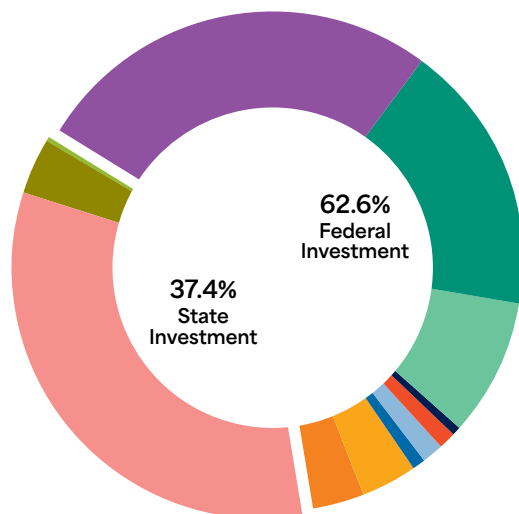
5,678,790 FAMILIES RECEIVED²⁵

U.S. FEDERAL & STATE CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING FUNDING

STATE INVESTMENT

- \$14.4B** State-Funded Pre-K²⁶
- \$1.6B** CCDBG State Match²⁷
- \$93M** PDG B-5 State Match²⁸

Note: Amounts reflect total program funding. In some cases these levels include funding that is allocated to technical assistance, research and evaluation, and other administrative supports.



FEDERAL INVESTMENT

- \$11.4B** CCDBG and Mandatory Funds²⁹
- \$7.6B** Head Start Preschool³⁰ (includes AIAN and MSHS)
- \$3.8B** Early Head Start³¹ (includes AIAN)
- \$309.9M** PDG B-5³²
- \$472M** MIECHV³³
- \$515M** IDEA Part C³⁴
- \$416.6M** IDEA Part B, Sec. 619³⁵
- \$1.6B** TANF Early Care and Education³⁶
- \$1.4B** TANF Transferred to CCDBG³⁷

CCDBG

CCDBG allows states to provide child care assistance to low-income working families with children under age 13, helping parents access child care in a setting of their choice.

- On average, states have capped eligibility at **69% of state median income**³⁸
 - Income eligibility ranges from **\$33,072 per year in NV** to **\$109,956 per year in ME** for a family of 3.³⁹
- Monthly cost of center-based infant care
 - Prices range from **\$641 in MS** to **\$2,195 in MA**⁴⁰
 - Maximum copayments with subsidy range from **\$15 in OR** to **\$1,075 in VT**⁴¹
 - Many families save more than **\$10,000 per year**
- 238,564** child care providers accept CCDBG subsidies⁴²
- Child care workers' median wage: **\$15.98 per hour** (**\$33,240 per year**)⁴³

States must establish child care licensing requirements, including staff-to-child ratios, to ensure children are cared for in safe, quality environments. Different rules may apply depending on the setting (e.g., center- or home-based), and some providers may be exempt from licensing requirements (e.g., faith-based programs).

Ratio requirements for licensed center-based care vary across the U.S.:⁴⁴

INFANT	Ranges from 1:3 to 1:6
TODDLER	Ranges from 1:3 to 1:11 for age 2
PRESCHOOL	Ranges from 1:8 to 1:20 for age 4

EARLY HEAD START/HEAD START

Early Head Start and Head Start provide high-quality early learning and comprehensive services – including health, nutrition, and family support – at no cost to eligible families. Programs are federally funded and locally administered.⁴⁵ Children are eligible based on family income, receipt of TANF, SNAP, or SSI benefits, or if they are in foster care or experiencing homelessness. Head Start programs must reserve at least 10% of enrollment slots for children with disabilities.

- Income eligibility: at or below the federal poverty level (**\$27,320** for a family of 3)⁴⁶
- In the U.S.: **1,835 Head Start grants** fund **13,887 program sites**, serving **751,713 children**.^{47, 48, 49}
- This includes **21,460 children** through Migrant and Seasonal Head Start and **17,935 children** through American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start.⁵⁰

PDG B-5

Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) is a competitive federal grant program designed to improve states' early childhood systems:

- In 2025, HHS awarded **23** Systems-Building Grants, ranging from approximately **\$1.4 million to \$14.7 million** each, to expand parent choice, improve efficiency through shared best practices, and enhance program quality.⁵¹
- Thus far, **49 states, DC, and 4 territories** have benefited from PDG B-5 funding. Learn more with the PDG B-5 grantee map [here](#).⁵²

CDCTC

In 2022, **5,678,790** U.S. families claimed the CDCTC.⁵³

The CDCTC directly helps working parents offset the cost of child care. In 2025, the CDCTC was permanently updated for the first time since 2001. Many filers could see their credit increase by as much as \$450 (for one child) or \$900 (for two or more children) in tax year 2026.⁵⁴



Scan or click the QR code for full references and links at www.ffyf.org/factsheet26. For more information contact FFYF at mail@ffyf.org.