

# Investments in Quality Child Care Secure the Future

## Infant-Toddler Child Care Fact Sheet



**ZERO TO THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime

**America's future depends on quality child care.** It not only fuels our country's economic engine by helping parents work, but also builds the workforce of the future. Of the 12 million infants and toddlers in the United States, more than half spend some or all of their day being cared for by someone other than their parents.<sup>1</sup>

All the moments in a young child's day matter. Quality child care feeds a baby's growing brain, building the foundation for the development and learning necessary for them to thrive as adults. But available research shows that 75% of toddlers in center care and 93% in home-based care are in low or mediocre quality care settings that can be detrimental to their development.<sup>2</sup> Despite research that shows that at-risk children—children from families with few resources and under great stress – benefit most from quality child care, low quality care is often the only care available in low-income communities.

Our current child care market is failing to help those who need assistance the most. In 33 states and Washington, D.C., infant child care costs more than college tuition at a state university;<sup>3</sup> however, most young children are in families with fairly modest incomes. Child care assistance for low-income families reaches fewer than 1 out of every 6 eligible children and continues to decline.<sup>4</sup> Tax credits do not solve the problem for low-income families. Many do not benefit from the current child care tax credit because they have little or no federal income tax liability. Moreover, the maximum tax benefit does not approach the actual cost of infant-toddler care. The cost of center-based, infant child care remains unaffordable in 49 states and Washington, D.C.—if it can be found at all.<sup>5</sup>

Congress and the Administration must commit to creating a child care system that recognizes the influence of child care on early development and ensures quality services for young children, especially those whose parents' income put quality out of reach. Doing so will change the odds for working families and provide a path to economic independence. It will also ensure our future workforce – today's babies and toddlers – arrive at school ready to learn and prepared for future success.

## Policy Recommendations

Congress must ensure all families can access quality, affordable child care. Work is a fact of life for the majority of parents of very young children, yet child care costs, particularly for infants, take an outsized bite from their budgets. At the same time, child care helps shape brain development, yet quality care for infants and toddlers is in very short supply. The Administration and Congress should make a major investment to recognize child care as both a work support and a critical early learning setting where development unfolds for babies.

**Significantly expand the existing mandatory federal funding stream for child care, the Child Care Development Fund, so states can:**

- 1. Increase access to affordable, quality care and ensure appropriate compensation for a well-trained workforce**
  - Make child care assistance available to all eligible low- and moderate-income families who need it;
  - Enable states to increase payment rates to providers to ensure appropriate compensation; and
  - Ensure states have the resources to implement the reforms required under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014.
- 2. Invest intentionally in building quality care specifically for infants and toddlers:**
  - Increase the number and availability of high-quality providers;
  - Increase the qualifications of the workforce;
  - Instill more infant-toddler content in early childhood degree programs; and

## QUICK FACTS

- ❖ The average cost for an infant in center-based child care is higher than college tuition in 33 states plus D.C.<sup>i</sup>
- ❖ 62% of mothers with infants are in the labor force.<sup>ii</sup>
- ❖ 6 million children under age 3 are in non-parental care.<sup>iii</sup>
- ❖ High quality child care improves:
  - ◆ Early learning;
  - ◆ Cognitive and language development;
  - ◆ Social and emotional development; and
  - ◆ School achievement.<sup>iv</sup>
- ❖ The Child Care and Development Block Grant serves fewer than 1 in 6 eligible children.<sup>v</sup>

- Ensure that infants and toddlers in families with a severe lack of resources have access to quality care commensurate with Early Head Start.

### Improve the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) to:

- Make it refundable so that it is available to more low- and moderate-income families;
- Increase its sliding scale to benefit more middle-income families; and
- Raise expense limits to cover a greater proportion of families' child care costs.

## Research

**Quality child care readies babies for success.** Children in the Abecedarian Project, which provided quality child care starting at birth, had long-lasting positive impacts that led to higher IQ and achievement test scores, fewer grade retentions and placements in special education, higher levels of college graduation and job-holding, and healthier outcomes as adults.<sup>6</sup> For virtually every developmental outcome that has been assessed, quality of care also shows positive associations with early social and emotional development, leading to more competent peer relationships during early childhood and into the school years.<sup>7</sup>

**The quality of the relationship between the child care provider and child matters.** The quality of child care ultimately boils down to the relationship between the child care provider and the child; skilled and stable providers promote positive development.<sup>8</sup> Caregivers and teachers should have specialized knowledge and skill in early childhood development, with a focus on infant and toddlers. To help children make connections that support their development, there should be a 1:4 caregiver to child ratio and no more than eight children per group. One primary, but not exclusive, caregiver for at least one year, and optimally until age three, is critical for an infant's emotional development.<sup>9</sup>

**Quality child care is particularly important to low-income children.** Low-income children often start behind their peers when they enter school. When child care is of high quality, the positive effects can endure into the early adult years, particularly for children from the poorest home environments.<sup>10</sup> In fact, one study found that children in the second grade who had enrolled in quality child care demonstrated greater math ability and thinking and attention skills and experienced fewer behavior problems than other children in the same grade.<sup>11</sup> Yet, at-risk infants and toddlers often receive child care of such poor quality that it diminishes their potential and leads to poorer cognitive, social, and emotional-developmental outcomes.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mamedova, S., Redford, J., & Zukerberg, A. (2013). Early Childhood Program Participation Survey, from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012: First look. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013029rev.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Mulligan, G., & Flanagan, K. (2006). *Findings from the 2-year-old follow-up of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)*. NCES 2006-043. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006043.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2016). *Parents and the high cost of care*. Retrieved from [http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CCA\\_High\\_Cost\\_Report\\_01-17-17\\_final.pdf](http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CCA_High_Cost_Report_01-17-17_final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Chien, N. (2015, November). *Estimates of child care eligibility and receipt for fiscal year 2012*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/153591/ChildEligibility.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2016).

<sup>6</sup> The Carolina Abecedarian Project. (1999). *Early learning later success: the abecedarian study executive summary*. Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (1999). Retrieved from [http://fpg.unc.edu/sites/fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/reports-and-policy/briefs/EarlyLearningLaterSuccess\\_1999.pdf](http://fpg.unc.edu/sites/fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/reports-and-policy/briefs/EarlyLearningLaterSuccess_1999.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Lally, J., Griffin, A., Fenichel, E. et al. (2003). *Caring for infants and toddlers in groups: developmentally appropriate practice*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.

<sup>8</sup> Phillips, D. A., & Shonkoff, J. P. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. National Academies Press.

<sup>9</sup> Lally, Griffin, Fenichel, et al. (2003).

<sup>10</sup> Phillips, D. A., & Shonkoff, J. P. (2000).

<sup>11</sup> National Women's Law Center. (2008). *Low-income women and their families: how they benefit from affordable, high-quality child care and struggle to find it*. Retrieved from <https://nwlrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/LowIncomeWomenFamiliesMarch2008.pdf>

### Quick Facts:

<sup>i</sup>: Child Care Aware of America. (2016). *Parents and the high cost of care*. Retrieved from [http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CCA\\_High\\_Cost\\_Report\\_01-17-17\\_final.pdf](http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CCA_High_Cost_Report_01-17-17_final.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup>: U.S. Department of Labor. (2017, April). *Women in the labor force: a databook (Table 5)*. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2016/home.htm>

<sup>iii</sup>: Iruka, I. U., & Carver, P. R. (2006). *National household education surveys program of 2005: initial results from the 2005 NHES early childhood program participation survey*. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006075.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup>: Lally, J., Griffin, A., Fenichel, E. et al. (2003). *Caring for infants and toddlers in groups: developmentally appropriate practice*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.

<sup>v</sup>: Chien, N. (2015, November). *Estimates of child care eligibility and receipt for fiscal year 2012*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/153591/ChildEligibility.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> National Research Council. (2001). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. National Academies Press.