



# **A Compass to Guide the Way:** Child Care Aware<sup>®</sup> of America's 2020-2022 Policy Agenda

At Child Care Aware<sup>®</sup> of America (CCAoA), we have a vision for the future of child care:

**Every family in the United States has access to a high-quality, affordable child care system. The child care system supports children's growth, development and educational advancement and creates positive economic impact for families and communities.**

The current reality, however, is that our child care system is broken. It does not work for early childhood educators (ECEs) who are doing the difficult and important work of caring for our youngest children without a living wage. It does not work for families who are trying to access affordable child care so they can participate fully in our economy. It does not work for employers who face challenges recruiting and retaining workers because of gaps in the child care system. And, most importantly, it does not work for children.

Too often, our children spend their days (and increasingly, due to nonstandard hours work, their nights) in substandard care. This problem is particularly acute for children with disabilities, living in rural areas, from low-income families, from immigrant families, and other vulnerable communities.<sup>1</sup>

Our country still has a long way to travel to achieve the CCAoA vision of a high-quality and affordable child care system that is accessible to all. Fortunately, the national conversation around child care has come out of the shadows and into the forefront of public policy. More stakeholders are joining the discussion – parents, providers, employers and policymakers. These stakeholders are coming together to make the argument that without access to high-quality, affordable child care, the opportunity for economic stability for families, and the opportunity for economic growth for communities, will remain out of reach. Our

communities need comprehensive policies that are **child-centered, family-engaged, equity-driven** and **community-focused**. CCAoA takes these policy goals as our guiding principles, directing our advocacy work for America’s children.

CCAoA is uniquely positioned to chart the course toward an effective, equitable child care system. **This policy agenda provides the compass to lead us on this journey, guiding our efforts and keeping us driving toward the ultimate goals of serving children, families and ECEs.**

At this crucial time, when policymakers at all levels are beginning to understand the role of child care in our communities and in our economy, CCAoA is a trusted leader in the fight for a child care system that works for all. Looking forward, this policy agenda will serve to guide our work with stakeholders and partners to make such care a reality for our nation’s children.

## OUR WORK IS:



**Child-Centered**



**Family-Engaged**



**Community-Focused**



**Equity-Driven**







## Funding the Journey: Child Care Requires Public and Private Investment

Simply put, reforming this country's broken child care system requires funding. The current funding for child care is inadequate, fragmented, unpredictable and unsustainable. The child care system relies on a patchwork of funding streams that places too high a burden on families paying tuition and on educators working for low wages, creating clear inequities. Children from higher-income families have access to high-quality care that is financially out of reach for most families. Meanwhile, almost half of ECEs rely on public services to make ends meet.<sup>2</sup>

As a country, we have decided that K-12 education should be publicly funded and available to all families because it is a **public good**, a good that generates benefits for society as a whole. While there are still significant supports that should be provided to the K-12 system, there is a shared

understanding that the entire community improves when children are educated and able to grow into productive participants in the economy and the life of the community. However, we have not extended this “public good” perspective to early childhood education, despite research showing that investment in high-quality early learning generates high returns. Studies have shown that adults who attended high-quality early childhood education programs as children have increased labor force participation, increased earnings and better physical health, among other advantages.<sup>3</sup> These benefits accrue to all of us in the decreased need for public investment in support programs. Specifically, studies show that these life-cycle benefits result in public returns ranging from \$4 to \$16 for every public dollar invested in the early years.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, access to quality child care allows more parents to work and attend school, leading to more equitable labor force participation and lower public services costs in the more immediate term.<sup>5</sup> Child care policies can help ensure America's national security by addressing the child care needs of our military families. All this evidence makes

it clear: High-quality early childhood education is a public good, and it must be valued as such. It contributes to stronger families, greater economic development and more livable communities.<sup>6</sup> CCAoA will continue to communicate this message to policymakers, helping them understand that early childhood education deserves to be financed and sustained like the public good that it is.

The private sector also has a role to play in funding and supporting high-quality early childhood education. Child care access has a direct impact on employers, both in the present and in the future. In the short term, disruptions in employees' ability to access child care increase absenteeism, tardiness and turnover, all of which reduce productivity. By one estimate, the annual economic cost on working parents, employers and taxpayers is **\$57 billion** in lost earnings, productivity and revenue.<sup>7</sup>

Alternatively, companies see real benefits from offering child care assistance to their employees, boosting recruitment, retention and productivity.<sup>8</sup> In the longer term, employers benefit from having access to a workforce that is ready to work. Children receiving high-quality early childhood education can grow up to be adults ready to enter the workforce with higher educational attainment and engagement in the economy.

As the competition for skilled workers increases, public and private investments will be necessary to prepare the American workforce.<sup>9</sup> CCAoA, along with its partner Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies, will collaborate with early childhood education professionals and the greater community to ensure that employers understand the benefit to their bottom line from quality child care.

## Funding for child care is:

✘ Inadequate

✘ Fragmented

✘ Unpredictable

✘ Unsustainable





# Policy Agenda for 2020-2022: Reaching the Destination



As we look to the next three years, Child Care Aware® of America has built a policy agenda that is grounded on the four guiding principles of all of our work: it is **child-centered**, **family-engaged**, **equity-driven** and **community-focused**. These four principles serve as lenses through which to view policy

proposals. In the intersectional world of child care, an individual policy proposal may be seen through more than one lens in this framework. As such, we are using these guiding principles to ensure that we engage policymakers in fixing our broken child care system so it serves all constituents: children, families, providers and the community.



## Child-Centered Policies

The interest and well-being of children is at the heart of everything we do.

Estimates indicate that as of 2016, 12.8 million children under 6 spent some time in a nonparental care arrangement on a weekly basis.<sup>10</sup> Policies advocated by CCAoA must put all these children at the center, striving to provide the highest quality early childhood education for every child, regardless of background or geography. By focusing on the experience of the individual

children in care, we will advocate for policies that directly benefit childhood and lead to positive outcomes into adulthood.

Child-centered policies can take many forms. First and foremost, child care settings must provide for the health and safety of all children. In 2014, CCAoA was instrumental in the passage of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act. This law added critical improvements to the health and

safety standards for child care facilities receiving support from the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), including the requirement for background checks for all staff.<sup>11</sup> However, more needs to be done to help providers implement the health and safety standards of CCDBG reauthorization. CCR&Rs are deeply involved in this important work, supplying technical assistance to help providers and ECEs raise the health and safety standards in every facility. By leveraging the close relationships between CCR&Rs and local providers, CCAoA can help policymakers understand what implementation looks like on the ground, including what further supports providers need from state and federal agencies. As we work toward a child care system with the health and safety of all children as a baseline, CCAoA will combat state and federal efforts to deregulate child care in order to “fix” the child care supply crisis. The misperception

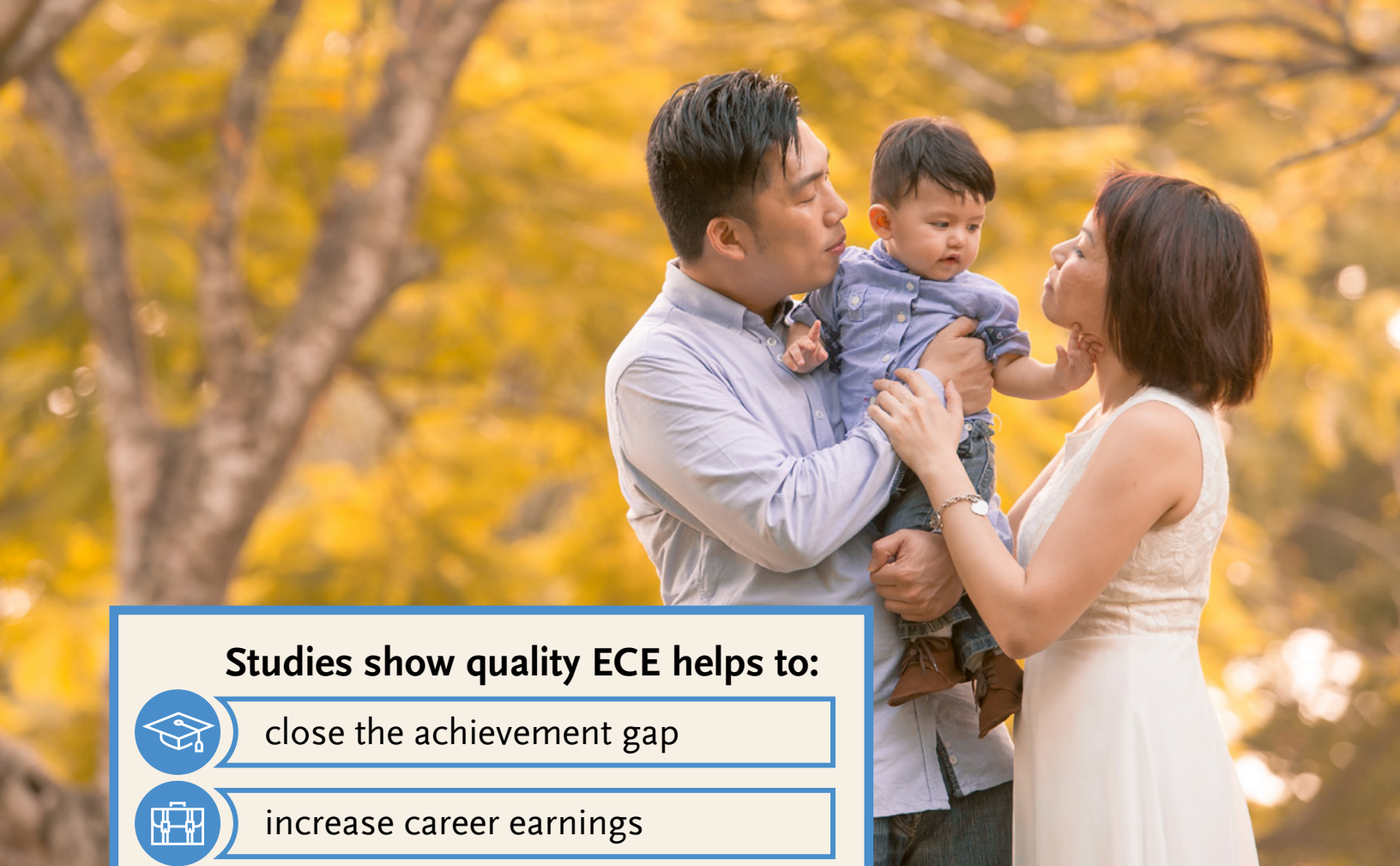
that simply undoing regulations will increase the supply of quality, affordable child care is potentially harmful to children who deserve a safe place to grow and learn.<sup>12</sup>

Further, for children to truly thrive, child care must go beyond only health and safety improvements. Quality early childhood education nurtures the whole child, including their social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. ECEs take a holistic approach to educating young children, building close, positive relationships with each child in their care. Studies show that access to high-quality care can help close the kindergarten achievement gap, leading to better educational outcomes throughout schooling.<sup>13</sup> ECEs also naturally interface with the families of the children they care for and the experiences these families have with food insecurity, housing insecurity and

**Estimates indicate that there are 12.8 million children under the age of 6 in need of child care in this country.**







### Studies show quality ECE helps to:



close the achievement gap



increase career earnings



create better health outcomes

health care. In addition, ECEs work to ensure their environments are safe by preparing their facilities to handle emergencies and natural disasters, and by improving infrastructure. Long-term analyses suggest that enrollment in quality early childhood education can increase adult earnings<sup>14</sup> and lead to better health outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

But quality does not just happen. Instead, early childhood education professionals need support to implement best practices within their facilities. Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRISs)

and accreditation programs<sup>16</sup> may be able to help ECEs move along the quality continuum by setting explicit standards for high-quality practice. CCR&Rs help ECEs understand these quality standards through professional education, technical assistance and support, and they can help policymakers understand the barriers that providers and ECEs face in meeting standards. CCAoA will continue to advocate for policies that raise the standards of care for all children and support ECEs as they work toward these high standards.

**“Quality early childhood education nurtures the whole child, including their social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.”**



## Family-Engaged Policies

Quality family engagement practices honor families as integral partners and drivers of children’s early learning.

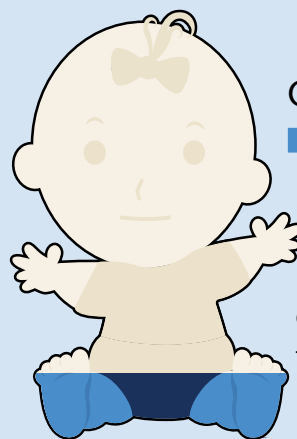
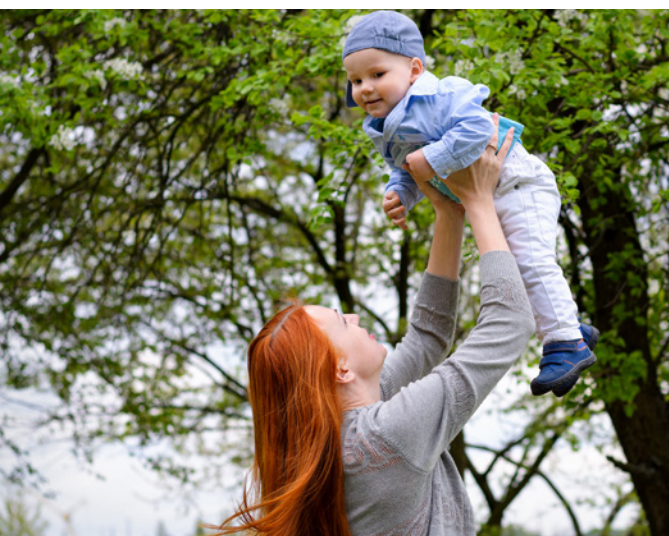
**Central to all efforts to improve our child care system will be steps to engage families in making policy changes that work for them.** The actual experiences of families should guide the development of legislative and regulatory changes at the national, state and local level. CCR&Rs, as community-based organizations, have connections to and credibility with child care providers, ECEs and families. CCAoA, as a national organization, can connect families to policymakers and provide families with advocacy resources and opportunities to create or influence change.<sup>17</sup>

CCAoA will work to bring more families into the policy conversation, and will empower CCR&Rs to grow their partnerships with families. Our work will be guided by input from the families we and our members serve, and will focus on helping policymakers and our members create and sustain partnerships that create family-engaged and -influenced policy. CCAoA is firmly committed to elevating families’ voices, supporting parental choice and advancing policies that honor families as integral partners and drivers of children’s early learning.

For policies to be truly family-engaged we absolutely must address affordability. The reality faced by many families in the current economy is

that quality child care is out of financial reach. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommends that families pay no more than 7% of their income for child care-related expenses.<sup>18</sup> Yet, for many families, child care costs consume a much higher portion of their income. Research by CCAoA estimates the national average annual cost of child care to be between \$9,100 and \$9,600, with wide variability across types of care and location. Compare that average to the national median income for married couples with minor children, and it would take 10% of household income to cover the child care costs for one child. For single-parent households, the numbers are even more stark, with 36% of household income needed for child care for one child. Indeed, in 30 states and the District of Columbia, the annual cost of center-based infant care exceeds the cost of in-state tuition at a public university.<sup>19</sup>

Federal subsidies, funded by the CCDF, are intended to address the affordability crisis in child care. Unfortunately, these investments are inadequate to provide high-quality child care to all eligible families. HHS estimates that only 15% of all children eligible for subsidies under federal rules actually received CCDF assistance, leaving far too many families with no help.<sup>20</sup> CCAoA will continue to urge Congress to fully fund the CCDF to ensure



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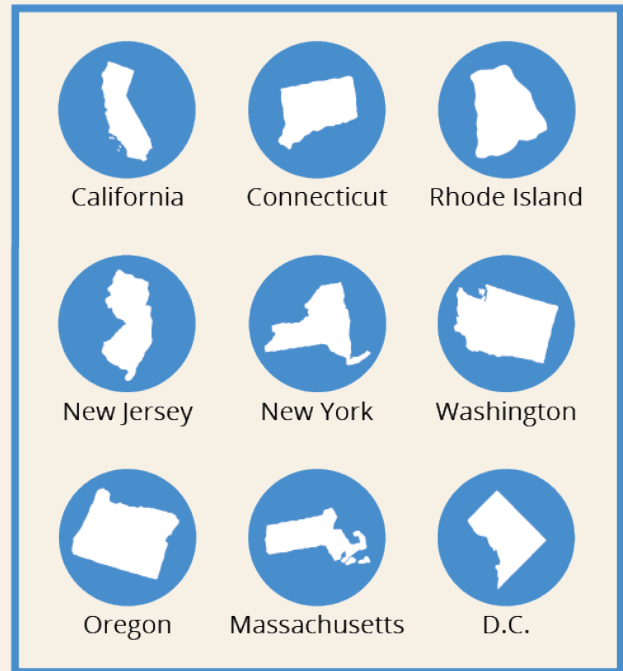
all eligible families receive the subsidies they need.  
**Full funding would mean:**

- all eligible children can access a high-quality child care slot with no waiting lists,
- quality child care openings are available in all American communities, including rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas,
- parents will pay no more than 7% of their income for child care and
- providers and ECEs are paid a market rate that allows them to make a proper living.

Anything less will leave families without the child care they need to fully participate in the economy. It should be noted that although tax credits cannot provide sustainability to the system, they can support family access in many situations. These credits should continue to be improved to better serve all families' needs.

States play a pivotal role in this goal of fully funding CCDF. They must also increase their matching fund contributions to the CCDF to further reduce waiting lists and get more children into subsidized care. And, because states set policies on things such as income eligibility thresholds, they control the levers that define what access means for families. Currently, in many states, the income cut-off for eligibility is set too low, leaving many low- to moderate-income families outside the subsidy system. The income requirements must be set to accurately reflect the cost of living and the cost of child care within local communities. In addition, states have the responsibility to increase provider reimbursement rates, incentivizing providers to increase capacity and open more slots to subsidy-eligible families. These rates are also essential to supporting adequate cost coverage for providers, ensuring the sustainability of their businesses.

## Only **eight** states and **D.C.**



have implemented paid family and medical leave programs.

Adding to the family financial burden is the lack of paid family and medical leave to care for a new child or sick family member. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 17% of workers in the United States have access to paid family and medical leave.<sup>21</sup> As of 2019, eight states – California, Rhode Island, New Jersey, New York, Washington, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Oregon – and the District of Columbia have paid family and medical leave laws on the books<sup>22</sup>, demonstrating a successful model for federal policy. Far more workers have access to some form of job protected unpaid leave, but low- and moderate-income families cannot afford to use it. Without comprehensive and inclusive paid family and medical leave policies, families are forced to find child care for babies soon after birth, and newborn care is the most expensive and least accessible.<sup>23</sup>



## Equity-Driven Policies

Early childhood education values all children, families and early childhood educators, embracing the diversity inherent in our communities.

An early childhood education program, despite the investments and supports, will not succeed if it does not have equity at its core. In 2019, The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) issued a position statement on advancing equity, stating:

**All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society.<sup>24</sup>**

Equitable early childhood education must lift up all children, giving them a fair shot at the future. It must not perpetuate – but instead reverse – the structural and institutional racism, poverty and lack of opportunity that exist in the U.S. Discrimination and prejudice have no place in our child care system.

Early childhood education can serve to build bridges between people of different backgrounds. Access to quality, affordable child care can empower families currently mired in poverty, giving those children a chance to close the achievement gap prior to entering kindergarten.<sup>25</sup> These policies

can also promote women’s economic advancement by making it possible for mothers to enter the workforce or higher education, developing their human capital toward a better future. In addition, respect for cultural diversity supports the equitable treatment of our diverse and dynamic early childhood education workforce.

In order to meet these critical equity goals, the supply of child care must meet the needs of all of today’s families, not simply those who can access high-quality care. In many instances, meeting these modern needs means moving beyond what might be perceived as the traditional model of child care, where center-based care is offered to parents working a traditional work week (eight-hour days, Monday through Friday). Fewer Americans are working these schedules. Instead, more people are working nights, weekends and shifts that vary from week to week. Occupations requiring nonstandard hours are increasing in today’s economy, especially for low-income workers in retail, health care or other service sectors.<sup>26</sup> Working parents confront limited options for center-based child care during nonstandard hours. Instead, they must cobble together an array of child care options, including center-based child care; home-based family child care (FCC); and child care provided by family, friends and neighbors (FFN).<sup>27</sup> This disjointed

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approach to child care can be stressful for parents trying to secure care and for children lacking a consistent caregiver.<sup>28</sup> This problem is exacerbated when work schedules are unpredictable. For a child care system to be truly equitable, it must address the needs of these families with nonstandard working hours.<sup>29</sup> And, for the child care system to do so, practices at work must adapt to support parents in seeking and securing care.

One approach to assisting these families is to deliver business advice, fair subsidies and other supports to all child care providers, but especially to FFN and FCC providers. CCR&Rs can again play a critical role in identifying and responding to the unique needs of FCC and FFN providers, in addition to center-based providers. CCAoA advocates supporting these CCR&Rs and FFN/FCC providers by helping them start their businesses and meet critical health, safety and quality standards. In exchange for entering the child care system, these providers would receive fair and subsidized compensation for the critical child care services they offer. These policies will serve several equity-driven objectives, including:

- **servicing the needs of low-income parents working nontraditional hours,**
- **ensuring quality care to help children from these families grow and develop,**
- **allowing ECEs in underserved communities to enter the profession,**
- **educating the ECE workforce about issues of diversity, equity and implicit bias,**
- **providing fair compensation to the providers of this care and**
- **sustaining the cultural diversity of our communities.**

Expanding access to all families is only one part of our policy agenda for achieving equity in the child care system. The care itself must embrace and support all families, providing quality care that is culturally informed. ECEs must partner with parents, celebrating the wide array of family backgrounds in our communities. Within child care programs, children and families should feel welcomed and affirmed, with a pedagogy that is supportive and inclusive. And, when needed, children and families should have access to trauma-informed care and services.<sup>30</sup> By examining all policies through the lens of advancing equity, CCAoA can help accomplish the true aim of child care policy – giving children the best possible start in life.





## Community-Focused Policies

Child care policies must address the pivotal role child care plays within the greater community.

Child care does not exist in a vacuum. It is an integral part of our greater communities, connected to school readiness, health outcomes, financial security, immigration, workforce preparedness and national productivity. For child care policies to be relevant and sustainable, they must focus on the entire community and the role child care plays within it. In addition, child care must be accompanied by robust, well-funded complementary services: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) coverage, Early Head Start/Head Start (EHS/HS), Home Visiting (MIECHV) and more.

One key aspect of community-focused policy is the status of ECEs as professionals and experts in the field of child development. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, over 1.7 million people work caring for children in the United States as directors and ECEs, making a large contribution to the economic development of our communities.<sup>31</sup> But too often, ECEs are dismissed as unskilled workers, and their pay reflects this societal perspective. The

Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley produces a biennial report describing earnings for ECEs across the country. The report notes that in 2017 in every state “child care workers earned less than two-thirds of the median wage for all occupations in the state — a common threshold for classifying work as ‘low wage.’”<sup>32</sup> The median hourly wage for ECEs in 2017 was \$10.72, far less than the median hourly wage for kindergarten or elementary school teachers.<sup>33</sup> Infant and toddler teachers earn even less. Nearly 15% of ECEs live in households with an annual income below the federal poverty line, and 36% have household incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line.<sup>34</sup>

Despite low wages, these educators – primarily women, and often women of color<sup>35</sup> – provide an essential service to our communities. They nurture and care for our youngest children, helping to set those children on the path of growth and development. **They deserve to be treated as the professionals that they are, fairly compensated and supported in their own career development.**<sup>36</sup>

**\$10.72**

median hourly wage for early childhood educators in 2017





CCAOA believes that improvements to the child care system must start with equity for the educators and providers on which we all rely. To address the asymmetry between the importance of ECEs and their current economic status within the community, CCAOA will advocate for policies that compensate and support ECEs and providers at a level commensurate with the role they play in designing the future. CCAOA will also help CCR&Rs build community-based partnerships that can move such efforts forward. These community-focused policies include:

- **an increase in the subsidy rate paid to providers to be at least 75% of the market rate,**
- **a living wage and comprehensive benefits for ECEs,**
- **professional development opportunities, family supports and scholarships that allow ECEs to access advanced courses while building on current job experience,**
- **robust apprenticeship programs to increase the pipeline of talent into the profession and**
- **awareness campaigns to educate the public and policymakers on the importance of early childhood education professionals in our communities.**

A well-supported and -compensated work force benefits the children in care and attracts new educators to the field. Many states report that they are seeing a decrease in the overall number of child care providers over the past decade, with an alarming drop in the number of family child care providers.<sup>37</sup> If we are to stop this decline, we must prioritize policies that make the early childhood education profession more attractive to new entrants and that advance an effective, diverse and well-compensated early childhood education workforce.



## Conclusion



We see our public policy work as a journey, with the final destination of a child care system that works for everyone – children, families, educators and communities. Our compass has as its directional points CCAoA's four guiding principles, leading us to policies that are **child-centered, family-engaged, equity-driven** and **community-focused**. By staying true to these guiding principles, CCAoA will advocate for policies that build strong communities, from the youngest children to the largest employers. Accessible, affordable, quality child care builds the firm foundation that allows communities to prosper. Without that care, communities falter.

Local CCR&Rs provide the hands-on, immediate assistance to families

and ECEs that is key to improving our child care system. Every day, CCR&Rs work in communities to connect families to care and to support providers. By partnering with these CCR&Rs, CCAoA has a depth and breadth of knowledge to support policy positions. We understand the challenges faced by families and by providers operating within our broken child care system. Those challenges drive us to push for changes to bring us closer to our ultimate destination. CCAoA, along with local CCR&Rs and the families they serve, will work with policymakers in the public sector and corporate partners in the private sector to develop and implement policies that will mend our child care system. We will continue to join national child care advocates and philanthropists to drive the research underlying this policy agenda. Over the next three years, we will return to our guiding principles to check our progress. We invite you to join us on this journey.



# About Child Care Aware® of America

Founded in 1987, Child Care Aware® of America (CCAOA) is a national, membership-based nonprofit that focuses exclusively on child care. We serve as our nation's leading voice for child care, taking a broad approach to the goal of improving the country's child care system. CCAOA is a leader in:



## Research

Adding much-needed data and analysis to support the advancement of child care policies.



## Technology

Helping families understand the importance of quality care and assisting them with the difficult task of finding it.



## Professional Development and Training

Supporting early childhood educators in their quest to improve the quality of care.



## Advocacy

Working with policymakers to advance policy and funding to improve our child care system.

In addition, CCAOA is honored to support all branches of the military service with Child Care Subsidy support and the Exceptional Family Member Respite Care support. In FY2019 (October 2018 through September 2019), CCAOA assisted over 36,000 children across these two programs. Since CCAOA began administering these programs in 2008, we have helped families find and pay for child care or respite care for over 250,000 unique children.<sup>38</sup>

CCAOA's work is strengthened by a national network of over 400 Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies. Located in every state, CCR&Rs strive to increase access to high-quality, affordable child care by serving as a resource hub for communities. These agencies assist families with finding quality child care, entrepreneurs with building child care businesses, and early childhood educators with improving their practices.

# Endnotes

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