

CONNECTICUT'S CCDF STATE PLAN 2022-2024

KEY APPROACHES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

BACKGROUND

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act is the law that authorizes the federal child care subsidy program known as the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). It is the primary federal funding source for providing low-income families that are working or participating in education and training with help paying for child care; and for improving the quality of care, learning, and development for all children. Connecticut's subsidy program is Care 4 Kids.

The CCDF plan reflects key goals of an integrated system of child care for low-income working families. The intention is that states and the federal government will be able to use this information to track and assess progress of child care service delivery; determine the need for technical assistance to child care programs; and monitor compliance with specific state and federal requirements.

Section 1: Define Leadership and Coordination with Relevant Systems and Funding Sources

- Expansion of the Office of Early Childhood's (OEC) long-term vision that focuses on six pillars: Access, Community Voice, Workforce Development, Accountability, Equity, and High-Quality Programs and Services.
- OEC has engaged a diverse group of statewide stakeholders over the past year and a half to help create the agency's long-term vision for an integrated early care and education system. Stakeholders include representatives from early care and education centers; family child care homes; school readiness liaisons; child day care directors; after school networks; staffed family child care networks; summer and youth camp directors; municipal leaders; families; legislators; and advocates.
- OEC deployed many supports to child care to preserve child care access for families and child care infrastructure for the future. Additional funds were sent to programs that remained open to serve essential employees, Kick start grants were sent to all programs who qualified to help re-open child care. PPE supplies and PPE supply grants were available to all licensed programs as well. And in May of 2021, OEC released stabilization funds to support child care programs as they continue to recoup losses and plan for program sustainability.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, OEC and United Way of CT (CCR&R) worked closely with the Department of Public Health (DPH) to coordinate mass administration of COVID-19 vaccinations. Child care staff were prioritized for vaccination to keep child care open and safe for children, families, and staff. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of vaccinations, and the need for coordinated access to health and immunization records for families, especially those experiencing homelessness and children residing in foster care.
- State trainings and materials were revised to accommodate virtual and interactive presentations for the early childhood workforce; including content specific to infant/toddler providers who work with diverse children and families.
- Training and coaching were offered to public school preschool staff around developmentally appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This fosters relationships between the public school preschools and the local community-based preschool programs for continuity of services and effective transitions.
- Translation of all supplementary materials for the Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS), and provide required training and bilingual materials on the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to family-based care providers.



- Improve the referral path for children experiencing homelessness to get into early childhood education programs. OEC is exploring opportunities to leverage existing training utilized by state McKinney Vento Liaisons to increase providers' understanding of the definition of homelessness used in the McKinney Vento Act, and to educate providers on how to identify and care for children experiencing homelessness.
- Engage in a Lab School Investment project with the CT State College and University System using COVID-19 relief funds to build a robust early childhood education practicum at public and private higher education institutions; and support regional centers of excellence linked to higher education opportunities.
- Work with Birth to Three to develop an extended service model to ensure a smooth transition from B to Three to preschool for children with disabilities.
- Coordinate with the Mohegan Tribe as they develop their CCDF plan to share relevant resources for professional development activities, and strategies for collaboration. OEC and the Mohegan Tribe are collaborating to develop a cross-check system for families receiving Care 4 Kids to ensure a single receipt of funding per family. OEC is also supporting the Mohegan Tribe in their development of Emergency Response Plans that will meet their specific needs. OEC has reached out to the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe to discuss collaboration and resource sharing. The director was provided Region 1 technical assistance contact information, and the CCDF team was available to the director for any additional information or support.

Section 2: Promote Family Engagement through Outreach and Consumer Education

- Enhancements to the 2-1-1 Child Care website will allow parents to access inspection and complaint history on the provider search engine. All Care 4 Kids families and child care providers have access to the resources and services at 2-1-1 Child Care. Additionally, the Care 4 Kids program provides a brochure on the Help Me Grow program to all new families and providers.
- OEC and 2-1-1 Child Development collaborated to launch Sparkler, an evidence-based, mobile family engagement platform (available in English and Spanish) to help all CT families with children birth to 5. Sparkler contains a tracking tool to screen and monitor children's social-emotional, cognitive, communicative, and physical development, including Ages & Stages Questionnaires. The system flags children at risk and 2-1-1 Child Development connects families with the appropriate services.
- Collaborated with the State Department of Education, and working with communities to reduce suspension and expulsion in state-funded pre-k programs. Working to notify families about changes in Birth to Three that enable families to retain services.
- OEC funds the Child Development Infoline and "Help Me Grow," a prevention program for children up to age 5, which provides families and providers with community resources that address a child's behavioral or developmental needs. Families may access the Child Development Infoline and access referral support, including child care.
- OEC is launching a Child Development campaign to engage families and disseminate information about the importance of the early years for brain development and healthy social and emotional development. It will be on social media, traditional media and with public television. It will link to Help Me Grow and 211 Child Development Infoline.

Section 3: Provide Stable Child Care Financial Assistance to Families

- Increased the state median income limit for new Care 4 Kids applicants from less than 50% to less than 60% of the appropriate family size.



- Temporarily pay the Care 4 Kids parents' family fee by issuing payments directly to providers using CRRSA funds.
- Established a 20% quality bonus for accredited licensed child care centers (DCCC), group child care homes (DCGH), and license-exempt providers (DCEX) that have or obtain a valid national accreditation with one of the approved accreditation organizations: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Council on Accreditation (COA), or New England Schools and Colleges (NEASC).
- Proposed legislation to expand Care 4 Kids eligibility to parents or caretakers that are enrolled in higher education; workforce development programs; or an education program to obtain a high school equivalency diploma or General Education Diploma.

Section 4: Ensure Equal Access to Child Care for Low-Income Children

- OEC funds 12 statewide family child care networks to increase the availability of care for infants and toddlers; and reduce administrative costs of family child care providers through technical assistance, training, and back office support.
- OEC works with the Women's Business Development Council (WBDC) to provide a comprehensive suite of business development services to support child care service providers to help sustain their business. WBDC has expanded services to support the rollout of the Child Care Program Stabilization Funding, which is funded by the American Rescue Plan Act. This is to support the child care field to build more effective business practices, so programs can remain open.
- OEC is seeking a waiver for the Market Rate Survey (MRS) and Narrow Cost Analysis for the 2022-2024 CCDF plan due to the extraordinary circumstances the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on the state's child care providers and families. Abnormalities in the child care market in Connecticut remain as the supply of child care programs is at 77% of pre-COVID capacity, and the use of Care 4 Kids subsidies dropped 7% over the course of the past year. A waiver will allow the child care market to normalize prior to conducting an MRS or Narrow Cost Analysis, resulting in a more representative child care market.
- The Care 4 Kids program currently offers a 5% rate increase to all providers who hold program accreditation. Effective June 1, 2021, an additional 20% Quality Bonus is being provided to accredited center-based providers using ARPA funds.

Section 5: Establish Standards and Monitoring Processes to Ensure the Health and Safety of Child Care Settings

- Care 4 Kids providers are required to complete a pre-service and/or an orientation program within three months of serving children. Based on feedback received from providers, the OEC will modify training topics to more closely match with provider type and child's age.
- Providers who receive a Care 4 Kids subsidy are required to complete an orientation training and ongoing professional development to build their knowledge and skills. Each Care 4 Kids provider will be regularly monitored to confirm they have met the online health and safety orientation, and ongoing professional development requirements.
- The Background Check Information System (BCIS) is used to identify out-of-state addresses in the address history of child care staff members. OEC is now implementing a process to send requests to the relevant agencies in each state for each respective out of state address. The BCIS database will also incorporate whether out-of-state checks have been cleared into the background check status to inform child care providers when staff members are permitted to work on an unsupervised basis.
- OEC is developing a three-tiered approach to health, safety and quality monitoring that will give families information about the quality level of the program and support programs efforts to attain higher quality standing. Programs will be a 1,2,or 3. 1 = basic health and safety requirements met. 2 = made substantial progress toward accreditation and 3 = Accredited or meets Head Start Standards.

Section 6: Recruit and Retain a Qualified and Effective Child Care Workforce

- OEC utilized ARPA stabilization funds to provide stabilization funding to child care programs to maintain a consistent, high quality, equitable, accessible system of child care. Programs are required to use 25% of these funds to increase wages for staff.
- OEC is using the NAEYC Workforce Blueprint and the Build It Better survey in creating a state professional development system. The CT Early Childhood Professional Registry is an online database that tracks professional development and employment experience; the Registry will also be used to monitor progress toward the state's goal of meeting required staff qualifications.
- Working with Eastern CT State University, OEC will sponsor train-the-trainer events to educate providers about trauma associated with homelessness. This includes technical assistance in identifying and serving children and families experiencing homelessness.
- OEC contracts with WBDC to support providers statewide with strategies to increase their business knowledge, and support their engagement with regional and community-based resources.
- OEC contracts with CT RESC Alliance to expand professional development training focused on the best practice and use of technology with young children. OEC provided families and child care programs with laptops, iPads, and internet access to participate in remote and hybrid learning.
- OEC contracts with the Erikson Institute to provide free professional development training on the use of technology for engaging and strengthening relationships with families. This training focuses on families' knowledge and understanding of developmentally appropriate practice for home learning opportunities.

Section 7: Support Continuous Quality Improvement

- Finalize a three-level Quality Improvement System to provide and document improvements for the development of individual skills and ongoing program quality. Quality improvement supports will include Accreditation Quality Improvement System (AQIS), standards, curriculum and assessment, trauma-informed practice, and fiscal and business management.
- Implement an "organizational hub" to provide support and coordination of the 12 staffed Family Child Care Networks.
- Use federal COVID relief funds to pay NAEYC accreditation fees for calendar year 2021.
- Contract with the UConn School of Social Work to develop an integrated network for data collection, analysis, and reporting using learning management systems, data dashboards, and participant feedback.
- Expand metrics in the area of early care and education supply and demand, family and provider demographics, resource and referral processes, and data related to emergency response functions using BridgeCare software.
- Expand the Pyramid Model trainings for family child care providers to better serve infants and toddlers.
- Expand the video library of evidence-based and exemplary practice through a partnership with Eastern CT State University to support early childhood professionals.
- Publish OEC's supplementary curriculum and assessment resources for providers aligned to the ELDS in English and Spanish.
- Work to update ELDS with higher education support.

Section 8: Ensure Grantee Program Integrity and Accountability

- Continue to implement program accountability activities as specified by CCDF.

- Continue to administer the CCDF program with controls to direct and monitor vendor performance. All vendors are required to meet the standards set in their contracts.
- Continue to implement safeguards to identify and prevent fraud or intentional program violations. Care 4 Kids has access to family records in several public databases to determine family eligibility. United Way of CT reviews cases for accuracy in eligibility; OEC utilizes the Department of Social Services Fraud Early Detection Unit to prevent errors before an agency approves benefits.