

# SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES



## HHS Roundtables on Improving Access to High-Quality Child Care

### ***Supporting Working Families and Increasing Access to High-Quality Child Care: Voices from the Field Executive Summary***

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF) focuses on finding innovative solutions to improve working families' access to affordable, high-quality child care. ACF also investigates how access to child care affects America's workforce, present and future. From September through November 2019, the White House Office of Economic Initiatives partnered with ACF to convene a series of half-day Roundtables in ten locations across the country. Parents, child care providers, employers, state and local officials, and innovators discussed barriers to—and practical solutions for—improving access to child care. Over 900 participants attended the 10 nationwide Roundtables – including 214 parents; 169 child care providers; 96 employers; 203 state, territory, local, and tribal government officials; 115 child care workforce development professionals; 57 philanthropic organizations; and 75 additional individuals.

### **Stakeholder Perspectives... What We Heard**

#### *Parent Perspective*

- The parent perspective is often left out of key policy making.
- Vital information is not getting to parents.
- Some parents need support aligned with their unique needs.
- A desire for meaningful parental choice.

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*“I wish every parent had real choice, what is most important and let me seek that out, but with the barriers, the logistics, we are forced into choices that have negative impacts over time.” – Parent Roundtable Participant*

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#### *Provider Perspective*

- The economics of child care present ongoing challenges for workforce recruitment and retention.
- Training offered may not meet the needs.
- Processes such as subsidy paperwork and monitoring can be overly burdensome and may need alignment.
- Tension between the cost to run child care and the price parents can afford.

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*“Parents and providers need to work together to educate people [policy decision-makers] about what the true cost of quality care is. Those full costs, and the challenge that providers face to pay their employees well, are not well known.” – Provider Roundtable Participant*

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### *Employer Perspective*

- Not all employers were aware of the connection between child care issues and their business.
- Employers are trying to identify different ways that they can help, particularly for after-hours/shift employees.
- Tensions around providing benefits to employees with different needs and preferences
- Not all child care options are appropriate for all employers.

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*“We miss out on good people because of this, just recently we had someone who did not take a job because her husband had shift work and it did not make sense financially, maybe in a couple years she said.” – Employer Roundtable Participant*

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### *State, Territory, Tribal, and Local Government Perspective*

- It is too difficult to blend/braid federal funding across early learning and care programs.
- Different eligibility requirements and standards for different federal programs make it difficult to serve families holistically.
- Certain CCDF requirements are too difficult to implement.
- The tension of multiple demands for limited funding.

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*“...everyone agreed that it is not regulations but the barriers between the different funding streams that keeps them from working better together...” – State Government Roundtable Participant*

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### *Child Care Workforce Development Perspective*

- The tension between higher education and child care training efforts.
- Credits and credentials do not always transfer across systems and states.
- Alternate pathways to increased credentials should link to reasonable pay schedules.

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*“We need aligned and coordinated education and career pathways across systems.” – Child Care Workforce Development Roundtable Participant*

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### *Philanthropy Perspectives and Innovations*

Philanthropy takes a particular interest in funding innovations, technical assistance, advocacy, and evaluation and many are interested in engaging and partnering with public and private agencies at the state and local level. ACF heard from over 40 innovators addressing barriers discussed by the stakeholders including provider professional development, training, and incentives; building child care supply; employer child care models and employee supports; family economic supports; provider business supports; and state legislation.



## Key Overarching Themes:

### *Systems Working Better Together – Alignment and Interaction*

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*“We all know it cannot be solved by one entity so it [takes] a collaboration where everybody will put their heads together...it takes a village.” – Roundtable Participant*

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### *Communication – Getting Stakeholders’ Input and Providing the Information They Need*

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*“Government programs are not easy for working families or employers to navigate.” – Roundtable Participant*

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### *Child Care Narrative and Messaging – Changing the Conversation*

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*“We need to start thinking of early childhood like streets [...]. It's infrastructure. We don't look for roads to turn [a] profit but we still put money into them.” – Philanthropy Roundtable Participant*

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### *Understanding Quality*

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*“[It would be a] luxury to understand what quality is.”*

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### *Compensation of the Early Childhood Education Workforce*

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*“Taking care of other people’s children is hard and should be a position we pay someone well to do.” – Roundtable Participant*

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## **Brief Summary of the Request for Information**

ACF received 239 comments in response to the [“Improving Access to Affordable, High Quality Child Care”](#) request for information (RFI). The comments to the RFI supplied a broad stakeholder perspective, and commenters included additional stakeholders, such as advocacy organizations, researchers, and Head Start commenters, than those attended the Roundtables. The RFI commenters added more citizen voices to the discussion. The demographics may have been different across the Roundtables and RFI, but many of the same themes discussed in the Roundtables were echoed in the RFI comments.

This version of the executive summary originally distributed during the White House “Summit on Child Care and Paid Leave” was edited to more closely align with the final report.

To read the full report, visit the Office of Child Care website at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ>. For more resources on child care, visit: <https://www.childcare.gov/about>

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