



**Administrative Data
Sources to Address
Early Care and Education
Policy-Relevant Research
Questions**

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Submitted by: Van-Kim Lin, Sara Shaw, and Kelly Maxwell
Child Trends

Submitted to: Ivelisse Martinez-Beck, PhD, Project Officer
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Kathleen Dwyer, PhD, Project Officer
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Contract Number: HHSP23320095631WC

Project Director: Kelly Maxwell
Child Trends
7315 Wisconsin Avenue
Suite 1200W
Bethesda, MD 20814

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Introduction

Administrative data can be an important source of information to help researchers address policy-relevant questions related to early care and education (ECE). *Administrative data* refers to information about individual children, families, and/or service providers that is collected and maintained as a part of program operations. Research using ECE-related administrative data has often focused on child care subsidy policies, use of ECE programs,^a access to ECE programs,^b and other topics.

Although researchers may be able to answer a range of questions using a single administrative data source, they can often answer other policy-relevant questions by linking multiple administrative data sources. Using administrative data, researchers can link children, families, programs, and communities across different data sources—and they can do so in a way that protects privacy and confidentiality.¹ At the child and family level, researchers can explore the services that low-income families receive across a variety of different agencies and programs (e.g., nutrition assistance, health insurance coverage, and child care subsidies). At the community level, researchers can explore the types of services available within a given city or county. Linking information across data sources about services offered or families served

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¹ More information about protecting privacy and confidentiality can be found at <https://www.researchconnections.org/content/childcare/understand/administrative-data.html> under the Data Confidentiality/Security section.

may identify gaps or duplications in services. It may also identify potential areas for coordination by identifying, for example, programs that serve the same families. Additionally, linking ECE data with other data sources offers a chance for researchers and policymakers to answer questions about the experiences of children and families over time. For instance, researchers could address questions about whether participation in home visiting is associated with later reductions in the incidence of abuse and neglect. By linking data across various services, researchers can address a broader range of questions.

The purpose of this brief is to highlight a range of federal, state, and local administrative data sources that could be used to address policy-relevant ECE questions. We describe data sources across four main areas: early care and education; health; child welfare, public assistance, and human services; and employment. We offer examples of the types of ECE research questions that could be answered when data sources from these areas are linked with other sources (e.g., when various ECE data sources are linked with one another, as well as when ECE data are linked with other data). This resource is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, it serves as a starting place for researchers or state agency staff interested in understanding the variety of administrative data that could be linked together to answer policy-relevant questions in early care and education.

Resources

Interested in learning more about linking data? The following resources will help you get started.

- Supporting the Use of Administrative Data in Early Care and Education Research series: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/supporting-use-administrative-data-early-care-education-research-resource-series>
- Building Capacity to Use Linked Data (BCULD) resource series: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/building-capacity-use-linked-data-program-improvement-and-research-initiatives>, particularly <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/207811/StrengthinNumbersFullReport.pdf>

Data Sources

This section describes administrative data sources across different areas of interest and offers examples of research questions that could be examined by linking together multiple data sources, within and across areas. Descriptions include examples of the kinds of data elements available, as well as information on how to access the data. When available, data sources or contacts are provided in the footnotes.

Early care and education

Many publicly funded ECE programs serve children from birth through age 5. Some programs deliver services directly to children (e.g., Head Start, pre-kindergarten) while others focus on ECE providers (e.g., child care licensing) or families (e.g., child care subsidies). Below are examples of research questions that can be addressed if multiple ECE data sources are linked:

- What is the quality of providers available in areas with a large population of families with low-incomes?
- How many children in state-funded pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs also receive child care subsidies for care during nontraditional hours?
- How many child care subsidy-receiving children with disabilities are served by high-quality child care providers (center or home-based)?
- Does exit from Part C of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) services disrupt use of licensed child care for children receiving child care subsidies?

Child care licensing

Child care licensing is a way for states to ensure that child care providers meet basic requirements.² Child care licensing data differ across states depending on the regulations set by states and information collected. Common data elements cover various topics such as information about the licensed facility (e.g., capacity), children served (e.g., age ranges), compliance with licensing regulations (e.g., health and safety violations), and enforcement actions (e.g., fines).^c Researchers may access state-specific child care licensing data through the state agency that administers the licensing program.³ Data about licensing regulations across states are available through the Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System's Data Explorer and State Profile tool.⁴ State and territory licensing regulations can be found in the National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations.⁵

Resource

Looking for a specific ECE data element at the federal level? The Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System has a Data Explorer and State Profile tool that allows you to search for information by topic or by state. <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/data>

Child care resource and referral (CCR&R)

Child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) help families find child care and may provide professional development to ECE providers. CCR&Rs may use their own data system or use a vendor system, such as NACCRRAware.⁶ Typical data elements include provider information (e.g., capacity, ages served, languages used), program quality information (e.g., accreditations, Quality Rating and Improvement System⁷ [QRIS] rating), and location information (e.g., address). CCR&R data may be accessed through individual CCR&Rs or through a state agency that oversees the CCR&Rs.⁸

Child care subsidy

Child care subsidies are offered by states, territories, and tribes through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF).^d CCDF, jointly financed by a federal block grant and by state governments, subsidizes the cost of child care for eligible families (e.g., low-income families or families of children with high needs) and aims to raise the quality of child care.^e Subsidy-receiving families can select a participating child care provider, and providers are paid by the state with the family contributing a co-payment. Data on families (e.g., income and size), dependent children (e.g., ages and disabilities), and child care providers (e.g., child care setting type, hours child is in care) are collected and reported by the state. States report case-level data on a monthly basis and aggregate data on an annual basis to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).^f Data from a specific state may be found through the state lead agency,⁹ and summary aggregate data may be found on ACF's website.¹⁰ Sample case-level CCDF administrative data can be accessed at the Child and Family Data Archive.¹¹ Data about states' CCDF policies, such as information about states' income eligibility thresholds or application procedures, can be found in the CCDF Policies Database managed by the Urban Institute.¹²

² More information about how to use child care licensing data can be found through A Guide to Support States and Territories' Use of Child Care Licensing Data, which is accessible at <https://childcare.gov/consumer-education/child-care-licensing-and-regulations>.

³ A list of child care licensing lead agencies for each state can be found at <https://childcare.gov/state-resources-home>.

⁴ The Data Explorer and State Profiles tool can be found at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/data> and includes data from the 2011 and 2014 Child Care Licensing Studies. Licensing data can be accessed under the "health and safety" topic and "licensing" subtopic.

⁵ The National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations can be found at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/licensing>.

⁶ NACCRRAware is provided by Child Care Aware of America. More information can be found at <https://www.naccrraware.net/>.

⁷ A quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) assesses quality, assigns program ratings, and support quality improvement in ECE settings. For more information about QRIS, see <https://qrisguide.acf.hhs.gov/about-qris>.

⁸ Local and state child care resource and referral agencies can be found at <http://childcareaware.org/ccrr-search-form/>.

⁹ A list of state and territory lead agency contacts can be found at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-grantee-state-and-territory-contacts>.

¹⁰ Publicly available data for the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) can be found at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-statistics>.

¹¹ Sample case-level CCDF administrative data can be found in the Child and Family Data Archive at www.ChildAndFamilyDataArchive.org.

¹² The CCDF Policies Database, along with user guides and reports, can be found at <https://ccdf.urban.org/>.

ECE workforce registries

Workforce registries contain ECE provider education and professional development information. Common data elements may include provider demographics, provider education and employment history, provider professional development participation (e.g., courses completed, certificates received), as well as program characteristics (e.g., quality information).⁹ If a state has a workforce registry, state registry information may be overseen by state agencies, CCR&Rs, non-profits, or other organizations, like a university.^h Workforce registry information across states may be found at the National Workforce Registry Alliance (NWRA),¹³ which regularly compiles registry information across states. Researchers interested in accessing workforce data in a specific state would need to contact the organization within the state that oversees the registry.

Civil Rights Data Collection¹⁴

The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) is a biennial (i.e., every other school year) collection of data from public local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools, including long-term secure juvenile justice facilities, charter schools, alternative schools, and schools serving students with disabilities. The CRDC collects data on leading civil rights indicators related to access and barriers to educational opportunity at the early childhood through grade 12 levels. This includes information on early childhood and pre-kindergarten enrollment and educational programs and services, most of which is disaggregated by race/ethnicity, sex, limited English proficiency, and disability. National and state aggregate estimates on enrollment, career readiness, school staff, and discipline are also available.

Head Start and Early Head Start¹⁵

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded programs that serve low-income families with children birth to 5 years and pregnant women.ⁱ Federal funding flows directly to local grantees and delegate agencies that oversee Head Start programming in communities. Child, family, and program information are collected by local Head Start grantees and reported annually to the Administration for Children and Families in aggregate at the grantee and delegate-agency level through the Program Information Report (PIR). PIR data, from 1988 onward, are accessible through the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES).¹⁶ PIR data include information on the program (e.g., enrollment or staff) and services offered to children and families (e.g., education, health, or family engagement services). Data also include information on the children and families served. Data may also be accessible through individual agreements with Head Start grantees.¹⁷

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)¹⁸

IDEA supports state agencies in providing early intervention, special education, and related services to infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities. State education agencies oversee special education, related services, and access to free appropriate public education for children ages 3 through 21, as specified under Part B, Sections 611 and 619, of IDEA. State agencies oversee early intervention services for infants and toddlers, birth through age 2, as specified under Part C of IDEA. The IDEA Part C early intervention program may be administered by state agencies other than the state educational agencies, including public health or social services agencies. The Part B data include state level counts of children receiving special education and related services, the environments in which these children are being educated, child outcomes (for preschoolers), removal of these children from their educational placement for disciplinary reasons, occurrence and resolution of due process complaints

¹³ More information about the National Workforce Registry Alliance can be found at <https://www.registryalliance.org/>.

¹⁴ More information about CRDC and access to CRDC can be found at <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>.

¹⁵ More information about Head Start and Early Head Start can be found at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs> or at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>.

¹⁶ Publicly available data from the Program Information Report, along with user guides, can be found at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/data-ongoing-monitoring/article/program-information-report-pir>.

¹⁷ Any agreements and disclosure of data involving personally identifiable information (PII) on children served would need to meet Head Start requirements at 45 CFR 1303 Subpart C, Protections for the Privacy of Child Records. Additional information is available at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1303-subpart-c-protections-privacy-child-records>.

¹⁸ More information about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act can be found at <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>.

filed under IDEA, and information regarding the use of IDEA funds to support and coordinate early intervention services. Part C data include state level counts of infants and toddlers receiving early intervention services, the locations in which these infants and toddlers are receiving services, child outcomes, reasons these infants and toddlers stop receiving early intervention services, and the occurrence and resolution of due process complaints filed under IDEA. IDEA Section 618 data for Part B and Part C can be accessed via the IDEA Section 618 Data Products website.¹⁹ Other data may be accessed through Part C or Part B state agencies.²⁰

Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS)

Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) are a strategy to document and communicate the quality of ECE programs and support quality improvement.^k Most states have a QRIS.^l QRIS data systems can include information on the quality ratings of participating programs, changes in ratings over time, and possibly the quality improvement supports programs received. Researchers interested in using QRIS data about individual programs would need to request it from the organization(s) overseeing QRIS in the state or locality of interest.²¹

Publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs

Communities may have both city- and state-funded pre-K programs. These programs are publicly funded educational programs for 4-year-olds (and sometimes 3-year-olds) prior to kindergarten. These programs may be supported by a combination of federal, state, and local funds and are often administered by state educational agencies.^m Most pre-K programs are targeted to a subset of at-risk children, though a few are offered universally.ⁿ Child-level data may include child age, family income level, and assessment data (e.g., developmental screening). Program-level data may include operating schedule, staff qualifications, and number of slots. These data may exist locally and at the state level. Researchers interested in accessing data for a state must work with state agency staff. Sometimes states may make aggregate or anonymized data publicly available through downloadable public-use files or state reports.

Resource

Integrated data systems or longitudinal data systems are data systems designed for collection, management, analysis, and reporting of data over time and across programs.²² In recent years, there have been multiple initiatives to build statewide integrated or longitudinal data systems, especially focusing on linking early childhood data. For more information, see the [Early Childhood Data Collaborative](#) or the [Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems \(ECIDS\) Toolkit](#).

Health

Health services are an important part of the early childhood system. For instance, access to a stable supply of healthy food ensures that young children have the nutrition they need to grow up strong and healthy, and adequate health insurance coverage allows children to access needed medical services. ECE researchers and state agency staff may want to examine questions regarding the intersection of ECE and health services.^o Examples of questions are listed below:

- Do children receiving food and nutrition benefits receive the same quality of child care as their peers who do not receive these benefits?

¹⁹ The IDEA Section 618 Data Products website can be accessed at <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/index.html>.

²⁰ A list of Part C lead agencies can be found at <http://ectacenter.org/partc/ptclead.asp>, and a list of Part B Section 619 Coordinators can be found at <http://ectacenter.org/contact/619coord.asp>.

²¹ A list of state contacts for quality rating and improvement systems can be found at <https://grisnetwork.org/gris-state-contacts-map>.

²² Definition adapted from that developed by the DaSy Center. Definition found here: <https://dasycenter.org/glossary/statewide-longitudinal-data-system-slds/>

- Do ECE programs that receive food and nutrition funds serve a greater proportion of children receiving child care subsidies than programs that do not receive these funds? Are patterns consistent across various regions of a state?
- What are the characteristics of families that receive both Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits and child care subsidies?
- How many children in a county are both covered by the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and enrolled in a high-quality ECE program (e.g. QRIS rating)?
- What is the availability of high-quality ECE programs in counties that have high CHIP enrollments?

Several health-related data sources, which could be used to address these and other questions, are described below.

Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant Program (Title V MCH)

The Title V MCH program is a federal-state partnership that aims to improve maternal and child health. Based on identified priority needs, states select national performance measures and work to improve outcomes in those areas. Performance measure areas relevant to children include developmental screening, medical home, transition, injury, physical activity, oral health, smoking, and adequate insurance. The Title V Information System provides access to program, performance, and financial data as reported by the state Title V MCH programs.²³ Researchers interested in accessing a particular state's Title V data should contact their state Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Director, or the Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN) Director.²⁴

Food and Nutrition Services programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) manages 15 nutrition assistance programs.²⁵ Three are highlighted below.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, is the largest of the USDA's federal nutrition assistance programs.²⁶ It provides funds on Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards for families to purchase groceries at eligible retailers, including most large grocery stores and many smaller convenience stores. Data may be available at the individual or family level (both for states and nationally) and include household characteristics and average monthly benefit by household. The SNAP Quality Control System measures the accuracy of state eligibility and benefit determinations. Quality Control data are accessible to researchers interested in national and select state-level statistics.²⁷

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)[®]. WIC provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age 5 who are found to be at nutritional risk. Data may be available on household characteristics (e.g., income, nutrition risk status) and average monthly benefit by household. Data on recipients can be accessed through WIC state agencies, which are typically within state departments of health.²⁸ Individual data sharing agreements must be set up with either entity to access data for individuals or families. Aggregate-level data at the federal level collected from states in the spring of each year are available online by request from the USDA's FNS.²⁹

²³ Researchers interested in accessing Title V data should visit <https://mchb.tvisdata.hrsa.gov/>.

²⁴ A list of MCH or CSHCN contacts can be found at <https://mchb.tvisdata.hrsa.gov/Home/StateContacts>.

²⁵ More information on all of FNS's nutrition assistance programs and federal administrative data on select programs can be found at www.fns.usda.gov.

²⁶ More information about SNAP can be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

²⁷ SNAP Quality Control data can be accessed at <https://host76.mathematica-mpr.com/fns/>.

²⁸ A list of state WIC contacts can be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/wic-contacts>.

²⁹ Guidance on how to conduct a research project with WIC can be found at <https://www.nwica.org/guidance-for-planning-conducting-and-communicating-a-wic-research-project>.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)³⁰. CACFP provides nutritious meals and snacks to eligible children and adults who are enrolled for care at participating child care centers, day care homes, and adult day care centers. CACFP also provides meals and snacks to children and youth who participate in afterschool care programs or reside in emergency shelters. USDA's FNS administers CACFP through grants to states. Independent centers and sponsoring organizations enter into agreements with their administering state agencies to assume administrative and financial responsibility for CACFP operations. Local sponsoring agencies collect and report data to the state, and states report aggregated data to the USDA.

Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Medicaid

CHIP and Medicaid offer health insurance coverage to low-income families and are funded by a combination of state and federal funds.⁹ States are required to provide data to the federal agency, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), on a range of indicators related to application, eligibility, and enrollment processes. Aggregate data on the number of families receiving CHIP or Medicaid by state are publicly available on the Medicaid website.³¹ Additional information about requesting access to and using CMS data is available through the Research Data Assistance Center (ResDAC).³² States may also collect more information at the state level, and data and reports may be available through state agencies.³³

Child welfare, public assistance, and human services

Researchers and state agency leaders may be interested in understanding how and when children are served by the child welfare, public assistance, or human services systems. Connecting ECE data to these data sources offers an opportunity to understand factors that may affect child and family outcomes. A few examples of research questions linking ECE data and child welfare, public assistance, and human service data are below:

- How many child care subsidy-receiving ECE providers are available near federally funded homeless shelters that serve children from birth to age 5? What is the quality of these ECE programs?
- How many child care subsidy-receiving children residing in a federally funded emergency and transitional housing program are served by high-quality child care providers (center or home-based)?
- Are there differences in the rates of child abuse and neglect incidents between subsidy-receiving children who attend licensed care and those who attend license-exempt care?
- What proportion of low-income children in a county receive both home visiting services and a child care subsidy?
- What is the availability of high-quality ECE in an area with a high proportion of children and families receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI)?
- How many child care subsidy-receiving families are also receiving SSI?
- What type and quality of care do families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) use?

³⁰ More information on CACFP can be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/child-and-adult-care-food-program>.

³¹ Publicly available data and relevant reports can be found at <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/program-information/medicaid-and-chip-enrollment-data/index.html>.

³² Additional information on the ResDAC can be found at <https://www.resdac.org/about-resdac>.

³³ A list of state Medicaid agency contacts can be found at <https://www.medicaid.gov/about-us/contact-us/contact-state-page.html>.

Adoption and foster care

Title IV-E is the largest federal source of funding for adoption and foster care services. Title IV-E of the Social Security Act requires that states maintain information systems on children and families in the adoption or foster care system. Twice a year, states submit data to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).³⁴ State Title IV-E agencies report case-level information on all children served by the foster care system and those who have been adopted with Title IV-E agency involvement during the data submission period. Annual reports on the AFCARS data are published by the Children's Bureau.³⁵ States must also submit data to the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), which collects information every six months about youth who are currently in foster care as well as those who are no longer in care. The information collected includes sex, race, ethnicity, date of birth, foster care status, and outcomes captured through surveys administered at ages 17, 19, and 21.³⁶ The Children's Bureau publishes reports periodically summarizing findings from state NYTD data.³⁷ Researchers interested in case-level data may request access to data on the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) website.³⁸ Additional data at the state and local levels may be available in case management information systems.³⁹

Resource

Looking for more information on federal child welfare data sources? This Child Trends report discusses the ways in which researchers can access and use child welfare data. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/knowning-the-numbers-accessing-and-using-child-welfare-data>

Child abuse and neglect

State child protective services (CPS) or social service agencies respond to all reports of child abuse and neglect. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories have their own child abuse and neglect reporting laws as well as their own definitions of child abuse and neglect that are based on standards set by federal law. Researchers interested in cross-state data may request access to data in the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), into which states provide data.⁴⁰ Both aggregate and case-level data are available, with information on demographics of children and their perpetrators, types of maltreatment, and services provided because of the investigation or assessment. Reports are often housed in central registries at the state level and may include information on suspected child abuse and neglect; child, family, and perpetrator demographics; condition of the home environment; and the nature and extent of the child's injuries. To access these data, an individual data sharing agreement must be established with the state agency overseeing the registry of information, and often only de-identified data may be provided. Additional data at the state and local levels may be available in case management information systems.⁴¹

Resource

The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) makes child abuse and neglect as well as adoption and foster care data and documentation available for secondary analysis. Data include NCANDS, NYTD, and AFCARS, all of which can be linked together.

More information is available at <https://www.ndacan.cornell.edu>.

³⁴ AFCARS can be accessed at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/reporting-systems/afcars>.

³⁵ Annual reports on AFCARS data can be accessed at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars>.

³⁶ NYTD can be accessed at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/reporting-systems/nytd>.

³⁷ Reports summarizing findings from state NYTD data can be accessed at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/data-briefs>.

³⁸ NDACAN can be accessed at <https://www.ndacan.cornell.edu/>.

³⁹ Additional detail on information systems can be accessed at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/state-tribal-info-systems>.

⁴⁰ More information about NCANDS can be found at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/reporting-systems/ncands>.

⁴¹ Additional detail on information systems can be accessed at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/state-tribal-info-systems>.

Homelessness^s

Continuums of Care (CoC),⁴² consortiums of local homeless services providers, are required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to use a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)⁴³ to collect client-level information about children and families experiencing homelessness that receive federally funded housing and services. In HMIS, CoCs report family- and child-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness or persons at risk of homelessness. Data elements in HMIS include identifying information on individuals (e.g., name, race, gender, and disability status), information on when an individual or family received housing supports, and any known housing information after receiving services. CoCs are also required to count the number of persons experiencing homelessness using a point-in-time count. A point-in-time count using HMIS data, or the number of individuals receiving federally funded housing and services, is required annually, and a point-in-time count including unsheltered individuals is required every other year, at a minimum. Some early childhood programs may also collect data on children's housing status including Head Start; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)-funded home visiting programs; and child care subsidy programs; however, with the exception of Head Start, the availability of these data varies by state.

Home visiting

Home visiting is a service delivery mechanism. Home visiting programs aim to support parents.^t Home visitors typically travel to families' homes to provide families with information and support related to child development, parenting, health, and/or family economic self-sufficiency and may also refer families to community services, as needed. The methods for providing services and the target populations for home visiting programs vary depending on the home visiting model.⁴⁴ At the local program level, information such as family demographics, services offered, referrals made to other services, and the frequency of visits are typically collected. Because home visiting models differ somewhat in their approach and targeted outcomes, the type of information collected may also differ across models. Researchers may coordinate with individual home visiting programs or with home visiting models to request data. At the state level, data are often fragmented.^u Data may be aggregated for programs that receive state or federal funds, but this is typically not inclusive of all home visiting programs in a state. The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program is a federally funded program that supports the use of evidence-based home visiting programs and promising approaches to working with families prenatally through a child's entry to kindergarten.⁴⁵ States, territories, and tribes with MIECHV-funded programs must report aggregated data on participating programs.⁴⁶ Although historically, state-level linking of ECE and home visiting data has not occurred, some states are starting to link their data to answer questions across the comprehensive early childhood system.^v

Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

The Supplemental Security Income program (SSI) is a federal assistance program administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) that guarantees a minimum level of income for needy, aged, blind, or disabled individuals.^w Data on children under 18 years receiving SSI are publicly available at the state, SSA region, or the public-use microdata area (PUMA) level. Data elements include the type of disability, family earnings, child demographics, and household composition. Publicly available data at the federal level can be accessed through the Social Security Administration.⁴⁷

⁴² A list of CoC grantees can be found at <https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/contacts/>.

⁴³ Some HMIS data, including aggregated elements from a point-in-time count are available publicly. However, ECE researchers would need to request data to identify children under age 5 as the publicly available data include all children under age 18 into one category. Publicly available data, which are not specific to children under 5 years, can be found at <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3031/pit-and-hic-data-since-2007/>.

⁴⁴ More information about home visiting models and their evidence base can be found at <https://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/>.

⁴⁵ More information about the MIECHV program can be found at <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/MaternalChildHealthInitiatives/HomeVisiting/pdf/programbrief.pdf>.

⁴⁶ The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 provided new authority to the MIECHV program to designate data exchange standards by February 2020 for information required to be electronically exchanged between the MIECHV state agency and other agencies within the state.

⁴⁷ Publicly-available SSI data can be accessed at <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/>.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

TANF is a federal block grant to states, territories, and federally recognized tribes that funds monthly cash assistance to low-income families with children, as well as a wide range of other benefits and services to foster family economic security and stability.^x Aggregate data may include financial data (i.e., how states spend federal TANF and state maintenance-of-effort dollars) and data on recipients of TANF cash assistance, including caseload information, work participation rates, and characteristics and financial circumstances.^y Publicly available state and tribal TANF data can be found at the Administration for Children and Families website.⁴⁸

Resource

Interested in learning more about how to use and analyze TANF data? Please visit the TANF Data Collaborative.

<https://www.tanfdata.org/>

Employment

Researchers and state agency staff may also be interested in parental employment data that can be used, for example, to explore questions related to eligibility for early childhood benefits (e.g., minimum number of hours employed to be eligible for child care subsidy). Linking employment data to ECE data may allow researchers to explore the relationship between parental employment and early childhood program use. Examples of research questions using employment data are below:

- How many child care providers receive unemployment benefits during the summer months?^z
- What are the employment patterns of guardians who receive child care subsidies?^{aa}
- Does parental employment stabilize after receiving a child care subsidy?^{bb}
- What are the early labor market outcomes for individuals entering the job market who were enrolled in social benefit programs as children and youth?^{cc}

Unemployment insurance data

Companies that are regulated and taxed by state governments are required to track and manage payroll data on their employees as part of their state's unemployment insurance program. Unemployment insurance data likely vary across states in terms of both data elements and accessibility. Typically, these data are housed in a state's department of labor.⁴⁹ The data may include information such as the number of weeks worked per quarter, quarterly earnings, the name of the employer, and the industry of the employer. However, each state collects different information, and in some states this data may not be available to researchers. Interested researchers should work closely with the state's labor department to determine which data elements are available for use in research.

National Directory of New Hires (NDNH)

The NDNH is a national database of wage and employment information.⁵⁰ NDNH is used primarily to help states administer programs that improve states' abilities to locate parents, establish paternity, and collect child support. While the available data vary by state, the database includes information about new hires (e.g., information about the employee and employer such as names and addresses), quarterly wage information, and information on individuals collecting unemployment benefits.^{dd} Researchers interested in accessing this information should contact the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support and Enforcement.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Publicly-available TANF data can be accessed at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/data-reports>.

⁴⁹ Publicly-available data on unemployment insurance can be found at <https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/DataDownloads.asp>.

⁵⁰ More information about the National Directory of New Hires can be found at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/resource/a-guide-to-the-national-directory-of-new-hires>.

⁵¹ More information about how to access National Directory of New Hires data can be found at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/resource/overview-of-national-directory-of-new-hires>.

Conclusion

Linking administrative data across multiple agencies and programs, both within and outside of ECE, can help address new questions that may inform policy, improve program operations, and generate new knowledge in the field. This resource provides an overview of the wide array of administrative data sources available. Researchers and state agency leaders must work together to develop a set of high-priority research questions, gain access to the data needed to answer the questions, link the data, analyze the data, and interpret the findings. Addressing broader, more complex questions from a wide array of data sources is a challenging undertaking; however, doing so may help researchers, policymakers, and state leaders better understand the children and families served by programs and gain new insights into the programs themselves.

Challenges to Consider

Linking administrative data has unique challenges. For example, linking children and families across data sources is easier when a unique identifier (ID) is present in each source (e.g., a state-generated unique ID). States with an integrated data system are more likely to have strategies for matching individuals and families across data sources. However, many programs may not have a unique ID or may not be able to share a unique ID for security reasons.

Additionally, the unit of analysis may differ across data sources (e.g., child-level data vs. family-level data). Accessing data may also be more complicated if the data are housed in multiple divisions or agencies. It is also important to protect the privacy and confidentiality of children and families participating in various programs. Further, researchers and state agency staff may need to establish data sharing agreements to access and use administrative data, which often take several months to develop.

For more information about developing data sharing agreements, see *Guidelines for Developing Data Sharing Agreements to Use State Administrative Data for Early Care and Education Research* accessible at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/guidelines_for_developing_data_sharing_agreements_508_7_16_18_508.pdf

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