



Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing and At Risk of Homelessness

Homeless Families with Young Children

While estimates vary day to day, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determines that about 194,716 people in families with children were homeless in January of 2016 (about 35% of the total homeless population).¹ Depending upon the definition of homeless (e.g., counting families doubled-up in overcrowded conditions, etc.), other estimates are far higher.²



Research: Impact of Homelessness on Children

- Infants are the most likely age group to have stayed in an emergency shelter in the past year.³
- Almost half of children in shelters are under age six.⁴
- Homelessness during pregnancy and in the early years is harmful to children's development.⁵



Families experiencing homelessness aren't just without housing. Many are affected by trauma, including domestic violence, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Homelessness itself can also be a traumatic experience.⁶ For young children, research has shown that toxic stress affects brain development, particularly in the earliest years from birth to age three when rapid brain development and wiring lays the foundation for future social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.⁷

These findings suggest that no single system can meet the needs of homeless families with young children.⁸ However, through the Child Care and Development Block Grant, states are making progress in developing strategies to better assist homeless families with young children – to connect them to services for which families and their children might be eligible, to connect them to initiatives across systems such as HUD's Continuums of Care, and to enroll children in high quality early care and education programs.

While homeless families with young children may have a broad array of needs, access to high quality child care and early learning programs represents a strategy that boosts the ability of parents to work while also promoting the healthy development of children.



The Child Care and Development Block Grant

In 2014, the Child Care and Development Block Grant was reauthorized (P.L. 113-186) by strong bipartisan majorities in the House and Senate. The new law requires states to develop their own strategies to better serve homeless children and calls for:

- Outreach to homeless families with children,
- Training and technical assistance on identifying and serving homeless children and their families,
- The coordination of services so that families with children can get the help that they need,
- A grace period or flexibility to obtain immunizations and other documents needed so that homeless children can be served more quickly, and
- Data reporting so that the number of homeless children who receive child care services is known.

Based on the FY2016-FY2018 Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) State Plans submitted to HHS, more than half of states (27 states) are already in compliance with the new law's requirements.⁹

States, such as Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming have developed interagency working groups, partnerships or added the McKinney-Vento State Coordinator to the State Advisory Council (SAC) on Early Childhood Education and Care. The purpose of the SACs is to promote broad statewide coordination and collaboration among early childhood initiatives and services to better meet the needs of young children.



Children who are homeless often fall below the radar for assistance – their parents may not know what help could be available in the community and staff working in community initiatives may not know about the location or circumstances of the children in order to conduct outreach and connect them to the help that they may need.

The Office of Child Care (OCC) released PDF copies of all approved FY 2016-2018 CCDF Plans that became effective June 1, 2016. The CCDF Plans offer a snapshot into current and planned efforts, initiatives and implementation plans for each State/Territory over the next two years through September 30, 2018. A chart of activities related to homelessness is attached.

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, November 2016. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2016-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

² ChildTrends, Homeless Children and Youth, October 2015. https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/112_Homeless_Children_and_Youth.pdf

³ Homeless Families Research Brief, OPRE Report No. 2017-06, January 2017.

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/opre_homefam_brief3_hhs_children_02_24_2017_b508.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See, for example, Center for Housing Policy and Children's Health Watch. (2015, June). *Compounding stress: The timing and duration effects of homelessness on children's health*. Sandel, M., Sheward, R., & Sturtevant, L. Retrieved from http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/Compounding-Stress_2015.pdf

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Department of Education Joint Policy Statement, Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness, October 2016.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/ecehomelessnesspolicystatement.pdf>

⁷ Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child. <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/> and <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>.

⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Department of Education Joint Policy Statement, Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness, October 2016.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/ecehomelessnesspolicystatement.pdf>

⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Summary of CCDF Implemented Requirements, Section 3.2.2 Improving Access to High Quality Child Care for Homeless Families, September 2016. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/summary-of-implemented-requirements>