

What are the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships?

The science of early childhood development clearly demonstrates that brain development is most rapid in the first years of life. Early childhood programs play a prime role in these formative years, in fact, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort, which followed a nationally representative group of children from infancy through their preschool years, found that nearly half of infants and toddlers in America were in some form of non-parental care^{1, 2}. Of infants in care, 75% of these were in low or mediocre quality care². Findings from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care found that children who were in high quality care from birth through 54 months, scored higher than their peers who were in consistently low-quality care, in language, reading, and math³. These studies, together with a growing body of research, indicate that children’s earliest experiences have profound impacts on brain development and child outcomes.

As part of President Obama’s Early Education Plan, we will support states and communities in expanding high quality early learning to over 100,000 infants and toddlers through the Early Head Start – Child Care Partnerships. Through these partnerships, Early Head Start grantees will partner with center-based and family child care providers who agree to meet Early Head Start Program Performance Standards and provide comprehensive, full-day, full year high-quality services to infants and toddlers from low-income families.

Research has shown that low-income children and families who attend high quality Early Head Start programs often fare better than their peers in a number of developmental domains. Despite this, at its current capacity, Early Head Start only serves about 4% of eligible children. That means that most of our lowest income children are not getting the support they need to excel in school and beyond.

The Child Care and Development Fund provides child care assistance to approximately 700,000 children birth through age three each month, a small portion of the children who are eligible. Children are served in a variety of settings, including child care centers and family child care homes. However, State child care standards vary widely and are often too low to promote healthy development and school readiness. In addition, CCDF payments in most States don’t adequately fund child care programs to provide high quality early learning environments for young children. Working together, HHS, States, and local providers have invested in quality initiatives like teacher scholarships

¹ Mulligan, G.M. and Flanagan, K.D. (2006). *Age 2: Findings From the 2-Year-Old Follow-up of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)* (NCES 2006-043). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

² Flanagan, K., and West, J. (2004). *Children Born in 2001: First Results From the Base Year of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)* (NCES 2005-036). U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

³ Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS. (2006). *The NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD): Findings for Children up to Age 4 1/2 Years (05-4318)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

and improvement grants, but we are far from our goal of creating more high quality spaces for infants and toddlers.

The Early Head Start- Child Care Partnerships will provide children and families with access to high-quality early learning experiences that support working families by providing a full-day, full-year program so that more vulnerable children have the healthy and enriching early experiences they need to realize their full potential.

In addition to high-quality early learning experiences, Early Head Start programs provide high quality comprehensive services that benefit children, families, and teachers, including:

- Health, developmental and behavioral screenings
- Higher health, safety, and nutrition standards
- Increased professional development opportunities for teachers
- Increased parent engagement opportunities

This initiative will complement the Preschool for All proposal administered by the U.S. Department of Education, as well as the Administration's proposal to extend and expand the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. Funds will be targeted to grantees and other eligible entities that propose a strong alignment with MIECHV and state preschool programs to create a birth to five trajectory for the neediest children. As more four year olds are served under Preschool for All, Head Start programs will be able to serve more children from birth through age three.

Applicants will compete for funds through the Early Head Start grant-making process. All entities currently eligible to apply for Early Head Start will be able to apply for Partnerships. This includes states, local governments, public and private non-profits, and for-profit agencies. Applicants will be encouraged to leverage other funding sources and form public/private partnerships to maximize the impact of federal funds. In addition to meeting the Early Head Start Performance Standards, programs will be funded based on the degree to which they partner with child care providers, especially those caring for children receiving a Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidy.

As a condition of the award, grantees implementing a Partnership will submit an organizational readiness plan that outlines implementation of all Early Head Start Performance Standards. The Office of Head Start, in collaboration with the Office of Child Care, will ensure that each grantee receives training and technical assistance to ensure that all standards are fully implemented to meet the deadlines in their organizational readiness plan. All grantees will be expected to be operating in full compliance with all standards after an initial startup period of 18 months. The grantees will be subject to Early Head Start accountability with onsite reviews and with visits to child care partners to ensure that they are in compliance and getting to full Early Head Start standards within 18 months. This approach will ensure that there are adequate supports to reach and sustain high quality standards and accountability.

Prospective grantees will have the opportunity to make large scale change in their communities and to the early childhood development field at large. By incentivizing eligible entities to apply for partnership grants, the federal government is raising the quality of care for the neediest children

served across Early Head Start and Child Care, providing more of our nation's lowest income children with the foundational skills they need to climb the ladders of opportunity and reach their full potential.