

Baby Steps to Improving and Expanding Infant and Toddler Child Care in Philadelphia

Key Findings



Families receiving subsidies still face out-of-pocket payments – as high as \$4,950 per year



Philadelphia has a 57% shortage of infant/toddler child care slots – as many as 39,500 children aged 0-3 may be missing out on high-quality child care



Approximately 17,000 Philadelphia infants and toddlers eligible for child care subsidies are unserved



An average of \$7,150 per child is needed to close the gap between state subsidy and the cost of high-quality child care in Philadelphia

Special Thanks

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Thanks to:

Center for American Progress

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About the Task Force

The Philadelphia Infant Toddler Task Force spent countless hours over 18 months to help build an evidence-based early childhood education platform for children from newborn to age 3.

This committed group of professionals was comprised of 55 members representing 45 local, regional and statewide agencies and providers.

Seventeen high-quality child-care providers representing home and group care and centers participated in the planning process and were integral members of a cost of care study, a supply and demand survey project, and the creation of five case studies.

Twenty-four percent of providers engaged in the planning process are family providers.

A full list of participants can be found on the last page of this report.

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Executive Summary

Parents know how important their child's first years are. Beginning as a helpless infant they grow in just a few short years into a toddler who can walk, talk and reason, opening his and her world to new experiences that shape their intellect and personality.

In recent years, science has confirmed what parents have known by instinct. The latest research has confirmed that a child's brain grows faster from birth to age three than in any other period in life, building the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. The evidence is unequivocal: What happens during the first months and years of life matters a lot.

The realities of the American economy usually preclude a parent from spending months, let alone years, at home caring for a new child. Paid maternity, paternity or adoption leave is not widespread. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 62 percent of women who have had babies in the last 12 months are in the labor force. Nearly half of them (49 percent) live in households at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Families with lower incomes must confront three problems in finding care outside the home for their infant or toddler: cost, quality and availability. The estimated annual cost per child in Philadelphia in a full-day, full-year high-quality child care center is \$25,000 for an infant and averages \$17,500 for a toddler. These prices are out of reach for a family of three at the 200 percent mark for poverty, which is an income of \$41,500 a year.

Pennsylvania does provide child care subsidies for lower income parents who qualify, but child care subsidies do not come close to covering the cost of high-quality care. There are 122,770 infants and toddlers in the state whose parents qualify for state subsidies, but only 27,907 receive and are enrolled in child care program. Philadelphia is home to 26,380 infants and toddlers eligible for state subsidy, but only 9,650 (37%) are enrolled in subsidized child care. And of that total, roughly 2,200 are cared for at child care provider sites rated as high-quality by the state, with a PA Keystone STAR 3 or 4 rating.

There is not enough state aid to meet the demand of the eligible 0-3 population; the aid that is granted falls short of the true cost of providing quality care; and as a result, there are not enough providers at the STAR 3 or 4 level. The consequence? Low-income parents are effectively precluded from access to the high-quality care that will make the most difference for their child.



Let's be clear: It is not the state's role to rear children; that is the sole purview of parents. But, just as the state invests in creating jobs, it should invest in the future of today's infants and toddlers by helping all parents overcome obstacles to enrolling their children in high-quality child care. This involves providing additional money – not only to subsidize more children but to also support more providers to reach high-quality status because every child deserves a fair chance.

Here's what can happen if we make sure the families who are low and mid-income can afford high-quality care for their babies and toddlers: Children get a strong start in life and their parents can work and know their child's development is being nourished.

None of this can be accomplished overnight. Instead, we propose a strategic plan to increase the number of STAR 3 and 4 providers, so they serve at least 75% of all income-eligible infants and toddlers, up from the current 23%.

The following report spells out the specifics of the plan. It will not be easy to put into place and it will require moving on several fronts at the same time by involving elected officials, businesses, educators, child care providers, community stakeholders - and especially parents and families. Every child deserves an equal opportunity to a quality educational foundation that will prepare them to grow, learn and succeed. One question some may ask: How can we afford the time, effort and resources needed? The answer is: How can we afford not to, when our children's future is at stake?

Introduction

Parents know how important their child's first years are, as they grow from helpless infants into toddlers who can walk, talk and reason, opening their worlds to new experiences that shape their intellect and personality.

We know the best practices for early child-care providers. The list includes caring, highly qualified teachers; low adult-to-child ratios; comprehensive curricula; and a safe, engaging environment to support the whole child. Health, nutrition and early intervention practices are also essential elements of a high-quality early education.

Traditionally, we've focused on adequate preschool and prekindergarten experiences. Science now tells us that we have overlooked the crucial years between birth and three. Recent research confirms that a child's brain grows faster in this three-year period than at any stage of development, building the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health.

The evidence is unequivocal: What happens during the first years of life matters a lot.



Investments made in a child's early years will maximize the commitments already made in pre-K, offering better prepared students.



A 2016 report “From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts” from Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child made this crucial point:

“A remarkable expansion of new knowledge about brain development in the early years of life, linked to advances in the behavioral and social sciences, is now giving us deeper insights into how early experiences are built into our bodies, with lasting impacts on learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health...”



Harvard researchers urged that “breakthrough impacts” can only come through new emphasis on infants and toddlers. The report calls for “attending to a missing niche in the field—new strategies in the prenatal-to-three period for families.”

Early childhood education advocates in Philadelphia are ready to meet that challenge. As partners of Start Strong PA—a statewide advocacy campaign to increase access to affordable, high-quality child care for Pennsylvania’s families and their children through policy and investment, starting with infants and toddlers—we are poised to build an evidence-based, early childhood education platform for children from newborn to age 3. Our goal is to tap these key years of a child’s learning and development, expanding the learning pipeline to include infants and toddlers.

While preschool programs can prepare children to do well in school, high-quality infant and toddler programs can provide our children with a steady foundation and a greater chance of succeeding in life.

Investments made in a child’s early years will maximize the commitments already made in pre-K, offering better prepared students. They will ensure that the youngest members of society are flourishing physically and mentally and are ready for pre-K. By helping families give their toddlers the social, emotional, and learning tools they’ll need for school, we can create healthy, safe and stable learning environments for all children.

This commitment in the earliest years will yield dividends as a new generation of children grow into mature students, better friends and, later, better parents. When all children start with a fair chance to learn, our schools will finally have a fair chance to succeed.

The Situation Today

There are not enough high-quality child care slots for Philadelphia's children.

According to PA's Kids Count Data Center, there are 63,165 infants and toddlers in Philadelphia today. One out of four live in lower-income families where the annual earnings are at 200% of poverty or less. (Two-hundred percent equals \$41,560 in income a year for a family of three, \$50,200 for a family of four.)

Over 26,300 (42%) of these children live in families where their parents work and are eligible for a state program that provides a child care subsidy. The state budget has money set aside for the Child Care Works (CCW) Program, but the amount allocated falls far short of meeting the need. Only one out of three eligible infants and toddlers receive subsidies.

Of the 9,650 infants and toddlers who get subsidies in Philadelphia, nearly seven percent are enrolled with family providers, another four percent with group providers and the majority – 89% – are enrolled in child care centers.

There is a shortage of child care slots in Philadelphia according to a summer 2019 report by The Reinvestment Fund (TRF). In this report, which estimates supply and demand for infant and toddler child care in Philadelphia, TRF highlights a citywide shortage of infant and toddler slots of 57%. If every infant and toddler in the city needed child care, then the city would have to create a little over 39,500 additional slots to reach possible demand.

Further compounding the overall shortage is the lack of high-quality slots available to families with infants and toddlers. The state rates child care providers from one to four using the Keystone STARS system, a program for operators that is grounded on an evaluation based on four factors: staff education, learning environment, leadership management and family and community partnerships.

The higher the rating, the better the environment, learning, staffing and security for children.

Of the 9,650 infants and toddlers who get child care subsidies in Philadelphia, about 2,200 (23%) are enrolled with providers rated STAR 3 or 4. To look at it another way, of the 26,380 babies eligible for a state subsidy in Philadelphia, only eight percent end up getting high-quality care.

The chart on the next page illustrates the number and percentages of Philadelphia providers who served children under 5 enrolled in subsidy in 2016. But more importantly, it highlights the urgency by which we must address the issue of the lack of high-quality child care in Philadelphia. An astounding 77% of infants and toddlers are enrolled in subsidized child care programs not meeting high-quality standards.



There is a shortage of child care slots in Philadelphia...a little over 39,500 children could be missing out.

Compounding the overall shortage is the lack of high-quality slots available to families with infants and toddlers.



TABLE #1: PHILADELPHIA PROVIDERS SERVING CHILDREN UNDER FIVE, ENROLLED IN SUBSIDY (2016)

Total # Providers (ALL TYPES) 1,615	# Providers not yet meeting high quality	% Providers not yet meeting high quality	# Providers meeting high quality (STAR 3 & 4)	% Providers meeting high quality (STAR 3 & 4)
Center-Based Providers Total: 973	718	74%	255	26%
Group Child Care Providers Total: 178	160	90%	18	10%
Family Child Care Providers Total 464	398	86%	66	14%

In Philadelphia there are simply not enough high-quality providers offering the kind of care that makes a lasting difference. The issue is affordability and availability and children lose out because of it. That’s why we need to make sure that Philadelphia families can afford high-quality care for their infants and toddlers. Even middle-income families struggle to pay for the cost of high-quality care they know is best for their children.

Affordability

As all parents know – rich, poor and in between – child care is costly. The most expensive is year-round, full-day care for an infant in a high-quality child care center in the Philadelphia region, which costs about \$25,000 according to a cost of care study commissioned by the Philadelphia Infant Toddler Task Force and completed by the Center for American Progress in 2018.

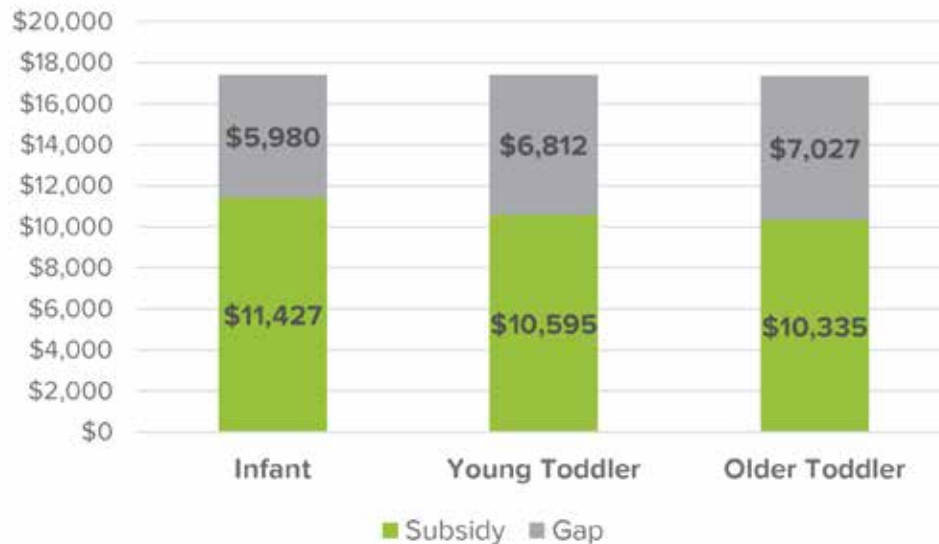
Parents earning \$50,000 a year or less cannot afford high-quality care. Even those who get subsidies face out-of-pocket payments as high as \$4,950 per year. And, because of their inability to pay for high-quality child care, families gravitate to providers who have not yet reached quality, with cost and availability driving their decisions. In addition to families paying high co-pays, providers are faced with even higher costs based on our current subsidy system.

We also know that parents must quickly return to work because their workplace only offers unpaid parental leave. To use one example, the average family income in Philadelphia is \$48,055, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Can a family with an income at that level afford to forgo eight to 12 weeks of pay to tend to an infant? Can they even afford two to four weeks, unless they use up vacation time and sick days to do it?

CHART 1: GAP BETWEEN ANNUAL COST PER CHILD AND CURRENT SUBSIDY, STAR 4 CHILD CARE CENTER AT HIGHER STAFF SALARIES



CHART 2: GAP BETWEEN ANNUAL COST OF QUALITY AND CURRENT SUBSIDY, STAR 4 CHILD CARE HOME AT HIGHER STAFF SALARIES



Both charts assume teachers earning a higher average salary than they do today, which we consider crucial to drawing a talented, educated and skilled workforce to the child care sector.

Behind this swirl of numbers are the stories of thousands of parents wrestling with the issue of child care. Parents want the best for their children but are forced to make painful decisions based on their ability to pay, even if they qualify for subsidies. For example, an infant or toddler may be left with a neighborhood caregiver who can be loving and attentive or who may spend half their day watching television while the child lolls in a crib or playpen. Worse still, infants and toddlers end up in child care settings where there are few activities and where they are supervised by an underpaid and ill-trained staff.

Two Important Threads

One main thread that runs through this report is the crucial role parents play. Babies experience the world mostly through their primary caregivers – their parents. As a child’s first teacher, everyday occurrences provide excellent opportunities to enhance a baby’s development. A parent’s consistent, loving care offers their child a sense of security that allows him or her to thrive – socially, emotionally, intellectually and behaviorally. Every parental action and spoken word sets an example and is stored in a child’s developing brain. The importance of these interactions is significant to a child’s sense of security, confidence, and social awareness throughout early life. No amount of formal teaching can compare to the influences a parent has on their child.

Unfortunately, without substantial resources or paid family leave, most parents must return to the workforce due to financial necessity. This means that their babies are cared for by someone else for upwards of 10 hours per day all year long. That’s a considerable amount of time a child is away from their primary teacher – and it is why high-quality child care matters.

A second thread is the important role child care providers play. High-quality infant toddler teachers are both physically and emotionally engaged, providing sincere, responsive, and predictable care. They provide a steady stream of dialogue and emotional communication that is positive and warm – often narrating what is happening, explaining, and giving notice for changes in activities when caring for children.

Early care environments offering high-quality programs have the largest positive impact on infants, toddlers and their families. In addition, families facing economic troubles and other toxic factors at home have an even greater need for support for their children. High-quality child care can help bridge the gap to resources and services that support young children’s developmental health and adequately prepare them for school.



It’s hard to accomplish anything without a plan. Like any major initiative, we need a strategic plan, a road map that will help us get to our goals. The following plan lays out how we will accomplish that.



If we are serious about providing high-quality early learning and care for our most vulnerable infants and toddlers, we must increase the amount of state subsidy. With additional money and adequate subsidies, we can meet the needs of all babies.



Baby Steps Toward Bold Goals

There is a significant gap between what it costs to provide high-quality child care and what is subsidized by the state. If we are serious about providing high-quality early learning and care for our most vulnerable infants and toddlers, then we must increase the amount of state subsidy to ensure providers can attract and retain high-quality teachers who can deliver best practices.



With additional money and adequate subsidies, courageous leadership at the state and local level, and with actionable support from our citizen champions, we can grow the early childhood education business sector, create a pipeline of highly-qualified and well-trained infant/toddler teachers, and we can meet the needs of all babies by ensuring appropriate and adequate support through program services.

These are ambitious goals, but they can be attained if we focus our shared resources and expertise. Political will – and leadership – is essential.

As adults, we are aware of our obligation both to our children and our society as a whole. Education is at the core of our future and science has revealed the importance of the earliest years to learning. But scientists cannot implement the changes they recommend. Children lack the power to do it themselves.

As citizens of this City the task falls to us. It is a daunting task that will require effort and sacrifice. Like everything in life, we need the child care system and programs to be efficient and effective. But, if some ask: How can we afford the time, effort and resources needed? We answer: How can we afford not to, when our children's future is at stake?

Improving the Child Care Landscape in Philadelphia Begins at the State Level

The goals below are statewide, system-encompassing and are designed to support all working families and their children. To move towards a high-quality child care system that supports all working families, Pennsylvania must:



1. Stabilize the child care subsidy system to ensure all parents have access to affordable, high-quality child care.

Increase the base subsidy rate closer to market rates so more working families have access and pay less for high-quality child care

Fund tiered reimbursement rates for high-quality care at the true cost of care

Direct funding to STAR 2 providers working towards high-quality to boost capacity in the child care sector



2. Grow the early childhood education business sector to increase the availability of high-quality child care slots for the roughly 95,000 eligible infants and toddlers currently unserved in Pennsylvania.

Create a statewide business development center to increase the number of centers and home and group-based providers offering high-quality care

Grow the number of early learning providers to adequately serve all infants and toddlers who are dual language learners in Pennsylvania

Commission facility studies in high-need areas to find expansion opportunities and identify zoning barriers

Align child care regulations and licensing processes between local and state agencies



3. Build the early childhood education workforce pipeline that results in enough highly qualified, well-trained infant and toddler teachers for every classroom.

Ensure the inclusion of infant/toddler coursework in academic programs for early childhood education

Utilize current early learning workforce data to determine full-scale workforce needs and create a training plan

Create an industry cluster framework within the Department of Labor and Industry and utilize Workforce Investment Act funding for Child Development Associate (CDA) Credentials and apprenticeship training programs

Create and fund functioning career pathways that begin in high school and grow the workforce

Improve access to higher learning opportunities for incumbent staff by offering nontraditional hours, online classes, and other methods of expanding learning opportunities

Establish a state data-collection system to gauge progress



4. Improve the quality of services for infants/toddlers in underserved communities

Increase and improve services for all infants and toddlers who are dual language learners (DLL)

Create a robust community of practice offering training modules and toolkits to help prepare new and incumbent teachers within the Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) framework

Offer financial incentives to STAR 2 providers that serve high numbers of dual language learners in efforts to boost quality

Strengthen the state technical assistance infrastructure to impart dual language learning best practices and training

Improve early intervention services for children 0-3

Set performance-based contracts with local entities responsible for early intervention services to promote effective enrollment and transition policies



4. Improve the quality of services for infants/toddlers in underserved communities (continued)

Provide lingual and culturally matched family navigators to support a child's transition through programs

Build parent resource centers that offers online resources and roadmaps

Ensure all infant/toddler teachers are trained in critical areas of early detection

Implement Help Me Grow or similar initiative that coordinates family and provider outreach, as well as screenings, referrals, and follow-up for children

Pilot the systemic assignment of consolidated therapist pools in three large early education centers with high numbers of children receiving early intervention services

Ending Expulsions and Suspensions

Expand the Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) program to meet demand in high-needs communities

Replicate a rapid response model designed to secure a child's placement with his/her child care provider prior to expulsion in high-need counties

Expand the use of the ECE Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model

Create a data collection process and publish an annual expulsion report by regional agencies and infant/toddler care programs to ensure transparency, set baselines and identify trends

To the extent that providers need to suspend children, state policy must mandate referrals for screening and an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) if warranted



**Baby steps citizens can take to help make
a difference for infants and toddlers:**

**Take action today and join the Start Strong PA
campaign as a supporter at www.startstrongpa.org
and follow them on social media @startstrongpa.**



Next Steps for Philadelphia

- Formalize the Philadelphia Infant Toddler Task Force (PITTF) to serve as an advocacy hub to ensure that key strategies outlined in this report achieve greater community buy-in, build public will towards closing the gap to high-quality child care and moves the recommendations toward implementation
- Create a parent advisory board that provides parental and family perspective regarding child care policies and that guides the PITTF on how best to engage parents in the public debate regarding high-quality child care
- Present and align the strategies outlined in this plan for adoption to A Running Start Philadelphia, the city's early learning plan for Philadelphia's children
- Form a Philadelphia cross-sector task force that identifies strategies between early intervention and child care systems for service integration and clear system pathways and access points for all stakeholders including parents
- Work with the Mayor's office to establish within the Philadelphia Commerce Department a child care business services center with a dedicated, full-time coordinator to serve as a primary contact person to serve the over 1,600 child care providers operating in Philadelphia

The Philadelphia Infant Toddler Task Force

The Philadelphia Infant Toddler Task Force spent countless hours over 18 months to help build an evidence-based early childhood education platform for children from newborn to age 3. This committed group of professionals was comprised of 55 members representing 45 local, regional and statewide agencies and providers. Seventeen high-quality child-care providers representing home and group care and centers participated in the planning process and were integral members of a cost of care study, a supply and demand survey project, and the creation of five case studies. Twenty-four percent of providers engaged in the planning process are family providers. A full list of participants is found on the next page.

Members of the Infant Toddler Task Force

1199-C Training and Upgrading Fund: Teresa Collins

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PennAEYC: Jodi Askins and Jen DeBell

Trying Together: Cara Ciminillo and Lissa Geiger Shulman

Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) serves as the leading child advocacy organization working to improve the lives and life chances of children in the region.

Through thoughtful and informed advocacy, community education, targeted service projects and budget analysis, PCCY watches out and speaks out for children and families. PCCY undertakes specific and focused projects in areas affecting the healthy growth

and development of children, including child care, public education, child health, juvenile justice and child welfare.

Founded in 1980 as Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, our name was changed in 2007 to better reflect our expanded work in the counties surrounding Philadelphia. PCCY remains a committed advocate and an independent watchdog for the well-being of all our children.

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