



AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE ROADMAP

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ProGov21 is a shared resource for progressive local policy makers and advocates alike. Operated and maintained by COWS, a national think-and-do tank based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ProGov21 offers a fully searchable digital library of progressive policies, practices, and other resources for 21st century local government.

The Problems & Progressive Local Solutions

Early childhood education and care in the United States includes part-day to full-work-day programs, delivered through educational, social welfare, or commercial enterprises and funded through both the public and private sector. These programs can be designed to emphasize care, education, or equally emphasize both factors. Child care is critically important to America's present and future. Healthy child development requires high-quality care: low quality care raises stress levels in young children and is associated with learning and other developmental difficulties. The impact of high quality child care is so large that every dollar spent on early child care education (ECE) yields a public benefit of between three and seven dollars. The American economy depends on child care because most parents work: 69.3 percent of married mothers work outside the home, as do 75.3 percent of unmarried mothers, 93.5 percent of married fathers, and 87 percent of unmarried fathers.

Today, we are struggling to meet child care needs as a nation. Access to child care is limited by affordability (with many women in low-wage work spending 30 percent or more of their income on child care), provider locations and transportation options, and a lack of stable care or care during non-standard work hours. Child care workers have historically been devalued and underpaid, which destabilizes the workforce and reduces the quality of care.



However, there are steps local governments can take to improve child care. This roadmap provides an introduction to strategies that can make a difference, such as publicly funded child care, shared services alliances for home-based providers, and creating wage supports and career ladders for child care workers.

Available Local Levers & Current Reforms

In order to expand equitable access to high-quality child care, comprehensive child care reform must simultaneously increase the supply of affordable child care and support the child care workforce. Local governments can effectively increase child care supply by establishing publicly funded universal child care programs that provide free care to any enrolled child. Boston's Universal Pre-K program and New York City's Pre-K for All are model examples of these policies in action. In municipalities where it is not possible or feasible to create such programs, cities and counties can subsidize child care for low-income families. Similar to universal child care programs, subsidized child care programs are also funded through public dollars (i.e. dedicated taxes, levies).

San Antonio's subsidized pre-K program and Aspen's Kids First program are funded through dedicated sales taxes, and Seattle's successful ballot initiative, Proposition 1B, funds subsidized preschool through a property-tax levy. Additionally, many localities have allocated COVID-19 recovery funds into child care support, including the City of Austin and Travis County, which allocated \$11 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to increase access to affordable quality child care.

Many families struggle to find adequate child care due to their lack of proximity to child care centers or providers' lack of capacity. Local governments can take steps to address lack of access to child care by supporting family child care providers, who offer care in residential settings. Home-based providers are often the only care option in rural and low-income communities, and they are also more likely to be open during non-traditional hours. The most effective way cities and counties can support family child care providers is by investing in shared services alliances. A shared services alliance is a "partnership between child care providers working together to share costs and deliver services in a streamlined and efficient way"; examples of shared services alliances include Seattle's Sound Child Care Solutions and Fairfax's Infant Toddler Family Day Care. These partnerships can help reduce costs and improve operations, reducing the strain experienced by home-based providers. Other solutions can be found in the

Administration for Children and Families and USDA's joint resource guide to strengthen and expand child care facilities in rural communities.

While the aforementioned reforms improve affordability and availability, they fail to ensure better compensation for early care and education (ECE) workers. As a result, further reforms should be established alongside universal and subsidized child care programs to improve wages and benefits for child care workers. Local governments can address this by enacting compensation parity policies between early care and education workers and K-3 teachers. This has been done in New York City, where ECE workers receive compensation equivalent to their similarly-educated K-3 counterparts, and in San Antonio, where ECE workers receive higher salaries than K-3 teachers. Cities and counties like Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and Berkeley, have also enacted living wage ordinances to raise wages throughout the workforce. On top of raising their minimum wage, San Francisco developed the WAGES+ or C-WAGES program to increase wages for child care workers by establishing targeted wage subsidies. Further, ECE workers can be supported through policies not targeted to earnings. Local governments should act to protect ECE workers' right to collective bargaining and to increase their qualifications. Apprenticeships and scholarships, like the Early Educator Center-Based Apprenticeship in Los Angeles and Family Child Care Provider On-the-Job

Training Programs in San Fernando Valley and Alameda County, can pave the way to more lucrative jobs within the ECE workforce. Ultimately, through increased support for child care workers, local governments can reduce turnover and retain and/or create high-quality educators.

Taking it to the Next Level

While pre-K is not a one-size-fits-all solution to child care, universal pre-K programs that are accessible, high-quality, and free at the point of service are daycare alternatives that significantly improve educational, economic and health outcomes, and decrease achievement gaps. These programs enjoy widespread public support, and have community-wide benefits. The National Institute for Early Education Research has published a guide on funding strategies that cities can use to support their pre-K programs. This resource examines strategies that cities across the country have used to fund pre-K, including parcel taxes, private donations, and sales taxes. See ProGov21's Education Roadmap for more on universal pre-K.

Allies, Comrades, and Helpers

Center for American Progress

The Center for American Progress offer various resources on early childhood, including a useful blueprint for childcare reform.

National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)

NIEER conducts academic research to inform policy supporting high-quality, early education for all young children

Child Care Aware of America

Child Care Aware of America is a national nonprofit organization working to improve affordability, accessibility, development and learning of children in childcare.

Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE)

(CSCCE) conducts research and develops policy solutions to support and reward for early care and education workers.

We continue the conversation around affordable childcare on **ProGov21's Podcast**. Our most recent episode discusses fair compensation for early childhood educators and features experts Wanzi Muruvi and Annie Dade from the Center for the Study of Childcare Employment.

Listen to our podcast on, our website, Spotify, Apple Music, or Amazon Music.

