

March 25, 2021

Ensuring Quality Care for All Children in the State Budget

As we emerge from a generational crisis, child care access will help all families share in our state's recovery and that young children are spending time learning and connecting with others. However, even before the pandemic, child care barriers kept thousands of parents out of work or under-employed. Less than half of Michigan families live near affordable, licensed care, and many more who are already eligible for payment support through Michigan's child care program – families working at odd hours, with infants or toddlers, in school or training, or involved with family preservation services – deal with additional access barriers.

For families already eligible for payment support through [Michigan's child care program](#), the below-market-rate payment for providers makes it difficult for quality providers, especially [family, friends, and neighbors](#), to serve eligible children. And for families like foster parents whose children may require adults to be particularly prepared to meet behavioral and emotional needs without burning out, providers with access to these supports are even scarcer. [Michigan's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant \(IECMHC\) program](#) has been proven to help providers support infant mental health, but this program is limited by funding to select counties.

Over \$1 billion in federal funds dedicated for child care are available to our state's leaders through the American Rescue Plan Act. Michigan's goal must be supporting access to quality care for the families who need it most. To recover and reopen, child care is an essential priority.

Recommendations:

1. Bring child care payments in line with the cost of care, paid by enrollment instead of attendance, and enact a wage supplement for child caregivers towards a living wage.
2. Establish contract arrangements with child care providers with an enhanced payment rate to guarantee child care slots for underserved eligible families.
3. Invest in expanding the IECMHC program statewide, which would cost \$6.6 million.
4. Provide dedicated network and service support for family, friend, or neighbor caregivers.