

REMOVING CHILDCARE BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S WORKPLACE PARTICIPATION

YWCA believes that access to quality, affordable child care and early education is crucial for women's successful participation in the workforce. Child care and early education programs help parents obtain and retain employment and further their education, while promoting child development and school readiness. Accordingly, since 1868, YWCA has provided early childhood programs for millions of children across the United States.

Unfortunately, while women's participation in the labor force has steadily grown since the 1950s, this growth has been hindered by a lack of access to these crucial community resources and programs. For too many parents, finding quality, affordable, accessible child care and early education programs is difficult. Many families earn too much to qualify for financial assistance, yet struggle with the high cost of child care on top of meeting basic needs like paying for housing and food. Many low-income families also struggle with the additional challenge of needing care for their children during nontraditional hours such as evenings or weekends, or lacking quality care in their communities.

Child care and early learning programs, and financial assistance for these programs, are critical resources for all women, but they are particularly important for women of color who face additional compounding challenges related to racial discrimination and systemic disparities.

YWCA Position:

YWCA supports improving access to quality, affordable, and accessible early childhood programs as a means of reducing barriers to successful workplace participation by women, particularly women of color, and providing children with culturally sensitive, developmentally appropriate activities that enable them to succeed in school. To this end, YWCA supports legislation, budget proposals, and public policies at the federal, state, and local levels which improve the quality, accessibility, and affordability of child care and early education programs.

BACKGROUND

Child care and early education programs are a vital support for women in the workforce, particularly women of color, many of whom are a primary source of financial support for their families.

- Half of all households in the U.S. with children under age 18 have a breadwinner mother who is either a single mother who heads a household, or a married mother who provides at least 40 percent of a family's earnings.ⁱ More than four in five Black mothers (81.1 percent), 67.1 percent of Native American mothers, and 52.5 percent of Latina mothers are breadwinners.ⁱⁱ Many of these women are raising families on their own (60.9 percent of

Black mothers, 44.2 percent of Native American mothers, and 31.2 percent of Latina mothers).ⁱⁱⁱ

- Women of color who are mothers of young children participate in the workforce at high rates. More than half of Asian and Hispanic, 60 percent of White, and 70 percent of Black mothers whose youngest children are under three years old work.^{iv} These labor participation rates increase to almost 60 percent for Asian, 60 percent for Hispanic, more than 65 percent for White, and almost 80 percent for Black mothers whose youngest children are age three to five years old.^v
- When mothers receive help affording child care, they are more likely to obtain and maintain employment, and are better able to support their families and gain financial security. One study found that single mothers of young children were 60 percent more likely to still be employed after two years if they received financial assistance for child care.^{vi}

Conversely, a lack of reliable, high quality, affordable child care and early learning programs undermine women's success in the workforce. This challenge is particularly acute for women of color.

- The cost of child care and early learning programs is a significant barrier for low- and moderate-income families.
 - The average annual cost of center-based care is approximately \$18,000^{vii} – 49 percent of the median income for a typical Black family, 40 percent of the median income for a Latinx family, and 23 percent of the median income for a typical Asian family.^{viii}
 - The high cost of child care means that a full-time, full-year minimum-wage worker with one child would have to devote all her earnings, forty hours per week from January to September, towards childcare.^{ix} Two-thirds of low-wage workers are women, nearly half of whom are women of color.^x Thirty percent of low-wage female workers are supporting children.^{xi}
 - The high cost of child care also impacts moderate-income families: two-parent working families that earn between \$48,600 (200 percent of the federal poverty level)^{xii} and \$56,500^{xiii} (the national median household income) are spending 32 to 37 percent of their total family income on child care.
 - High child care costs negatively impact mothers' employment, making them more likely to leave employment and less likely to start new jobs.^{xiv}
- Availability of child care is another significant barrier.
 - A 2016 report by the Center for American Progress found that more than half of the Latinx population across eight reviewed states lived in "child care deserts."^{xv}
 - Child care deserts are also especially prevalent in low-income communities, and among families with irregular or nontraditional work schedules,^{xvi} which have high concentrations of women and families of color.
- Even when child care services are available, they often don't match the needs of working families.
 - Notably, women of color are less likely to benefit from flexible work

arrangements^{xvii} and are more likely to work nonstandard or variable hours, making finding child care more difficult since a majority of center-based and even family-based care are only available during standard work hours.^{xviii} For example, a five-state study found that only 26 percent of family child care and 9 percent of center-based care was provided during evenings and weekends.^{xix}

- In a recent poll, 36 percent of Black women and 45 percent of Latinas reported difficulty at work due to a lack of reliable child care.^{xx} Furthermore, a majority of Black women and Latinas reported that “reliable child care when you need it,” “high quality, in-home child care,” “high quality child care center in your neighborhood or near work,” and “affordable child care” were out of reach for them.^{xxi}

Far too few low- and moderate-income families, particularly families of color, receive the financial assistance they are eligible for to help cover the cost of child care.

- Federal funding through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the primary vehicle for assisting low- and moderate-income working families in securing the child care needed to participate in the workforce, has not kept pace with growing populations of young children, with disparate impacts on families of color. For instance:
 - The South and Southwest have experienced rapid growth in their Black and Latinx child populations in the last decade—up to 10 percent. However, CCDBG funding levels have remained flat, leaving many families of color without access to financial assistance.^{xxii}
 - Only 21 percent of eligible Black children, 8 percent of eligible Latinx children, 6 percent of eligible American Indian / Alaska Native children, and 11 percent of Asian children are served by CCDBG. ^{xxiii}
 - CCDBG access by race/ethnicity also varies across states. For example, in 2015 the share of Black children served by CCDBG ranged from 3 percent in Maine to 42 percent in Pennsylvania; for Latinx children, 1 percent in Mississippi to 12 percent in New Jersey; for American Indian / Alaska Native children, less than 1 percent in Hawaii to 43 percent in Arizona; and for Asian children, 1 percent in Arizona, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota, to 73 percent in New York.^{xxiv}
- State eligibility practices can also limit the availability of child care assistance. For example, restrictions around the documentation of work schedules make it difficult or impossible for families with variable working hours – common among families of color, particularly Latinx families – to participate in CCDBG-funded child care programs.^{xxv}
- Language barriers may also impede access to financial assistance for child care. A U.S. Government Accountability Office study found that limited English proficiency could severely impact whether parents were aware of the availability of child care assistance.^{xxvi}

Moreover, inadequate funding for Head Start and Early Head Start leaves affordable, quality child care and early learning programs out of reach for many working families.

- Inadequate funding levels have led to many children of color not receiving the Head Start and Early Head Start services they are otherwise eligible for.

- Nationally, only 54 percent of eligible Black children, 38 percent of eligible Hispanic/Latinx children, and 36 percent of eligible Asian children are served by Head Start preschools.^{xxvii}
- Access to Head Start services varies among racial and ethnic groups by state. For instance, only 28 percent of eligible Black preschoolers receive services in Arizona, compared to 100 percent of eligible Black preschoolers in Mississippi.^{xxviii}
- Early Head Start shows even lower enrollment levels for children of color, with only 6 percent of eligible Black infants and toddlers, 5 percent of eligible Latinx infants and toddlers, and 4 percent of eligible Asian infants and toddlers enrolled.^{xxix}
- Children of color, particularly Black children, are also less likely to have access to high quality child care and early learning programs.
 - A national Center for Education Statistics study found that while 40 percent of White children were enrolled in center-based classrooms rated as “high” quality, only 25 percent of Black children were in classroom with the same rating.^{xxx} In addition, 15 percent of Black children attended child care centers where the quality was ranked as “low,” nearly twice the rate of Latinx and White children.^{xxxi}
 - The same study found that only 26 percent of Head Start programs serving Black children were considered “high” quality, compared to 43 percent of those serving Latinx and 48 percent of those serving White children.^{xxxii}
 - Latinx and Black children in family-care centers fared even worse: more than 50 percent of these children were in settings rated as “low” quality, compared to only 30 percent for White children.^{xxxiii}

POLICY RESPONSES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- Increase funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start, and Early Head Start to make child care assistance available to all eligible low- and moderate-income families who need it.
- Increase payment rates to child care providers serving families receiving child care assistance to cover the costs of providing high-quality child care – including the costs to hire and retain well-qualified staff who can foster children’s early learning, to purchase books and toys, and to maintain facilities.
- Ensure that data collection on the availability, accessibility and quality of child care and early education programs adequately documents the experience of underserved communities, particularly children of color.
- Assess eligibility policies and practices (e.g., workplace documentation requirements, implementation of 12-month eligibility periods) to ensure they do not have a disparate impact on families of color.
- Increase the ability of low- and moderate- income families to utilize the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) by making it refundable, increasing the sliding scale, and raising the expense limits so that it covers a greater proportion of a family’s child care costs.

ⁱ Institute for Women’s Policy Research. (September 2016). *Breadwinner Mothers by Race/Ethnicity and State*. Retrieved 10 January 2017 from: <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/breadwinner-mothers-by-race-ethnicity-and-state/>.

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- ii Id.
- iii Id.
- iv Department of Labor. (April 2016). The Economic Status of Women of Color: A Snapshot. Retrieved 30 March 2017 from https://www.dol.gov/wb/resources/economic_status_women_of_color.pdf (“Labor force participation rate of mothers by age of youngest child, race and Hispanic ethnicity, 2015 annual averages”).
- v Id.
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- viii U.S. Census Bureau. (2016). Real Median Household Income by Race and Hispanic Origin 1967 to 2015. Retrieved 30 March 2017 from <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/visualizations/p60/256/figure1.pdf>.
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- xii Families USA. (2016). Federal Poverty Guidelines. Retrieved 30 March 2017 from <http://familiesusa.org/product/federal-poverty-guidelines>.
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- xv Defined as, “a zip code with at least 30 children under the age of 5 and either no child care centers or so few centers that there are more than three times as many children under age 5 as there are spaces in centers.” Malik, R. et al., (October 2016). Child Care Deserts: An Analysis of Child Care Centers by Zip Code in Eight States. Retrieve 30 March 2017 from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2016/10/27/225703/child-care-deserts/>.
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- xxii Id.
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^{xxx}_{ii} Malik, R. et al., (October 2016). Child Care Deserts: An Analysis of Child Care Centers by Zip Code in Eight States. Retrieve 30 March 2017
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^{xxx}_{iii} Child Care Aware. (2016). Parents and the High Cost of Child Care. Retrieved 30 March 2017 from
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