

## 2022 Priority: Increase Access to Affordable, Reliable Child Care

### OVERVIEW

Child care is a substantial need for working families and student-parents.<sup>1</sup> Affording child care, finding available programs, and ensuring a robust early childhood workforce is available are all challenges being faced by our region, state, and the country. Child care costs are currently one of the highest in families' budgets—often exceeding the cost of college.<sup>2</sup> More than one-half of Americans live in child care deserts, and options are even more limited for low-income and rural families.

Expanding access to reliable, stable, and affordable child care for these families is essential even in the best of times. Now, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need is even greater. In urban centers, programs have untenable wait times for families seeking care, to the point where even families who qualify for child care subsidies cannot find places to use those subsidies. Additionally, since COVID-19's outbreak, 40 percent of children previously in formal child care nationwide are now in care of informal child care providers—sometimes referred to as family, friends, and neighbor providers, who don't receive the same supports as licensed child care providers.<sup>3</sup>

As such, Rocky Mountain Partnership is **focusing on policy solutions to increase access to affordable, reliable child care** as a means to improve social and economic mobility in our region.

### STATE & FEDERAL POLICY SOLUTIONS

- **Increase income level eligibility to receive state support for childcare.** The ongoing economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately impacted low-income populations, making the affordability of child care an even higher barrier to families participating in the economy. By expanding state income level eligibility for childcare support, Colorado will support financially vulnerable families in their recovery from the pandemic.
- **Increase support for prospective and existing members of the early childhood workforce.** It is well documented that early childhood workers are poorly paid and unlikely to have health insurance, and that workers of color are paid less than white workers, exacerbated by the child care crisis caused by the pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Strong evidence shows that participation in federal safety net benefit and tax programs can make a significant difference in recipients' lives.<sup>5</sup> Actively conducting outreach, simplifying

access, and supporting enrollment of these workers in these key programs could result in immediate relief for this workforce. High-quality online learning, training, and credentialing can help them improve their practice, gain credentials, and potentially attain higher wages. This could be an opportunity for policymakers to build on the lessons learned during the pandemic to permanently expand online learning and credentialing for child care providers and offer a wider swath of the workforce access to high-quality learning opportunities.

- **Find efficient ways to include family, friends, and neighbors in efforts to support the child care system without requiring rigorous licensing standards.** Family, friends, and neighbors care includes a broad category of informal care providers and little is known about their desire to obtain a child care license. Regardless of formal or informal child care settings, family, friend, and neighbor providers are essential to strengthening our child care systems and COVID-19 recovery. By expanding eligibility for Colorado's Emerging and Expanding Child Care Grant Program or Colorado's Child Care Relief Grants to include family, friend, and neighbor care providers is one way to bolster and support this critical care force.

## SOURCES

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