

# Partnering with Parents to Access and Maintain Subsidy in Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships



Explore this resource to learn about key messages, strategies, and examples for early childhood professionals and their local partners to promote the use of child care subsidies among families in Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnerships. Find tips about what parents need to know and how programs and local agency partners can work with parents to access and maintain child care subsidies in these partnerships.

Working with parents to access and maintain child care subsidies is important to the success of EHS-CC Partnership programs. Early Head Start grantees, child care partners, and local agencies, including the state subsidy system, can all play a role in partnering with families to access and maintain subsidies. Together they can develop strategies to address challenges that arise.

## Partnering with Families in Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships

EHS-CC Partnerships can take a hands-on approach to partnering with families to access and maintain subsidies—and in support of their program’s consumer education efforts. Consumer education means providing information about child care options and quality so parents can make the most informed choices possible for their children (as referenced in the Child Care Development Block Grant).

Programs can communicate the benefits of the collaborative EHS-CC Partnership program for all children, and the critical role parents play in the funding picture of these programs. Parents need to be aware specifically of how the program is funded and how child care subsidies help to cover program costs.


It’s also important for parents to understand the long-term benefits to their families of accessing and maintaining a child care subsidy. In many cases for families who remain eligible, these subsidies may be available to assist them in paying for high-quality child care as their children become school age.

Taking the long view can be difficult for some parents who may be focused on the “here and now.” Challenges may occur when parents whose children are currently enrolled in an Early Head Start slot do not apply for or maintain the subsidy. Programs can partner with parents and communicate the importance of applying for and maintaining their subsidy.


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## What Do Families Need to Know?


Use these key messages to communicate the value and benefits of EHS-CC Partnerships and the important role parents play in the success of these partnerships.


 **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships are unique and beneficial programs for children and families. Parents play an important role!** EHS-CC Partnerships enhance and support early learning settings to provide full-day, full-year, seamless, and comprehensive services that meet the needs of family members who are working, in school or training, and have low-incomes. These partnerships


- increase access to high-quality, full-day child care (including family child care);
- support the development of infants and toddlers through strong relationship-based experiences; and
- prepare children and families for the transition into Head Start and preschool.


 **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships bring together the complementary strengths of Early Head Start and Child Care programs.**

Complementary Strengths	
<b>Early Head Start</b>  Early Head Start is a research-based program that emphasizes the importance of responsive and caring relationships to support the optimal development of infants and toddlers.  Early Head Start provides comprehensive family-centered services that adhere to the Head Start Program Performance Standards (Office of Head Start, 2019) to support high-quality learning environments.	<b>Center-Based and Family Child Care</b>  Child care centers and family child care providers respond to the needs of working families by offering flexible and convenient full-day and full-year services.  Child care providers have experience providing care that is strongly grounded in the cultural, linguistic, and social preferences and needs of the families and their local communities.

 **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships support family safety, health, financial security, employment, and educational advancement.** EHS-CC Partnerships may offer referrals and linkages to needed medical, dental, nutrition, vision, and mental health services. Families also may receive information about employment, housing, financial, educational, and legal services.

 **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships enhance and support high-quality services so that all children benefit.** For example, any child in an EHS-CC Partnership classroom will benefit from enhancements provided by the EHS-CC Partnership program, regardless of whether they are enrolled in Early Head Start. Classrooms supported by EHS-CC Partnership funding must have low teacher-to-child ratios and small class sizes; qualified teachers who receive ongoing supervision and coaching in curriculum implementation; and broad-scale parent engagement activities.

 **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships can leverage multiple funding sources and resources to provide more comprehensive services for children and families.** For example, Early Head Start services include developmental screenings, provision of diapers and formula, home visits, and parent engagement opportunities. These services can enhance traditional child care settings, strengthening both options and outcomes for infants, toddlers, and their families.

 **For families in Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, completing child care subsidy applications and renewals is important to ensuring access to high-quality services now and in the future.** Children age out of EHS-CC Partnerships. By the time children become eligible to transition to Head Start, families may no longer be eligible to enroll (for example, if their income exceeds eligibility guidelines). Often there is a waitlist for child care subsidies. Families who aren't already accessing child care subsidy when their child ages out of EHS-CC Partnerships (or who are not able to complete renewal requirements on time) can experience interruptions in child care services. Accessing child care subsidies while enrolled in EHS-CC Partnerships can help ensure continuity in child care services.

## Tips for Programs Working with Families

Programs can embrace their role as consumer education hubs for information about the EHS-CC Partnership program and the importance of subsidies in those partnerships. Programs can:

- **Provide or create materials that explain the value and benefits of Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership to help parents see the important role they play.** Find out how families you work with prefer to receive this type of information—for example, in print, online, or through conversations.
- Use the key messages listed above. Consider using or adapting the brochure *Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships: Growing the Supply of Early Learning Opportunities for More Infants and Toddlers*, available at [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/ehs\\_ccp\\_brochure.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/ehs_ccp_brochure.pdf)

### Program Example

Early Learning Ventures (ELV) in Englewood, CO, has developed two videos to describe the benefits of participating with the EHS-CC Partnership. The videos highlight how the program supports comprehensive services for enrolled children. One video is for parents and the other is for providers.

ELV began using the videos in February 2017 during the enrollment process for children and childcare partners, and at policy council orientations. Since then, the number of families receiving child care subsidies has increased significantly, from 39.2 percent to 65.4 percent.

- **Be open with families about the mutual benefits to families of accessing child care subsidy while enrolled in Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships.** For example, explain the 25 percent subsidy requirement to families. Explain how their application for child care subsidy helps ensure that the required mix of funding streams is met—which helps to ensure opportunities for enrollment for their child and for others. In some programs this information has motivated families to sign up for the subsidy so they had a better chance of getting enrolled.
- **Remind families of due dates for completing renewal applications.** Consider ways that child care directors and family support staff can work together to track when vouchers are set to expire. Then make plans to help the families maintain the subsidy.  
Create and use tools to track the subsidy funding associated with each child. Develop reminder notices that include a list of required information and documentation. Encourage families to share updated contact information to ensure they receive notices on a timely basis—with administrators for both the EHS-CC Partnership and the child care subsidy. Encourage parents to set their own reminders using a wall calendar or a calendar on their cell phones.
- **Seek families’ input about their experiences with the child care subsidy application or reapplication process in your community.** Ask individual families, conduct a survey, or host a focus group to learn about their ideas and experiences with the child care subsidy. Work with families to identify and overcome barriers to accessing and maintaining child care subsidy. (During this process, families may also share their interests and needs for child care.)
- **Work with parents to complete child care subsidy applications on site.** Using this approach, one grantee reduced the time to process applications to under four days or less.

## Program Example

A grantee in Louisiana added coordinator positions at each of the EHS-CC Partnerships sites. The coordinators act as “ambassadors” on behalf of families. They work with families to navigate the child care subsidy application process. They also assist with scheduling and coordinating home visits with the Family Service Worker, parent meetings, doctor appointments and other commitments.

The Lourie Center in Maryland helps families appreciate the importance of beginning the process of applying for subsidies with support of a family services worker (FSW) or child care staff. Staff encourage families to think about the long term as children age. This coaching prepares families for completing future child care subsidy applications. If families remain eligible, subsidies could be available to them until their child turns 13.

## Tips for Supporting Staff Partnering with Families

- **Ensure that staff understand what the eligibility requirements are for child care subsidy in the community and how those requirements impact parents' use of the child care subsidy.** Conduct regular training for staff, including Family Support Workers.

### Program Example

At Clayton County Head Start Program in Forest Park, GA, a family service worker attends the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning's (DECAL) required training to learn about the child care subsidy process and how to determine families' eligibility for the state's child care subsidy program. To guarantee payment to their partner(s) for eligible children, the family service worker ensures that the approved number of children who receive DECAL-funded subsidies is certified monthly.

At Drake University the grantee director sends automated calendar reminders to directors of child care partners about child care subsidies and associated renewal dates. Grantee staff and EHS-CC Partnership staff find the reminders useful and effective.

## Tips for Community Partners

- **Encourage child care subsidy office staff to learn more about the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Programs in their service areas.** Share information about EHS-CC Partnerships with the child care subsidy office staff. With families' permission and with respect for confidentiality, establish a line of communication for sharing information between the subsidy and program staff.
- **Work with Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships to ensure the application process is as seamless as possible.** Some states assign subsidy eligibility staff to work with EHS-CC Partnership programs and parents interested in applying. Programs and families benefit from the support and knowledge of dedicated subsidy staff who assist in accessing and maintaining subsidies.

Some states, such as Georgia, contract directly with all EHS-CC Partnership grantees and their partners to provide the child care subsidies. These states train the grantees and partners to determine the subsidy eligibility, and this training streamlines the process for the programs and families. This approach also allows the program to determine the families' eligibility for both Early Head Start and child care subsidies simultaneously.

Some states also waive parent co-payments for their subsidies if the parents are enrolled in EHS-CC Partnerships. Dropping the co-payment requirement encourages parents to maintain the child care subsidy.

## Program Example

Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services in California connected with the local child care subsidy agency. Together they were able to develop a process where families enrolling in EHS-CC Partnership could sign a waiver allowing the grantee to access information about the families' child care subsidy. Staff were able to track such information as subsidy renewal due dates.

The EHS-CC Partnership used this information to better understand families' subsidy status as well as track renewal dates. This collaboration simplified the subsidy application process, making enrollment into the partnership easier and "less [of a] burden on the family."

## Closing Thoughts

Working in partnership with parents to access and retain child care subsidies is important to the success of the EHS-CC partnership and the continuity of quality care for enrolled children.

For more information about this resource, please contact us:  
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