

Early Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers in the US

State-by-State Data on Demand, Cost, Licensing, and Policies

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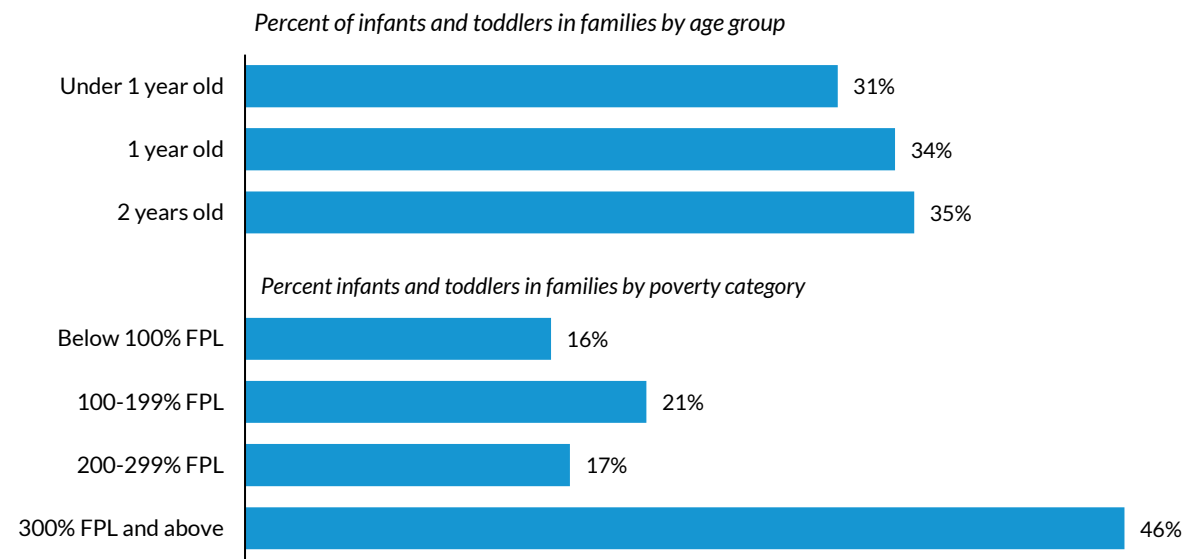
Across the United States, the supply of high-quality early care and education (ECE) for infants and toddlers remains insufficient to meet demand, leaving many families with limited options and facing unaffordable costs.¹ Two key federal funding sources—the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and the Early Head Start program—aim to offset these costs and expand access to comprehensive services for families with low and moderate incomes.² However, state-level differences in the share of infants and toddlers living in low-income households, licensing standards, and funding policies result in differences in access and affordability depending on where families reside. To support informed decisionmaking, this brief presents a comprehensive overview of infant and toddler ECE across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It provides policymakers and administrators with essential data on potential demand, costs of care, licensing requirements, workforce professionalization efforts, and state strategies to increase the supply of infant and toddler ECE.

A team of researchers at the Urban Institute found large state by state differences in the number and share of families eligible to participate in publicly funded infant and toddler ECE, costs of infant and toddler ECE, state requirements for ratios of adults to infants and toddlers attending ECE, and state plans to professionalize the infant and toddler ECE workforce. The team also found examples of actions states plan to take to improve the supply of quality ECE. See the technical appendix for details about the methods.³

Potential Demand for Infant and Toddler ECE Varies

In 2023, about 10 million (10,589,928) infants and toddlers were living in the US, about 3 percent of the total population. Approximately 7 million (6,616,779) of these children were living in families with both parents working or attending school. This accounts for about 62 percent of all infants and toddlers in the US. A higher percentage of infants and toddlers in families with higher incomes (above 300 percent of the federal poverty threshold) had all parents working or attending school compared with infants and toddlers in families with lower incomes. See figures 1 and 2 below.

FIGURE 1
Age and Poverty Distribution of Infants and Toddlers in Families in the US

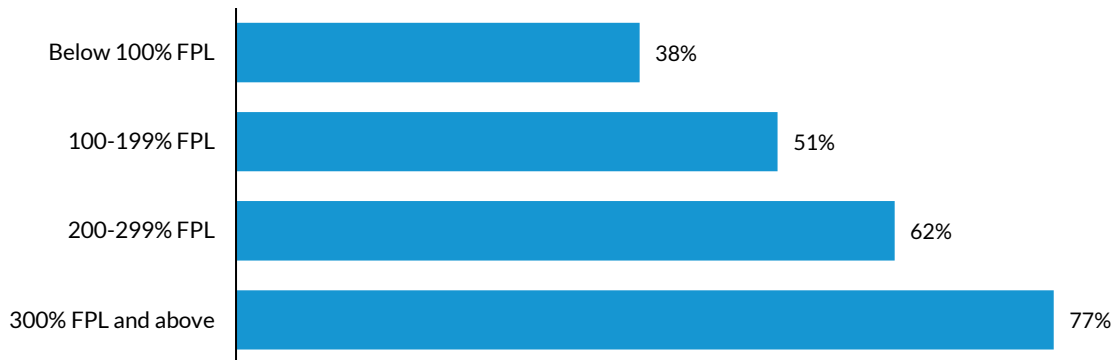


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Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019–23 American Community Survey via IPMUS.
Notes: FPL = federal poverty level. Each percent is created by dividing the category by the total number of infants and toddlers in families in the US. For family income, a small group of children living with unrelated household members or in group quarters falls into a not-applicable category. Poverty status is not calculated and not shown here for those children.

FIGURE 2

Percent of Infants and Toddlers in Families with All Parents Working or in School, by Federal Poverty Level



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Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019–23 American Community Survey via IPMUS.

Notes: FPL = federal poverty level. Each percent is calculated within category of poverty level, and represents the proportion of infants and toddlers in families within a federal poverty level that have all parents working or in school. For family income, a small group of children living with unrelated household members or in group quarters falls into a not-applicable category. Poverty status is not calculated and not shown here for those children.

The number of infants and toddlers in families with parents working or in school varied substantially by state. See table 1. States with the highest number of infants and toddlers were California, Texas, New York and Florida. States with the lowest number were DC, Wyoming, and Vermont.

TABLE 1

Number of Infants and Toddlers in Families with Potential Demand for ECE, by State

Number of children under age 3 living in the United States

State	Total # of infants and toddlers (in thousands)
Alabama	157
Alaska	28
Arizona	222
Arkansas	100
California	1,251
Colorado	178
Connecticut	105
Delaware	28
District of Columbia	23
Florida	613
Georgia	343
Hawaii	46
Idaho	63
Illinois	404
Indiana	230
Iowa	107
Kansas	99
Kentucky	147

State	Total # of infants and toddlers (in thousands)
Louisiana	161
Maine	35
Maryland	199
Massachusetts	200
Michigan	310
Minnesota	197
Mississippi	97
Missouri	202
Montana	31
Nebraska	71
Nevada	98
New Hampshire	33
New Jersey	296
New Mexico	64
New York	627
North Carolina	326
North Dakota	30
Ohio	382
Oklahoma	136
Oregon	121
Pennsylvania	385
Rhode Island	29
South Carolina	156
South Dakota	32
Tennessee	227
Texas	1,075
Utah	138
Vermont	16
Virginia	281
Washington	243
West Virginia	51
Wisconsin	178
Wyoming	18
United States	10,590

Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019–23 American Community Survey via IPMUS.

Notes: Total number of infants and toddlers is reported in thousands. Using the ACS, we estimated the number of infants and toddlers in each category. We included only infants and toddlers in households with at least one parent living in the household.

States also varied in terms of the percentage of infants and toddlers in the state in families with household incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. States with the highest percentages of infants and toddlers in working families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty were Mississippi, Arkansas, and West Virginia. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Final Rule sets maximum child care subsidy eligibility at a or lower than 85 percent of a state median income.⁴ However, states are granted flexibility, and many restrict eligibility to families with lower incomes. Table 2 presents information about families living below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, as this is the threshold most closely aligned with state subsidy eligibility. The states with the lowest percentages were Minnesota, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire.

TABLE 2

Percentage of Infants and Toddlers Living in Families with Incomes below 200 Percent of the Federal Poverty Level, by State

Children under age 3 living in the United States

State	Percentage of infants and toddlers
Alabama	48.59%
Alaska	32.49%
Arizona	42.44%
Arkansas	52.41%
California	34.05%
Colorado	29.53%
Connecticut	28.90%
Delaware	37.04%
District of Columbia	30.44%
Florida	42.32%
Georgia	43.60%
Hawaii	30.47%
Idaho	42.13%
Illinois	35.18%
Indiana	40.99%
Iowa	32.70%
Kansas	37.81%
Kentucky	46.92%
Louisiana	48.30%
Maine	35.25%
Maryland	28.02%
Massachusetts	24.19%
Michigan	40.76%
Minnesota	26.57%
Mississippi	53.02%
Missouri	41.25%
Montana	39.47%
Nebraska	32.74%
Nevada	40.78%
New Hampshire	23.70%
New Jersey	30.08%
New Mexico	51.33%
New York	36.51%
North Carolina	43.38%
North Dakota	29.33%
Ohio	40.96%
Oklahoma	48.83%
Oregon	34.44%
Pennsylvania	36.10%
Rhode Island	29.72%
South Carolina	46.22%
South Dakota	37.93%
Tennessee	44.35%
Texas	43.37%
United States	38.21%
Utah	31.73%
Vermont	28.02%
Virginia	31.33%
Washington	29.51%

State	Percentage of infants and toddlers
West Virginia	52.00%
Wisconsin	33.10%
Wyoming	37.12%

Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019–23 American Community Survey via IPMUS.

Note: Using the ACS, we estimated the number of infants and toddlers in each category. We included only infants and toddlers in households with at least one parent living in the household.

Cost of Infant and Toddler ECE Varies by State

The cost of infant and toddler ECE varies by state. The median cost of full-time center-based ECE in 2024 was \$14,995 for an infant and \$12,376 for a toddler. The median cost of full-time family ECE was \$10,809 for an infant and \$10,072 for a toddler.

The cost of infant ECE varied considerably by state. See table 4. For example, the cost of full-time center-based infant ECE ranged from under \$9,000 per year in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Dakota to over \$22,000 in California, DC, Maryland, and Massachusetts. The cost of family ECE for infants also varied by state ranging from below \$7,000 per year in Mississippi and South Dakota to over \$19,000 per year in California and DC.

Toddler ECE cost also varies. Although costs are somewhat lower than costs of infant ECE, states with the highest cost of infant ECE also have the highest costs of toddler ECE. For example, the cost of full-time center-based toddler ECE ranged from under \$9,000 per year in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Dakota and Alabama to over \$22,000 in DC, Maryland, and Massachusetts. The cost of family ECE range from below \$6,000 per year to over \$19,000 per year in California and DC.

TABLE 3

Average Full-Time Cost of Infant ECE by State

Costs for infant ECE in centers and family child care settings per year, by state

State	Center-based care for infants	Family child care for infants
US Median	\$14,995	\$10,809
Alabama	\$8,632	\$7,670
Alaska	\$12,107	\$10,809
Arizona	\$15,964	\$10,920
Arkansas	\$9,178	\$7,963
California	\$22,628	\$19,022
Colorado	\$20,978	\$13,666
Connecticut	\$18,492	\$14,305
Delaware	\$16,617	\$10,997
DC	\$26,193	\$21,382
Florida	\$13,011	\$11,201
Georgia	\$11,066	\$8,407
Hawaii	\$24,115	\$11,632
Idaho	\$10,608	\$7,380

State	Center-based care for infants	Family child care for infants
Illinois	\$19,807	\$12,283
Indiana	\$16,478	\$9,508
Iowa	\$12,694	\$8,596
Kansas	\$15,156	\$7,639
Kentucky	\$12,740	\$9,880
Louisiana	\$10,847	NA
Maine	\$15,730	\$11,830
Maryland	\$25,321	\$15,919
Massachusetts	\$26,343	\$17,510
Michigan	\$13,454	\$9,458
Minnesota	\$20,421	\$9,821
Mississippi	\$7,696	\$6,188
Missouri	\$13,780	\$9,984
Montana	\$15,080	\$11,700
Nebraska	\$18,147	\$13,383
Nevada	\$12,659	\$9,703
New Hampshire	\$16,040	\$11,708
New Jersey	\$20,213	\$12,502
New Mexico	NA	NA
New York	\$20,439	\$16,415
North Carolina	\$12,370	\$9,961
North Dakota	\$12,299	\$10,141
Ohio	\$13,780	\$10,556
Oklahoma	\$10,809	\$9,399
Oregon	\$19,500	\$15,808
Pennsylvania	\$14,910	\$10,994
Rhode Island	\$18,486	\$14,300
South Carolina	\$10,474	\$8,126
South Dakota	\$8,632	\$6,822
Tennessee	\$13,126	\$9,415
Texas	\$11,349	\$10,010
Utah	\$14,160	\$10,800
Vermont	\$18,710	\$12,395
Virginia	\$16,796	\$13,052
Washington	\$21,348	\$18,000
West Virginia	\$10,439	\$8,565
Wisconsin	\$17,963	\$12,319
Wyoming	\$12,784	\$10,704

Source: Child Care Aware of America (CCAoA) price data.

Notes: NA is when data for the price of infant care in New Mexico were not available from CCAoA. In Louisiana, family child care is not licensed by the state and therefore data are not available. US median reflects the middle value of average state costs.

TABLE 4

Average Full-Time Cost of Toddler ECE by State

How much care costs for toddlers in centers and family child care settings per year, by state

State	Center-based care for toddlers	Family child care for toddlers
US Median	\$12,376	\$10,072
Alabama	\$8,424	\$7,527
Alaska	\$11,304	\$9,265
Arizona	\$13,390	\$10,400

State	Center-based care for toddlers	Family child care for toddlers
Arkansas	\$8,801	\$7,727
California	NR	NR
Colorado	\$17,479	\$13,666
Connecticut	\$18,829	NA
Delaware	\$14,668	\$10,358
DC	\$24,087	\$21,022
Florida	\$11,461	\$10,185
Georgia	\$10,537	\$8,043
Hawaii	\$18,852	\$11,148
Idaho	\$9,996	\$7,308
Illinois	\$18,736	\$12,283
Indiana	\$16,002	\$9,102
Iowa	\$11,729	\$8,443
Kansas	\$11,071	\$6,890
Kentucky	\$12,220	\$9,360
Louisiana	\$9,997	NA
Maine	\$14,820	\$11,206
Maryland	\$22,594	\$15,676
Massachusetts	\$24,314	\$17,511
Michigan	\$13,555	\$9,959
Minnesota	\$18,042	\$9,434
Mississippi	\$7,254	\$5,980
Missouri	\$11,700	\$8,996
Montana	\$15,080	\$11,700
Nebraska	\$17,184	\$13,383
Nevada	\$11,442	\$9,239
New Hampshire	\$14,870	\$11,432
New Jersey	\$19,448	\$11,113
New Mexico	NA	NA
New York	\$18,661	\$15,616
North Carolina	\$11,694	\$9,591
North Dakota	\$11,580	\$9,801
Ohio	\$12,376	\$10,192
Oklahoma	\$10,060	\$9,122
Oregon	\$17,368	\$13,832
Pennsylvania	\$14,180	\$10,428
Rhode Island	NA	NA
South Carolina	\$10,308	\$7,449
South Dakota	\$8,632	\$6,822
Tennessee	\$12,063	\$9,430
Texas	\$10,921	\$9,957
Utah	\$11,328	\$8,700
Vermont	\$17,988	\$11,952
Virginia	\$15,964	\$12,480
Washington	\$19,236	\$16,200
West Virginia	\$9,903	\$7,762
Wisconsin	\$18,239	\$14,743
Wyoming	\$11,897	\$10,278

Source: Child Care Aware of America (CCAoA) price data.

Notes: NR=not reported by the state. NA is when data for the price of toddler care in New Mexico and Rhode Island were not available from CCAoA. In Louisiana, family child care is not licensed by the state and therefore data are not available.

Ratios of Adults to Infants and Toddlers and Quality Standards for Infant and Toddler ECE

The federal law that authorizes the CCDF gives states authority to determine licensing and quality standards. At a minimum, licensing standards are designed to protect children’s health and safety. Quality standards mandate that states and territories support the well-being of children in CCDF-funded programs by providing parents with publicly available information about licensed providers and the quality of care they provide.

Analysis of CCDF State Plans (2025–27) for each state and DC shows substantial variation in state licensing requirements for ratios of adults to infants and toddlers, quality standards, and plans to improve the quality and supply of infant and toddler ECE.

Center-Based Requirement for Ratios of Adults to Infants and Toddlers Varies Substantially

Center-based licensing requirements for infants range from one adult caring for no more than four infants in DC and Massachusetts to one adult caring for no more than six infants in Georgia, New Mexico, and Ohio. Table 5 shows the licensing requirements for ratios for center-based infant and toddler ECE by state. Center-based licensing requirements for toddlers range from one adult caring for no more than five toddlers in DC and Massachusetts to one adult caring for no more than 10 toddlers in Georgia, Kentucky, and North Carolina. Note that Florida and Texas have a different requirement for “older toddlers” defined as children up to age 36 months; the ratio requirements for these older toddlers is one adult caring for no more than 11 toddlers.

TABLE 5
Licensing Requirements for Ratios of Adults to Infants and Toddlers by State
Maximum number of infants cared for by a single adult by state

State	Maximum # of infants cared for by 1 adult	Maximum # of toddlers cared for by 1 adult
US Median	4	6
Alabama	5	7
Alaska	5	6
Arizona	5	6
Arkansas	5	8
California	4	6
Colorado	5	5
Connecticut	4	4
Delaware	4	4
DC	4	4
Florida	4	6
Georgia	6	8
Hawaii	3	3
Idaho	6	8

State	Maximum # of infants cared for by 1 adult	Maximum # of toddlers cared for by 1 adult
Illinois	4	5
Indiana	4	5
Iowa	4	4
Kansas	3	6
Kentucky	5	6
Louisiana	5	7
Maine	4	4
Maryland	3	3
Massachusetts	3	4
Michigan	4	4
Minnesota	4	7
Mississippi	5	9
Missouri	4	4
Montana	4	8
Nebraska	4	6
Nevada	4	9
New Hampshire	4	5
New Jersey	4	6
New Mexico	6	6
New York	3	5
North Carolina	5	6
North Dakota	4	5
Ohio	5	7
Oklahoma	4	6
Oregon	4	4
Pennsylvania	4	5
Rhode Island	4	6
South Carolina	5	6
South Dakota	5	5
Tennessee	4	6
Texas	4	9
Utah	4	4
Vermont	4	4
Virginia	4	5
Washington	4	7
West Virginia	4	4
Wisconsin	4	4
Wyoming	3	5

Source: Authors' analysis of 2025–27 CCDF State Plans

Note: Ratios are provided for center-based providers only. We do not include ratios for family child care providers as these vary based on group size and composition are not comparable to ratios in center-based settings. Ratios reflect the most restricting licensing requirements, for full details see the workbook.

Teacher and Caregiver Requirement for Regular Staff Varies

Licensed center and family ECE staff requirements vary substantially based on state. As Table 6 shows, 20 states require infant and toddler caregivers to have at least a Child Development Associate certificate (CDA) or alternate certification for teachers in centers, and 13 states require a CDA or alternative certification for caregivers in family ECE settings.

TABLE 6

CDA Requirements by State for Center and Family Child Care Staff*States sometimes require a CDA or other certification for caregivers in child care settings*

State	CDA or alternate certification required in center-based settings	CDA or alternative certification required in family child care settings
Alabama		
Alaska		
Arizona		
Arkansas		
California		
Colorado	✓	✓
Connecticut	✓	
Delaware	✓	✓
DC	✓	✓
Florida	✓	✓
Georgia	✓	✓
Hawaii	✓	
Idaho		
Illinois		
Indiana	✓	✓
Iowa		✓
Kansas	✓	
Kentucky		
Louisiana		NA
Maine	✓	
Maryland		
Massachusetts	✓	
Michigan	✓	
Minnesota	✓	
Mississippi		✓
Missouri		
Montana		
Nebraska	✓	
Nevada		
New Hampshire	✓	
New Jersey	✓	NA
New Mexico		
New York	✓	
North Carolina		
North Dakota		
Ohio		
Oklahoma		✓
Oregon	✓	
Pennsylvania		
Rhode Island	✓	
South Carolina		
South Dakota		
Tennessee		
Texas		✓
Utah		
Vermont		✓

State	CDA or alternate certification required in center-based settings	CDA or alternative certification required in family child care settings
Virginia	✓	
Washington	✓	✓
West Virginia	✓	✓
Wisconsin		
Wyoming		
Total	22	13

Source: Authors' analysis of 2025-2027 CCDF State Plans

Note: Child Development Associate (CDA) is a common credential for early childhood educators. NA=not applicable as Louisiana and New Jersey do not license family child care.

Nearly All States Meet CCDF Required Elements for Professional Development

Analysis of CCDF Plans shows that 49 states included the following six elements in the state's early childhood professional development framework: (1) professional standards and competencies, (2) career pathways, (3) advisory structure, (4) articulation, (5) workforce information, and (6) financing. Only one state reported not offering career pathways.

Many states provided additional details in the state CCDF Plan about additional professional development elements the states offered in their training and professional development framework for early childhood educators. Table 7 summarizes these requirements.

TABLE 7

Description of Additional Professional Development Framework Elements in State Plans

Some states describe additional professional development elements in state plans

State	Continuing education unit trainings and credit-bearing professional development	Engagement of training and PD providers in aligning CEU and PD with the framework
Alabama	✓	
Alaska	✓	✓
Arizona	✓	✓
Arkansas	✓	✓
California	✓	✓
Colorado	✓	✓
Connecticut		✓
Delaware	✓	✓
DC		✓
Florida		
Georgia		
Hawaii		✓
Idaho	✓	✓
Illinois		✓
Indiana		

State	Continuing education unit trainings and credit- bearing professional development	Engagement of training and PD providers in aligning CEU and PD with the framework
Iowa	✓	
Kansas	✓	✓
Kentucky	✓	✓
Louisiana	✓	
Maine	✓	✓
Maryland	✓	✓
Massachusetts	✓	✓
Michigan	✓	✓
Minnesota	✓	✓
Mississippi		✓
Missouri	✓	✓
Montana	✓	✓
Nebraska	✓	✓
Nevada		✓
New Hampshire		✓
New Jersey	✓	✓
New Mexico	✓	
New York	✓	✓
North Carolina	✓	✓
North Dakota	✓	✓
Ohio	✓	✓
Oklahoma	✓	✓
Oregon	✓	✓
Pennsylvania	✓	✓
Rhode Island	✓	✓
South Carolina	✓	✓
South Dakota	✓	✓
Tennessee	✓	✓
Texas	✓	✓
Utah	✓	✓
Vermont	✓	✓
Virginia		
Washington	✓	✓
West Virginia		
Wisconsin	✓	✓
Wyoming	✓	✓
Total	39	42

Source: Authors' analysis of 2025-2027 CCDF State Plans

Notes: CEU = continuing education units; PD =professional development. Engagement includes higher education, PD, and CEU providers and others involved in aligning training and educational opportunities with the lead agency's framework.

States' CCDF Plans Describe Actions to Increase the Supply and Quality of Infant and Toddler ECE

States can take actions to increase the supply and quality of ECE available to families with infants and toddlers. The table below shows the policies related to infant and toddler ECE that proposed in each state's 2025–27 CCDF Plan.

TABLE 9

Actions in CCDF State Plans to Increase the Supply of Early Childhood Education for Infants and Toddlers

CCDF Plan answers about using grants or contracts to increase the supply of infant and toddler care

State	Uses grants to increase supply of infant and toddler care	Uses contracts to increase supply of infant and toddler care
Alabama		
Alaska		
Arizona		
Arkansas	✓	
California	✓	✓
Colorado	✓	
Connecticut		
Delaware	✓	
DC	✓	
Florida	✓	
Georgia		
Hawaii		
Idaho		
Illinois	✓	
Indiana		
Iowa		
Kansas	✓	
Kentucky		
Louisiana	✓	
Maine		✓
Maryland	✓	
Massachusetts	✓	
Michigan		
Minnesota		
Mississippi		
Missouri	✓	
Montana		
Nebraska		
Nevada	✓	
New Hampshire		
New Jersey	✓	
New Mexico	✓	
New York	✓	
North Carolina		

State	Uses grants to increase supply of infant and toddler care	Uses contracts to increase supply of infant and toddler care
North Dakota		
Ohio		
Oklahoma		✓
Oregon	✓	
Pennsylvania	✓	
Rhode Island		
South Carolina	✓	
South Dakota	✓	✓
Tennessee		✓
Texas	✓	
Utah		
Vermont		
Virginia		
Washington		✓
West Virginia		
Wisconsin	✓	
Wyoming		
Total	22	6

Source: Authors' analysis of 2025–27 CCDF state plans.

Conclusion

As state and community leaders consider policies and practices to improve the supply of quality infant and toddler ECE, information about potential demand, costs, licensing, and other state's plans could inform decisions. This brief provides descriptive information for state policymakers and practitioners with information about states' action plans to increase the supply of infant and toddler ECE. Future research is needed to produce evidence about the interactions between policies designed to improve the supply of infant and toddler ECE, professionalization of the infant and toddler workforce, and parents' access to high-quality infant and toddler ECE.

Notes

- ¹ “Cost of Child Care for One Child Can Be More Than Rent in Some US Counties,” US Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau, November 19, 2024, <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/wb/wb20241119>.
- ² Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014. Public Law No. 113–186, 113th Cong. (November 19, 2014). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/1086>. “About the Early Head Start Program,” Office of Head Start, accessed September 5, 2025, <https://headstart.gov/programs/article/about-early-head-start-program>.
- ³ Laura Wagner, Ridhi Purohit, Aaron Williams, Diane Schilder, and Erica Greenberg, “Infant and Toddler Early Care and Education: Technical Appendix,” Urban Institute, November 25, 2025, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/infant-and-toddler-early-care-and-education>.
- ⁴ “State Median Income and Federal Poverty Guidelines Calculation Tool,” National Center on Subsidy Innovation and Accountability, accessed September 5, 2025. <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/new-occ/resource/files/ncsia-smi-fpg-calculation-tool-instructions.pdf>.

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