

COVID-19 RESPONSE IN CITIES:

Supporting Early Childhood Providers and Other Caregivers

The United States' longstanding caregiving crisis has been made worse by the coronavirus pandemic. Due to school and business closures and the curtailment of vital services, many families find themselves providing round-the-clock care for young children, aging parents, and family members with disabilities—even as they face the pressures of lost work or working remotely. The emotional and physical costs associated with caregiving are taking a tremendous toll— and getting quality help is often out of the question because of the financial costs. In the midst of the pandemic, these pressures and challenges are leading [one in four women](#) to consider leaving the workforce altogether. As cities move toward reopening, local leaders can take the following key steps to alleviate the burden of care for millions of American families.

1 Recognize early childhood workers and providers as critical players in community health and well-being and vital to economic recovery.

Before the pandemic, the Bureau of Labor Statistics counted nearly 1 million childcare workers in the United States. As of September 2020, that number had fallen by nearly 200,000. Caregivers and early childhood educators – disproportionately women of color – have been underpaid, unseen, and undervalued for far too long.

The early childhood sector makes it possible for other key sectors (including essential workers) to do their jobs, and it creates a strong foundation for educating and building the skills of future workers. Early childhood providers are a vital part of a city's infrastructure. Without these providers and workers, a recent survey indicated that [40 percent of employers](#) say they are concerned some employees will not fully return to work.

The Governor of [Nevada](#) Steve Sisolak declared child care facilities as essential enabling these businesses to continue to safely provide care during the pandemic.

Local elected officials can use their platform to help ensure that everyone understands the critical role of early learning and childcare providers to the economic success and overall vibrancy of their cities. Together with city departments and community partners such as the Workforce Development Board or the local Chamber of Commerce, city leaders can build new partnerships to support these workers and ensure they have the knowledge, support, and safe working conditions that allow them to stay open and be successful.

The **City of Milwaukee, WI**, through a partnership with the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, provided grants to licensed providers in eight zip codes that experienced the highest COVID-19 infection rates.

City leaders also can expand access to professional development supports for providers, whether virtually or in person. These should include in-home supports for informal networks including family, friend, and neighbor-care providers. Cities should consider engaging with community organizations to identify gaps in professional development support and/or to broaden the reach of existing services.

The **City of Jacksonville, FL** has leveraged funds to support families, including those of early care workers, who lost jobs or were furloughed. As childcare providers stayed open for essential workers, the state of Connecticut created a fund to compensate them through the [CTCARES for Child Care](#) program.

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation in Michigan held a virtual [Child Care Townhall](#) for providers to share their experiences and the needs for their businesses during the pandemic.

2 Strengthen the early childhood workforce by including childcare center operators as small business owners.

Local economic strength depends on skilled, qualified workers and a fully supported small business community, including early childhood providers. Through the collection of local data on the impact of the pandemic on the needs of small businesses, local leaders can deepen buy-in to make significant investments for the childcare sector and its workers. These investments include support for owners of formal and informal childcare settings in areas including: training (e.g., on administrative success as a small business and health and safety regulations); rent and financial supports; and access to basic needs, supplies and technology.

The **City of Walla Walla, WA** [Small Business Relief Program](#) supported child care programs through its micro-small business loan program.

Most early childhood educators are small business owners. Many operate out of their homes and are facing significant barriers in the pandemic when it comes to everything from financing to legal and other support. Through funding from the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the [City of Arlington, TX in partnership with SCORE](#), connected small childcare providers to legal advice and funding as they dealt with the impact of the pandemic. Including owners of early care and education settings in conversations about how to support small businesses is crucial to ensuring they can remain open and serve children. City leaders can also consider partnering with their local Chamber of Commerce or institutions of higher education to provide training courses for these small business owners.

The [City of Fort Worth and Tarrant County, TX](#) issued a “[grocery letter](#)” allowing early childhood providers to bring the letter and their business license to grocers and suppliers to purchase sufficient food and cleaning supplies necessary to safely continue business operations.

Another avenue for supporting childcare providers to survive and continue their vital work is partnering with other businesses and community organizations to disseminate basic and essential supplies such as toilet paper, paper towels, disinfectant spray and wipes, and sanitizer. Local leaders can ensure that these small businesses have access to the resources to safely reopen for those in their care. In the [City of Indianapolis, IN](#), a partnership with the United Way of Central Indiana set up a grant program, [Nonprofit Restart Program](#), to support small non-profit businesses, including childcare programs, with personal protective equipment (PPE).

3 Connect early childhood educators with local, state, and federal financial supports.

Local leaders seeking to support and invest in early childcare providers can access funds through the federal CARES Act and COVID-19-related business stabilization funding. For example, the [City of Austin, TX](#) created the [Austin Childcare Provider Relief Grant](#), which included access to resources such as grant funding, unemployment assistance, and legal aid. Local leaders can also work with community development financial institutions (CDFIs) to expand access to lines of credit to support the early childhood workforce. Cities should work across city departments and leverage public-private partnerships to identify all supports (large and small) available to owners in the childcare sector. The [City of Portland, OR](#), through the

The [Philadelphia Emergency Fund for Stabilization of Early Education](#) in the [City of Philadelphia, PA](#) was created with funding from the William Penn Foundation and Vanguard Foundation’s Strong Start for Kids.

city's economic development agency, [Prosper Portland](#), worked to support small businesses, including childcare providers, with a focus on equitably distributing funds to cover losses, payroll, and operational gaps due to the pandemic.

4 Improve the local system of supports and services for caregivers for the elderly and disabled.

Support for caregivers for seniors and people with disabilities is essential to the nation's comprehensive response to the pandemic. Unfortunately, the reality is that many caregivers are struggling to cover basic needs for their families, and many are experiencing emotional stress and trauma. Local leaders can marshal resources to ensure that these caregivers have access to accurate information and resources to stay well and safe during the pandemic, while ensuring that their loved ones get the care they need. Cities can strengthen efforts to provide respite care for those taking care of seniors and people with disabilities by securing volunteers trained in COVID safety protocols to look in on and sit with seniors and provide a break for caregivers. To meet day-to-day needs, city leaders can work across city departments and with community partners to identify agencies and programs that have the resources to address personal care assistance and physical/mental health supports for these caregivers. Additionally, local leaders can provide training to help caregivers navigate the health insurance and healthcare systems. Elected officials can also use their bully pulpit to make the case to multiple audiences for the value of caregiving and identifying and engaging traditional and non-traditional partners to help build a network of caregiver supports.

The [Chicago Department of Family and Support Services \(DFSS\) Senior Services](#) division operates a variety of programs designed to address the diverse needs and interests of older Chicagoans, from those who are active and healthy to those residing in long-term care facilities. DFSS provides support services for caregivers, older adults needing housing or legal assistance, and grandparents or older relatives raising children.

LEARN MORE AND STAY ENGAGED.

DuPage County and the City of Naperville, IL have opened a [Caregiving Resource Center](#) to provide respite care and gap-filling services to informal or family caregivers of persons over age 60. Services can include respite care, home modification, assistive devices, transportation and financial assistance.
