



Support growth and expansion of investments in the early child care system, including increases for child care subsidies

Why the Child Fatality Task Force is interested in child care

Evidence is clear that access to affordable quality child care can save lives and prevent child maltreatment. A CDC publication, [*Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Resource for Action: A Compilation of the Best Available Evidence*](#), sets out five prevention strategies for child maltreatment.¹ Two of these strategies include providing quality care and education early in life; and strengthening economic support to families, including subsidized child care. The CDC notes studies that show the connection between access to child care and decreased child maltreatment, and says, “Better quality child care increases the likelihood that children will experience safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments and decreases the risk of maltreatment-related fatalities.” The CDC also notes how access to care can reduce parental stress and symptoms of maternal depression, both of which are risk factors for child abuse and neglect.

Quality early care positively impacts the brain development of young children, setting them up for better outcomes later in life. Eighty-five percent of the physical brain develops by the age of three, and children’s early experiences build their brain architecture for life. Studies show that the earlier the investments in children, the higher the rate of economic return given increased productivity and reduced social spending.²

Experts in North Carolina echo the importance of child care as a prevention strategy, including the North Carolina Perinatal Health Strategic Plan, the North Carolina Institute for Medicine’s 2015 Task Force for Essentials for Childhood and its 2025 update publication,³ the North Carolina State Child Fatality Prevention Team that reviewed child maltreatment deaths, and the NC Positive Childhood Alliance.

Ensuring that families have access to affordable, quality child care is a recognized strategy in preventing child abuse, neglect, and even death; significant state investments are needed to address North Carolina’s child care crisis

The child care crisis hurts individuals, employers, and the economy

Between January and October of 2025, 280 licensed child care providers closed in North Carolina.⁴ Child care programs struggle to stay open because what they take in does not cover their costs and they struggle to find and keep teachers who often can’t afford to stay in the profession due to low wages (NC median is about \$14 per hour) and lack of benefits (only about half of teachers have benefits). Meanwhile, parents struggle to find and pay for quality care due to lack of spaces and the high costs of care—the average annual cost of center-based care in North Carolina for one infant is nearly \$13,000 and a toddler’s care is 11,500 annually. And employers are losing workers who can’t access affordable child care.

The [NC Task Force on Child Care & Early Education](#), established by Executive Order in March of 2025, has developed six recommendations to address the child care crisis, the first of which is to set a statewide child care subsidy reimbursement rate floor.⁵ This recommendation requires state funding and overlaps with the recommendation being made by the CFTF to support growth and expansion of investments in the early child care system, including increases for child care subsidies.

Child care subsidies help eligible families afford child care, but only a fraction of eligible North Carolina families are actually getting child care subsidies.⁶ There is not enough subsidy funding to meet the need and North Carolina’s subsidy reimbursement rates, set by the NC General Assembly, only cover about half of what it costs providers to deliver services, with lower rates in rural counties.⁷ Increasing subsidy reimbursement rates ensures that child care providers get a rate that is closer to covering the actual cost of care delivery, which helps providers keep teachers, keep their doors open, and serve more children who qualify for subsidies.⁸

Too many North Carolinians are unable to fully participate in the workforce due to child care challenges. A North Carolina Chamber Foundation Child Care Survey showed that of parents with children five and under:

- 26% said they left the workforce because they couldn’t find affordable child care.
- 60% missed work due to child care challenges.
- 37% refused a job opportunity, promotion, or job change because it would increase child care expenses.
- 32% did not pursue job training or continuing education because of a lack of affordable child care.⁹

According to a report [Empowering Work: How Increasing Employment Among Parents of Young Children Can Grow North Carolina’s Economy](#), **100,000 fewer working-age parents with young children participated in North Carolina’s labor force in 2023 than in 2019** and one in five NC employers attribute hiring challenges to lack of access to child care.

Many in North Carolina are working on innovative strategies to address the child care crisis. Increased state investments, especially related to child care subsidies, are critical for addressing this crisis. **Access to affordable, quality child care has significant health and safety implications for North Carolina’s children.**

The NC Child Fatality Task Force is a legislative study commission that recommends policy solutions to prevent child death, prevent abuse and neglect, and support the health and safety of children.

Website: <https://sites.ncleg.gov/nccff/> **Executive Director:** Kella Hatcher, kella.hatcher@dhhs.nc.gov

Co-Chairs: Karen McLeod, kmcleod@benchmarksnc.org & Jill Cox, JCox@cisnc.org

¹ Fortson, B. L., Klevens, J., Merrick, M. T., Gilbert, L. K., & Alexander, S. P. (2016). *Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Resource for Action: A Compilation of the Best Available Evidence*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/CAN-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf. [Also, other CDC publications related to preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences and Intimate Partner Violence also discuss the importance of access to high-quality child care: [Adverse Childhood Experiences Prevention Resources for Action: A Compilation of the Best Available Evidence](#), and [Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Resources for Action: A Compilation of the Best Available Evidence](#).]

² Sourced from presentation to the Task Force by the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education; see research by Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman: <https://heckmanequation.org/the-heckman-equation/>

³ [North Carolina Perinatal Health Strategic Plan](#), <https://wicws.dph.ncdhhs.gov/phsp/phsp.htm>, and [NCIOM 2015 Task Force on Essentials for Childhood](#), https://nciom.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Essentials4Childhood_report_FINAL.pdf; North Carolina Institute of Medicine. Building Resilience and Promoting Well-Being: An Updated Action Plan for North Carolina’s Children and Families. Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Institute of Medicine; 2025, <https://nciom.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/E4C-Report-Final.pdf>.

⁴ North Carolina Task Force on Child Care & Early Education, [2025 Year-End Report](#), December 2025.

⁵ North Carolina Task Force on Child Care & Early Education, [2025 Year-End Report](#), December 2025.

⁶ Data source: Division of Child Development and Early Education, NC Department of Health and Human Services.

⁷ [2025 Year-End Report](#). December 2025. North Carolina Task Force on Child Care & Early Education.

⁸ [“Empowering Work: How Increasing Employment Among Parents of Young Children Can Grow North Carolina’s Economy.”](#) October 2024. NC Department of Commerce and NC Child.

⁹ Data shared with Task Force from NC Chamber Foundation Child Care Survey Findings: <https://ncchamber.com/2023/05/10/nc-chamber-foundation-child-care-survey-findings-summary/>.