



NC Child Fatality Task Force Recommendation

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 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 out of five of these strategies include providing quality care and education early in life; and strengthening economic support to families, including subsidized child care. The CDC 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.” Other CDC publications related to preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences and Intimate Partner Violence also discuss the importance of access to high-quality child care.²

Experts in North Carolina echo the importance of child care as a prevention strategy. The North Carolina Perinatal Health Strategic Plan and the North Carolina Institute for Medicine Task Force on Essentials for Childhood also highlighted access to affordable, quality child care as being important to support infant and child well-being and prevent child maltreatment.³ The North Carolina State Child Fatality Prevention Team that reviews child maltreatment deaths also raised access to child care as an area of concern.

Ensuring that families have access to affordable, quality early care is a recognized strategy in preventing child abuse, neglect, and even death, but North Carolina's child care system is in crisis.

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. This is one reason why investments in early care and learning have a high rate of economic return. Studies have shown that the earlier the investments in children, the higher the rate of economic return given the increased productivity and reduced social spending.⁴

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

North Carolina has a child care crisis and the child care business model cannot sustain itself without significant state investments. Between January and August of 2024, 191 child care programs closed in North Carolina.⁵ Teachers can’t afford to stay in the profession; parents struggle to find and pay for quality care; child care programs struggle to stay open; and employers are losing workers. Child care subsidies help eligible families afford child care, but only a fraction of eligible North Carolina families are actually getting child care subsidies, because there is not enough subsidy funding to meet the need.

Some of the underlying facts that help explain the child care crisis are as follows:

- Most NC children ages 0 to 5 live in households where all parents work.
- The average annual cost of infant care in North Carolina is \$9,480, which is \$790 per month; and child care for two children – an infant and a 4-year-old – costs \$17,593 annually. Infant care for one child would take up 17.8% of a median family’s income in North Carolina.
- Child care teachers earn so little (averaging \$14 per hour) that many can’t meet basic needs and lack health insurance, so they take other jobs where they can earn more and get insurance, leaving a shortage of teachers.
- The State’s child care subsidy rate pays only half of what child care actually costs to deliver, yet parents can’t afford to pay what it costs for teachers to make a living wage.

The child care crisis is also a problem for employees, employers, and the economy when too many North Carolinians are unable to fully participate in the workforce or advance their careers due to child care challenges. This comes at a time when North Carolina has 55 available workers for every 100 jobs.⁶

Availability of quality early care is a major factor in attracting and retaining businesses to bring jobs to our state. 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; and
- 32% did not pursue job training or continuing education because of a lack of affordable child care.⁷

Many in North Carolina are working on innovative strategies to address this crisis related to workforce issues, a better business model, and a different means of determining subsidy rates for reimbursements. Increased funding, as recommended by the Task Force, is a critical component of addressing this crisis, and 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

² [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](#).

³ [North Carolina Perinatal Health Strategic Plan](#) and [NCIOM Task Force on Essentials for Childhood](#).

⁴ Sourced from presentation to the Task Force; see research by Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman: <https://heckmanequation.org/the-heckman-equation/>

⁵ See NCDHHS Press Release on "Take Care" documentary: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/news/press-releases/2024/11/14/new-documentary-shows-north-carolinas-child-care-crisis-close-state-and-community-leaders-attend>

⁶ Data shared with Task Force from labor statistic according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce: <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/understanding-north-carolinas-labor-market>.

⁷ 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/>.