



# Child Care in Pennsylvania 2009 Fact Sheet

A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids

## The need for high-quality child care

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Child care helps parents work, which helps our economy. With more than 65 percent of parents working outside the home, safe, reliable child care enables parents to gain and sustain employment. But families face a number of challenges in finding child care that meets their needs as employees and as parents. Finding child care that is close to home or work, hours of operation that coincide with their employment, the need for care that is affordable, and transportation issues all can complicate child care decisions for low-income working families.

However, safe, accessible, and affordable child care is just a piece of the equation. Research has demonstrated that experiences in the early years, a time of explosive growth in brain development, have lasting and critical impact on children's development. High-quality child care programs promote early learning and support children's school readiness. These programs are developmentally appropriate, stimulating environments with responsive teachers. Unfortunately, high-quality child care is expensive and not readily available. As families struggle to make ends meet in this weakening economy, more are turning to the Commonwealth for assistance with the high cost of child care.

## Why it matters

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### *For children ...*

- Children who participate in high-quality child care experience lower level of grade retention and placements <sup>(1)</sup>; participation improves children's health and promotes their development and learning. <sup>(2)</sup>
- High-quality child care positively affects children's cognitive and social skills through the second grade. <sup>(3)</sup>

### *For parents ...*

- Long waiting lists for child care subsidies can make it challenging for low-income families to find jobs and stay employed. They may find themselves making difficult decisions ranging from quitting their jobs, leaving older children to care for younger ones, or leaving children with neighbors, unregulated providers, or home alone.
- Safe, reliable child care keeps low-income working families working. Research has shown that low-income mothers whose children had participated in high-quality

child care experienced more stable employment and higher earnings. <sup>(4)</sup>

### *For businesses and employers ...*

- Employers value quality child care because it creates more stability for employees. In a 2000 American Business Collaboration report, 63% of members' employees reported improved productivity while using quality dependent care. <sup>(5)</sup>

### *For Pennsylvania ...*

- "Investing in early care and education generates economic development for communities in the short run in the form of jobs, the purchase of goods and services, and a more efficient workforce. In the long run, quality early education builds an employable, educated workforce." <sup>(6)</sup>
- By making it possible for parents to work, the licensed child care sector allows Americans to earn more than \$100 billion annually. <sup>(7)</sup>

## Where are we now?

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- Pennsylvania provides subsidized child care assistance to families through Child Care Works. Monthly, an average of 141,000 children ages birth to 13 years old receive assistance through this program.
- Parents share the cost of child care, paying from a sliding fee scale based on their income. Working parents may be eligible for assistance for child care expenses if they meet income guidelines. For example, the annual income for a family of four must be less than \$42,400 to be eligible to apply for Child Care Works.

## What is the unmet need?

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- More and more families are struggling to adjust to the effects of this volatile economy. In July 2008, 5,300 children were on the subsidized child care waiting list. By February 2009, this number had grown to over 15,200 children – nearly tripling in size.

## Recommendations

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Support the Governor's FY 2009-2010 proposal for Child Care Works and use additional federal funding made available in the stimulus package to reduce the waiting list by half.

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- (7) National Women's Law Center. (2009). Child care is essential to economic recovery. Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center. Retrieved February 9, 2009 from <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/ChildCareEconomicStimulusJan2009.pdf>.