

# Access to Wyoming Child Care

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Services Committee

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Wyoming  
Department of  
Family Services

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# Background

Access to affordable child care can lead to greater financial stability for families and overall economic growth for communities.<sup>1</sup> Programs and services that increase availability and/or affordability of child care provide families with *opportunities for success* and keep families together and *safe at home*, core values of the Wyoming Department of Family Services (DFS) and the foundation for WY Home Matters. WY Home Matters is a framework that guides how DFS works across divisions, systems, and with communities to engage and serve children, youth, vulnerable adults, and their families. This framework is built on a belief that children do best when they can stay safely at home.

A growing body of research links increased access to economic and concrete supports (e.g. child care subsidies) with a reduction of risk for child welfare involvement and improved child and family outcomes. One study found that each additional month that mothers who are low-income receive a child care subsidy is associated with a 16% decrease in the odds of a neglect report and 14% decrease in the odds of a physical abuse report (in the following 12 months).<sup>2</sup> Additional research found that difficulty finding child care was a stronger predictor of maternal neglect than almost any other factor including mental health and severity of substance use.<sup>3</sup>

There are 40,100 children ages 5 and under in Wyoming. According to Wyoming Counts Kids Data Book 2022, 72% of Wyoming children ages five and under live in households in which all parents work and 13% of these households' earnings are below the poverty line (\$24,860).<sup>4</sup> Lack of accessible and affordable child care is a barrier to parental employment and can force parents (especially mothers) to choose between going to work and staying home.<sup>5</sup>

According to a 2022 Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) assessment, Wyoming is estimated to have a potential child care gap of 27.6%, representing 5,393 children in need of child care services. The BPC defines a child care gap as the difference between the *potential need* for child care as compared to the supply of child care for children under the age of six. 'Potential need' is defined as all children under six with all available parents in the labor force. While Wyoming's child care gap decreased by 8% since 2020 and Wyoming's gap (27.6%) is lower than the national child care gap of 31.7%, an increased need for child care access in many Wyoming communities continues to exist.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.americanprogress.org/article/growing-economy-affordable-child-care/>

<sup>2</sup> Yang, 2019 - [https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-ECS-Tool-with-Intro\\_6.14.23.pdf](https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-ECS-Tool-with-Intro_6.14.23.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Economic-Supports-deck.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "2021 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Public Use Micro Sample."

<sup>5</sup> Glynn, S.J., Farrell, J., & Wu, N. (2013). The importance of preschool and child care for working mothers. <https://ampr.gs/3uUJqrb>.

# Early Care and Education Programs Overview

## System Overview and DFS Role

Wyoming's early care and education (ECE) system, also commonly referred to as an early childhood system, is fragmented in its administration and governance.<sup>6</sup> For example, the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) administers the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C and Part B programs and some home visitation programs; the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) houses the Head Start Collaboration office and oversees Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) preschool program and Title 1 preschools; and the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services houses Wyoming Quality Counts, which assists with early childhood training and education. DFS also plays a significant role in the State's ECE system by ensuring Wyoming families have access to safe, affordable, and high quality child care through its Child Care Assistance Program, Child Care Licensing Program (including professional development and quality)<sup>7</sup>, and Resource and Referral. DFS also administers the State's Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant through local Parents as Teachers programs in five counties.

## Funding and Authority

DFS is the lead agency for the federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which funds ECE programs and functions designed to address child care access, safety, and quality across Wyoming. The CCDBG budget (\$21.2M total annual budget) includes approximately 73% federal funds (\$15.5M) and approximately 27% state general funds (\$5.7M) that primarily meet match and maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements.<sup>8</sup>

CCDBG requirements dictate how the majority of CCDBG funding is used. No less than 70% of both federal and matching funds are required to be spent on direct services to families (i.e., child care assistance). Additionally, 9% must be spent on quality activities (e.g., workforce training and professional development, child care resource and referral, implementation of early learning and development guidelines, and licensing), and 3% must be spent on infant and toddler care (e.g., health and safety training such as safe sleep practices and developing infant and toddler components in licensing regulations). Administrative expenses are capped at 5% and all remaining funding is used to ensure provider reimbursement rates for direct services meet a minimum threshold of the 50th percentile of market rates.

The following sections further describe how DFS uses CCDBG funds for ECE programs and functions that support child care access including affordability, safety, and quality.

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<sup>6</sup>[https://wyoleg.gov/InterimCommittee/2020/04-2020122902-01\\_WyomingGovernanceTaskForceFinalReport.121420.pdf](https://wyoleg.gov/InterimCommittee/2020/04-2020122902-01_WyomingGovernanceTaskForceFinalReport.121420.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> W.S. 14-4-101(v) establishes DFS as the child care certification and enforcement authority over child caring facilities, including those providing 24/7 substitute care services; and tasks DFS with administering and enforcing child care facility certification provisions contained in W.S. 14-4-101 through 117.

<sup>8</sup> If the MOE requirement is not met, Wyoming becomes ineligible for the entire CCDBG block grant. If the match requirements are not met, the federal match is proportionally reduced.

## Child Care Assistance

The Child Care Assistance Program (also known as the Child Care Subsidy Program) provides financial assistance to eligible, low-income families who have child care expenses and are participating in an approved activity (e.g., work, training program, education, job search or sleep time for shift work).

The Child Care Assistance Program is a means-based program. Eligibility for child care assistance and the amount of child care assistance awarded is determined by an applicant's citizenship, residency, income, assets, household size, and cost of child care. The eligible child must be between ages 0-13 and the parent(s) or caregiver(s) must be in an approved activity to be eligible for child care assistance. Child care assistance is paid to eligible providers, not directly to families. In order for providers to be eligible to receive child care assistance, they must be in compliance with Child Care Licensing or, if the provider is exempt from licensure, follow Wyoming Purchase of Service rules (See *Figure 1*).

In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2023, an average of 1,474 families with 2,855 children qualified for child care financial assistance, totaling approximately \$16.4 million paid directly to eligible child care providers. As of April 1, 2024, 341 out of 552 licensed providers (approximately 62%) accept child care assistance.

In addition to CCDBG funding, DFS also received one-time investments from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Act (CRRSA) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). DFS distributed \$30.4 million in federal funds directly to child care providers across all 23 Wyoming counties. These investments stabilized 96% of child care providers through the COVID-19 pandemic and led to an increase in 1,530 children served as well as provided substantial contributions to the child care workforce and infrastructure.

## Child Care Licensing

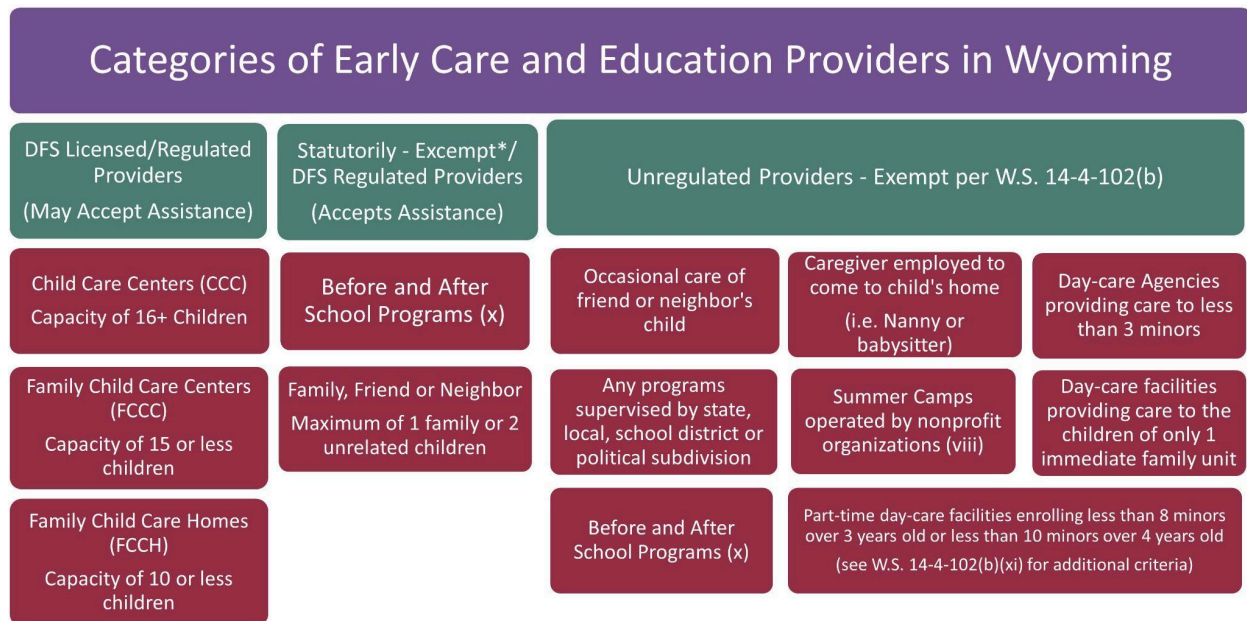
The Child Care Licensing Program, working in close partnership with the Child Care Assistance Program, provides community-based services that improve families' access to quality child care, which is necessary for families to attain or maintain employment, while ensuring that their children are safe. The Child Care Licensing Program inspects, licenses, investigates, monitors and provides technical assistance to child care providers required to be licensed under W.S. 14-4-101. The Child Care Licensing Program, along with other entities, ensures licensed providers are meeting a variety of minimum health and safety standards in accordance with federal law, Wyoming statutes, and DFS Rules, which incorporate rules and standards from other agencies such as the Departments of Agriculture and the Department of Fire Prevention & Electrical Safety. This includes criminal background checks, facility health and safety standards, staff training, emergency preparedness planning, suspension and expulsion procedures, ratios, supervision, and group size limitations.

During SFY 2023, the Child Care Licensing Program completed 1,835 visits to all licensed child care providers across the state. The Child Care Licensing Program also completed 139 investigations of reported concerns and as well as 95 investigations for observed violations by providers.

The types of child care providers required to be licensed are identified in the first column of *Figure 1* below and include Child Care Centers (CCC), Family Child Care Centers (FCCC) and Family Child Care Homes (FCCH). FCCHs are the smallest licensed facilities serving ten (10) or less children, followed by FCCs caring for 15 or less children and CCCs serving 16 or more children. Licensed providers may register to accept child care assistance; however, it is not a requirement for licensure.

The types of providers exempt from certification are identified in the second and third columns of *Figure 1* and include a family, friend or neighbor, before and after school programs, summer programs, nannies and babysitters. Providers who are exempt from licensure may register to accept child care assistance, which then requires them to follow DFS Purchase of Service rules as prescribed by the CCDBG.

*Figure 1: Categories of Early Care & Education Providers in Wyoming*



\*Exempt from licensing per W.S. 14-4-102(b).

*Figure 2* below shows that the total number of licensed providers is steadily declining from 855 in 2010 to 570 in 2023. This is an average decrease of 3% per year. However, at the same time overall capacity had increased. Since February 2020, the total number of licensed slots has increased by 388.

Figure 2: Total Capacity and Number of Providers by Year

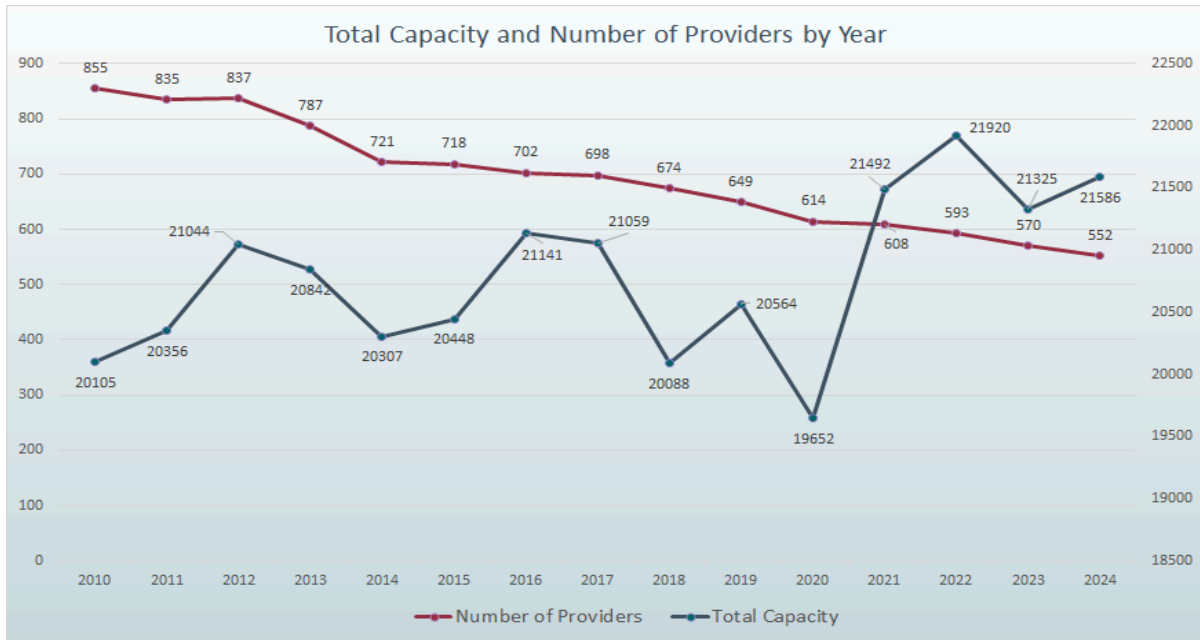


Figure 3 below shows the number of licensed providers and total licensed capacity as of April 1, 2024.

Figure 3: Wyoming Child Care Provider Types and Number; April 1, 2024

	Total Licensed Capacity	#Providers in WY
<b>Child Care Centers (CCC)</b>	18,464	273
<b>Family Child Care Center (FCCC)</b>	1,345	94
<b>Family Child Care Home (FCCH)</b>	1,777	185
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,586</b>	<b>552</b>

## Professional Development, Quality, and Resource and Referral

The Professional Development, Quality, and Resource and Referral Programs ensure quality child care activities are provided as required by the CCDBG. These quality activities include training and technical assistance for child care providers, infant/toddler credentials for providers, and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services for parents and other consumers in need of information about child care in their communities. The Professional Development, Quality, and Resource and Referral Programs coordinate with and provide a majority of the funding for the University of Wyoming’s Professional Learning Collaborative. The Professional Learning Collaborative works with both licensors and child care providers to enhance quality child care and provides high quality training to providers throughout the state. The Professional Development, Quality, and Resource and Referral Programs coordinate and



fund a professional development system for child care providers, which includes a training registry and an early childhood career ladder.

## Current Priorities and Initiatives

DFS is currently focusing its efforts on payment practices and rates; Information Technology (IT) and technical assistance resources; regulations and requirements review; and collaboration and partnerships to improve Wyoming's ECE ecosystem for children and families.

### Payment Practices and Rates

Pursuant to the 2022 Market Rate Survey, which is required by the CCDBG, DFS implemented a rate increase for participating child care providers which moved assistance payments from the 45th percentile to the 50th percentile of the child care market. Additionally, DFS continues to pay child care assistance based on enrollment to ensure providers who are serving children on assistance have a predictable revenue source so that they can continue to pay for operational costs (i.e. staffing, supplies) and provide care for all families.

### IT and Technical Assistance

Through the State procurement process, DFS has awarded a contract and is actively working to develop a modern integrated child care marketplace (ECARES). The proposed system will better connect families to child care providers and offer support through four main modules: Workforce Credentialing, Development and Training, Child Care Assistance Case Management, and Business Intelligence and Reporting.

DFS also received a consultation grant award from the Child Care State Capacity Building Center to support the development of a child care provider toolkit and other strategies designed to reduce barriers to becoming or maintaining child care licensure.

Additionally, the State, with support from Preschool Development Grant funds, established an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS). The Wyoming ECIDS is a shared secure space that combines and connects ECE data from disparate state and local agency systems and other data sources (e.g. Census) to provide useful information on ECE programs and services (e.g. availability, access, gaps, quality).

### Regulations and Requirements Review

DFS is conducting a review of all Wyoming child care licensing rules, as well as facilitating conversations with ECE stakeholders, to ensure Wyoming's current standards meet federal requirements and are clear and relevant. When asked, Wyoming child care providers are generally supportive of child care regulations. One provider was quoted as stating, "Wyoming has some of the best regulations. They're realistic, not as onerous as others."



With provider voice in mind, this project takes a “common sense” approach to the child care licensing rules to ensure they add value and are easily understood. Additional project goals include removing standards that don’t directly impact children’s health and safety and pose an unnecessary burden to providers (i.e., requiring a physician’s statement in order to provide care), reducing duplication of standards, and improving the readability of the Rules.

## Collaboration and Partnerships

DFS is leveraging partnerships and engaging in multi-level collaboration with a goal of advancing ECE efforts. DFS is partnering with the Wyoming Children's Trust Fund to develop statewide community Family Resource Centers to provide support and resources to families, including child care. DFS is also partnering with the Wyoming Business Council (WBC) to improve access to child care as child care issues have been identified as a barrier to economic growth and development. Through the Pathways to Prosperity Project, the WBC is taking a deep dive into the supply and demand of child care as well as economic viability of child care programs in Wyoming to help identify ways to encourage the growth of child care providers while also identifying ways to support child care providers from a business perspective.

DFS also received a federal grant to build infrastructure capacity between Wyoming's child welfare system and ECE to ensure children zero to five with or at risk of child welfare involvement receive high quality ECE services. Lastly, DFS participates with the Governor's Wyoming Early Childhood State Advisory Council, which focuses on statewide coordination of and collaboration with ECE programs and services.