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In the Shadows

**WHAT WE KNOW, DON'T KNOW AND
SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE CHILD
CARE WORKFORCE**

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Foreword

The child care workforce has been at the center of national discussions about child care access, affordability, and quality—rightly so. Despite a pent-up demand for child care, many programs have vacant classrooms because they cannot attract and retain qualified child care workers. This impacts parents, businesses, and especially children. As noted in this and previous reports, the quality of a child's experiences depends on the quality and consistency of interactions with the adults who care for them. This depends on their preparation for the job and their compensation.

Since COVID-19 and the pandemic, the country has recognized the crucial role child care plays in the lives of families, businesses and our national economy. With child care workers among the country's lowest-paid occupations, the nation needs a plan to move the issue forward. This requires an understanding of the actual cost of child care, including the preparation and compensation of the workforce. This begins with adequate data. This report is an effort to understand better the current workforce and what we know and don't know. Only by understanding what we have can we understand the actual cost of a competent and well-compensated workforce.

For this report, we set out to understand 10 basic things about each state's workforce. This includes employment setting and status, gender, age, years of experience, average compensation, highest level of education, CDA, and other credentials. States were not asked to collect data specifically for this report. Instead, we asked them to provide what they know about their workforce (within a two-year window).

We relied heavily on the National Workforce Registry Alliance and its members. 45 states have some type of workforce registry, and 34 of these registries provided data for this report. Where registry data

was not available, we contacted State Child Care Administrators. Eight states either had no data or declined to participate. While we do not consider this a nationally representative dataset, the report does illustrate what we do, and do not, know about the Early Childhood Workforce nationally and sets a baseline for future work.

This report is intended to help state CCDF administrators and state policymakers see how their workforce data collection compares to the ten key data elements selected for understanding the workforce. The report also demonstrates where we have a strong understanding of the workforce and where we do not. As illustrated in the publication "[Top Down and Bottom Up Brief](#)" workforce definitions vary from one state to another. We worked to move all state reporting into the same template; thus, within each state, the data are a good depiction of what the state knows and does not know about its early learning workforce demographic, preparation, and compensation (earnings and access to benefits).

Before we can adequately plan for and support broad investments in child care (and the workforce), we need baseline data on the existing workers. To provide that baseline data, we also need investments in our system of workforce registries. As we consider the total infrastructure of the child care system, it is essential to ensure we are building on a solid foundation of data. Understanding the true cost of publicly accessible workforce data is a crucial next step in ensuring adequately resourced and staffed registries. With near population-level data, registries provide a unique infrastructure for data information exchange with the early learning workforce. However, investments in robust data collection remain astonishingly insufficient. Effective utilization of workforce data depends on a myriad of specialized knowledge, skills, and technology to support moving information from users to policymakers and change agents mobilizing to support the workforce. "

In closing, we want to thank the state workforce registries and state child care administrators for their cooperation and support of this work. We especially acknowledge the efforts of Caroline Osborne, Rachel

Owen, Grace Reef and Diana Diaz and their countless hours devoted to ensuring the data fairly represented the states' data.

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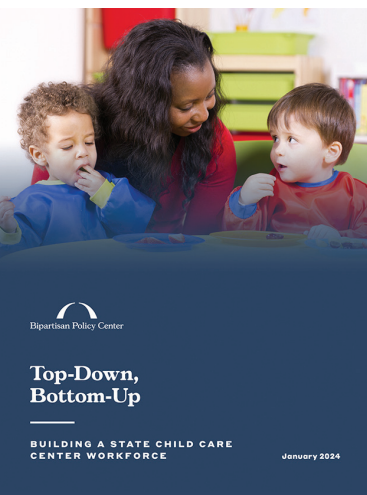
Introduction

Much has been written about the child care workforce. It supports all other workforces, and it enables parents to get and stay employed. It spurs economic growth, and it encourages positive child development.

Studies have found that positive child development is linked to interactions between the individuals working in child care and early learning settings and the children in their care. Thus, the quality of child care depends on the quality of the workforce (i.e., the knowledge and competencies of the workforce) in both center- and home-based settings.

This year, the Bipartisan Policy Center released two resources on the child care field to help federal and state policymakers, researchers, and advocates better chart the path forward for building a competent and stable child care workforce.

In January 2024, BPC released the [Child Care Workforce Licensing Database](#) after a review of licensing requirements and competency standards for child care centers across the country.



In February of 2024, BPC published [Top-Down, Bottom-Up: Building a State Child Care Center Workforce](#), a report recommending 10 steps that states can take to ensure that child care workers are best equipped to offer a nurturing environment to support children’s healthy development.

In February 2024, NWRA issued the [2023 Workforce Registry Landscape Report](#),

which compares early care and education (ECE) and out-of-school time (OST) workforce longitudinal data systems by state and territory. The report outlines state registry functions that provide data

to inform policy strategies, targeted investments, accountability, research, and evaluation.

In this report, BPC partnered with the [National Workforce Registry Alliance](#) (NWRA) to more closely examine the makeup of the U.S. child care workforce. Understanding the sheer numbers, basic demographic information, current knowledge and competencies, compensation ranges (pay and access to benefits), the settings in which they work, and workers’ experience are all critical factors in the consideration of strategies to build and support a competent and stable workforce.

The National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)¹ is helpful in understanding national averages and trends

related to the child care workforce. However, within each state, the data might differ from the national narrative, which increases the importance of each state retaining and fully understanding its own child care workforce data so that they can develop strategies to build and support the workforce.



Understanding the Child Care Workforce

Forty-five states use child care workforce registries as both a hub for workforce-related information and a data system to implement policies (e.g., to communicate or connect individuals within the workforce to information or support, such as the distribution of workforce retention or bonus grants made available through federal child care COVID-19 relief funding).

TWO KEY FUNCTIONS OF STATE WORKFORCE REGISTRIES

Data Source. A state workforce registry is a “one source of truth” data hub because it can generate aggregated or disaggregated data related to the child care workforce across settings, positions, roles, regions, demographics, and other fields critical to understanding the workforce’s makeup.

Workforce Data System. A state workforce registry is a data system because states can use it to disseminate information or provide support to individuals working in child care to advance career pathways. It can also help stakeholders understand workforce well-being and track progress toward policy strategies, such as the number of individuals working with infants and toddlers, increasing compensation, raising early childhood competencies, or pursuing other metrics to show progress within a state’s early childhood professional development framework.

Workforce registries enable consideration of data-driven strategies in real time. Individual entries reflect the entirety of a state’s child care workforce in contrast to a survey, which is typically based on a weighted sample or high-enough response rate to generalize characteristics about the workforce in a given state or region.

Workforce registries enable states to construct a framework for systemic support.

“IN A WAY, THE REGISTRIES ARE THE CLOSEST THING THAT THE CHILD CARE INDUSTRY HAS TO AN EMERGENCY BROADCAST SYSTEM. WHEN THERE’S AN EMERGENCY HAPPENING, AND WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO GET IN TOUCH WITH THE FIELD IMMEDIATELY AND QUICKLY—IT’S THE REGISTRIES THAT KNOW WHERE TO FIND THEM.”^a

DR. WALTER GILLIAM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE

To better understand the current child care workforce, BPC and NWRA conducted a first of its kind analysis using state workforce data to examine data known, to identify data gaps, and to highlight trends across states in the collection of workforce data.

Although more than 100 fields can be tracked through workforce registries, BPC and NWRA selected 10 basic elements to review.

^a Source: National Workforce Registry Alliance, [Powerful ECE Registry Data is Key to Informing Workforce Compensation Policy and Strategies](#), 2022.

WORKFORCE DATA REVIEWED FOR THIS REPORT

Wherever possible, we relied on state registry data. For states without a registry, state child care administrators sent workforce data for inclusion. A few states opted not to participate.

These 10 data points are fundamental to understanding who is in the workforce; the locations of their workplaces; the children's ages; workers' characteristics, such as age, employment status (full time vs. part time), gender, highest level of education or any early childhood certifications earned; years of experience; race and ethnicity; average compensation; and access to benefits.

The 10 elements are central to understanding not just who is in the child care workforce but also its current state. For example, data tells stakeholders the size of the workforce, the percentage of the workforce at varying stages of a state's career ladder, or the percentage of home-based providers who could be near retirement age – information that can inform data-driven policy strategies to strengthen competency progression and recruit home-based providers to ensure that families have maximum choices for finding care within their community.

Review of State Data. We reviewed workforce data from 42 states and the District of Columbia. Eight states declined to participate or have no statewide workforce data (Alabama, Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, South Dakota, and Washington). Florida has two workforce registries but was excluded because the registries are not statewide. In reviewing the 10 basic data elements, it became clear that data collection was a work in progress.

Workforce Size. More than 2.7 million people were included in state registries or state data. For this project, we reviewed data related to more than 1.6 million workers who were in a direct-care role (directors,

teachers, assistant teachers, home-based providers, and home-based assistants, trainers, and coaches).

Across states, the universe of individuals in direct-care roles who were required to participate in registries differed.

In 23 states, individuals working in licensed programs are required to participate in the state registry. However, in other states, only two categories of workers may be required to participate in the registry: those working in programs that participate in the state quality rating system, and/or those working in programs that enroll children whose care is paid for with a subsidy.

In 13 states, individuals working in Head Start programs must participate in the registry. Although we did not specifically ask about pre-K teachers in public schools, Virginia differentiated among individuals who work in public pre-K at public schools. Future reports should distinguish between these groups to ensure the most accurate representation of the data.

Understanding who is in the direct-care workforce begins with capturing data across settings. All individuals working in licensed or regulated care should be required to participate.

INDIVIDUALS IN DIRECT-CARE ROLES

For the purposes of this report, we defined direct-care roles as center-based directors and assistant directors, lead teachers and assistant teachers, family child care owners and assistants, and trainers and coaches supporting the field.

The following 10 steps, drawn from BPC's [Top-Down, Bottom-Up: Building a State Child Care Center Workforce](#) report show how states can build a stable and competent workforce.

10 STEPS TOWARD A COMPETENT, STABLE WORKFORCE

Define the Child Care Workforce

1. **Develop workforce definitions:** Lead agencies should adopt definitions for the child care workforce, including directors, teachers, and support staff.
2. **Develop workforce competencies:** Lead agencies should adopt competencies for all defined roles.
3. **Collect, analyze, and utilize workforce data:** Lead agencies should collect and connect all relevant data from child care subsidies, program licensing, Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), workforce registries, professional development, higher education, and other relevant programs, and should include years of experience, training hours, credentials, and degrees earned.

Ensure Competency and Quality

4. **Determine education requirements and career pathways:** Lead agencies should determine the competency-based education and training required of each role and needed resources for advancement. Credit for prior learning opportunities should be created as part of all degree pathways. Degree requirements should focus on child care directors first. State agencies should consider the availability of higher education and training in their state, and the capacity of the state to support expansion, before setting requirements for credentials and degrees.
5. **Enforce competency requirements:** Lead agencies should communicate requirements and utilize a monitoring system to ensure that the workforce meets them. This can mirror teacher certification or similar occupational licensing systems utilized in other professions.

Determine the Cost of the System

6. **Analyze costs:** Lead agencies should determine operating costs for a center with a competent and stable workforce. Baseline program operating costs inform the total cost of the system.
7. **Analyze workforce costs:** Lead agencies should understand the cost of education and training, compensation scales, and workplace benefits, including health insurance and paid leave.
8. **Conduct system-level cost modeling:** Lead agencies should conduct a system-level cost model to determine the total cost of a child care system that addresses gaps and meets short- and long-term goals.

Identify Financing

9. **Identify financing mechanisms:** Once the workforce is defined and total costs are determined (steps 1–8), lead agencies should consider how to allocate available public funding to best meet their goals.
10. **Determine funding for compensation:** Lead agencies should decide how, and at what level, they will fund child care as part of their public investment. This should include setting incremental goals for ensuring a competent and stable workforce.

Source: Bipartisan Policy Center, *Top-Down, Bottom-Up: Building a State Child Care Center Workforce*, 2024

Ages of Children Served. In over half the states (27), registries did not report or collect data on the ages of children with whom the direct-care workforce most frequently interacts. Understanding the ages of the children in child care is important for potentially identifying workforce shortages among age groups (e.g., infants). Such data is also important for designing strategies to attract child care workers, or incentivizing competencies among particular sectors of the workforce (e.g., a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, an infant-toddler credential, a preschool or school-age credential).

Workforce Age. In nearly one-third of states (16), data was not reported or collected on the age of individuals in direct-care roles. Information on the ages of these individuals helps identify when more recruits are needed or in designing training that will most resonate with the target audience.

Employment Status. In more than half of states (26), registries did not report or collect data related to individuals' employment status (full time vs. part time). Data on hours worked helps stakeholders to fully understand the workforce's composition, to design coursework or training programs, or to assess benefit eligibility (e.g., a recruitment and retention strategy that involves a bonus or access to a benefit, such as health care insurance, that relies on estimates of full-time employment).

Gender. In one-quarter of states (13), workers' gender data was not reported. Information about gender can help policymakers design workforce supports that may be needed, particularly when workers have young children and could be in need of child care for their own family.

Highest Level of Education. Nearly all states require individuals to enter their highest level of education in the registry. However, in half of the states (25), individuals are not required to specify whether their associate or bachelor's degree is in early childhood education. While it is good to know whether someone has an A.A. or a B.A., it is even more important to understand whether that degree

is in early childhood education, which prepares graduates to work with children.

In addition, in most states (47), the data reported for individuals denoting their highest level of education does not match the number reported for individuals in direct-care roles. It is unclear whether this is a result of how the data is pulled from state registries or whether individuals leave the field missing when they fill out their personal profile. Therefore, the highest level of education field may be incomplete across many states.

CDA and Other ECE Credentials. In over one-third of states (18), data was not reported or collected on the number of workers who have a Child Development Associate (CDA) or other early childhood credential. The CDA is a nationally recognized early childhood credential. Collecting data on academic attainment is important because the information is part of early childhood competencies. Certification data can help determine investment levels to strengthen the quality of care.

Years of Experience. In nearly two-thirds of states (33), data was not reported or collected on years of work experience. Understanding the experience of the workforce is important in designing training and support for the workforce.

Race and Ethnicity. In over one-quarter of states (14), data was not reported or collected on workers' race and ethnicity.

Average Compensation. In three-fifths of states (31), hourly wage information was either not reported or collected for individuals across both categories of center-based and home-based care settings.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics collects data on average and median wages for individuals working in child care broadly,² but it does not differentiate among individual roles performed in child care settings. Given the reported difficulty in recruiting and retaining child care workers, understanding average wages across roles and by setting can help inform both wage incentive strategies and cost modeling.

Program Benefits. In three-quarters of states (39), no data is available on the number or percentage of programs (center-based and home-based) that offer benefits, such as paid planning time, paid sick leave, paid vacation, retirement, and health insurance.

Compensation is comprised of both earned wages and benefits. Both are important for recruitment, retention, and overall workforce well-being. Data on compensation can help stakeholders design recruitment and retention strategies as well as cost modeling exercises.

“WITHOUT A COMPREHENSIVE WORKFORCE REGISTRY, OHIO WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO QUICKLY DISSEMINATE INCENTIVES (COVID-19 DOLLARS) TO OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-AGE WORKFORCE THROUGH THE PANDEMIC. OHIO’S DATA ON OUR WORKFORCE HAS BEEN USED TO PRIORITIZE COVID VACCINATIONS, FOCUS ‘HERO PAY’ STIPENDS, ALONG WITH ASSISTING TO DISSEMINATE MORE THAN \$1 BILLION IN FEDERAL CORONAVIRUS AND STABILIZATION FUNDS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS AND PROFESSIONALS, WHICH HAS BEEN A LIFELINE TO PROVIDING CHILD CARE TO OUR FAMILIES.”^b

TODD BARNHOUSE, CEO, OHIO CHILD CARE RESOURCE & REFERRAL ASSOCIATION

Why Workforce Data Matters. Access to accurate, consistent, and complete workforce data matters.

Workforce registries provide a data hub analogous to a state workforce census about those working in child care. Such data should inform targeted policy strategies, for example, to establish wage scales, consider wage supplements or refundable tax credits, or to inform cost estimates for investments.

Workforce data helps facilitate a system of support and pathways for professional development. For example, about half of states used their workforce registry to verify eligibility for bonus and retention grants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

NEVADA STATEWIDE REGISTRY SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

In 2023, Nevada’s Division of Welfare and Supportive Services in the Department of Health and Human Services began a family-wide supplemental health insurance program for all active members of the Nevada Registry.

The Telehealth Services Benefit Program offers members access to free dental and vision coverage; an Employee Assistance Program (EAP); unlimited telemedicine calls/ video sessions (no deductibles, no co-pays); 10 teletherapy sessions; and an optional whole life insurance policy. The Nevada Registry serves as the gateway to these benefits, as the opt-in enrollment form is embedded within the registry, creating a streamlined approach for early care and education workers statewide.

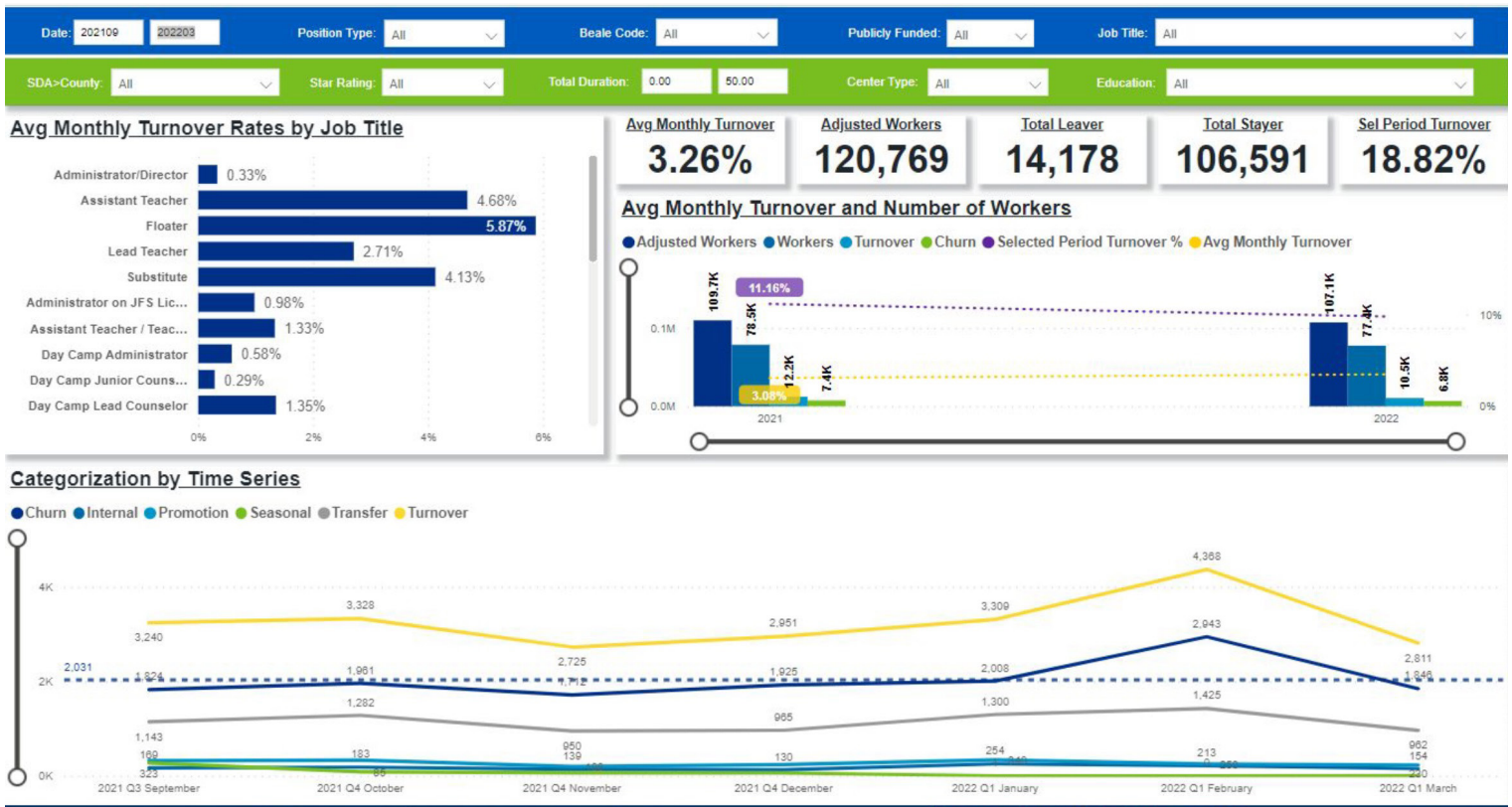
Source: National Workforce Registry Alliance, Nevada Profile, Fall 2023.

^b Source: The National Workforce Registry Alliance, [Powerful ECE Registry Data is Key to Informing Workforce Compensation Policy and Strategies](#), 2022.

State Highlight: Ohio Dashboard Informing State Discussions

Workforce Program Analysis Platform (WPAP)

- Dashboards allow for the review and analysis of workforce and program turnover, churn, retention, compensation
- Built to support the decision making at the state level
- Providing data to Governor's Office for budgeting discussions
- Examples of Available data
 - Review Turnover Rates During Phase 2 Hero Pay and one year earlier
 - Review Compensation over four year period



Moving Forward. For recruitment to and retention within the child care and early learning field, a solid understanding of the field is critical. Developing policy strategies and offering support rests on solid data, including knowing workers' role and the setting; the ages of the children for whom they are primarily responsible; workers' age, employment status, and gender; their highest level of education and any ECE credentials earned; their years of experience, race, and average compensation (by role and setting); and their access to benefits.

TOP STATES COMPLETING 10 BASIC DATA ELEMENTS

4 States completed all 10 data points (IA, MT, NV, and PA)

7 States completed 9 out of 10 data points (CT, IL, MN, NY, OH, OK, and WI)

7 States completed 8 out of 10 data points (AR, GA, MO, NE, NJ, SC, and WV)

8 States completed 7 out of 10 data points (AK, CA, CO, ID, ME, MI, NC, and VA)

Without this basic data, it is not possible to conduct a cost analysis and build a professional development system.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) law requires 12% of funds to be set aside for quality-related activities.³ Including funds transferred from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant to CCDBG (about \$976 million in fiscal year 2022),⁴ states have nearly \$1.5 billion in federal funds available to strengthen the quality of care.⁵

States should prioritize the creation, maintenance, and updating of state workforce registries with federal quality dollars. Workforce data, which plays an important role in developing quality-related strategies and activities, enables policymakers and stakeholders to measure progress and promote accountability.

NEED FOR INVESTMENT IN DATA COLLECTION EFFORTS

“WORKFORCE REGISTRIES PROVIDE PATHWAYS FOR ROBUST EARLY LEARNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS. WE KNOW POLICYMAKERS ARE INTERESTED IN DESIGNING DATA-DRIVEN POLICY STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH OR TO MEASURE PROGRESS AGAINST STATE MARKERS. HOWEVER, TO DO SO, MORE INVESTMENT IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT WORKFORCE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.

“IT'S NOT EASY. SPECIALIZED STAFF WHO HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND TECHNOLOGY ARE NECESSARY TO ENSURE DATA IS COLLECTED CORRECTLY, DEFINED APPROPRIATELY, STORED IN AN INTEGRATED MANNER, AND THAT REPORTS ARE ISSUED IN TIMELY, EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND WAYS, PROVIDING INSIGHT TO AID AND TO INFORM POLICY. ADDITIONAL INVESTMENTS ARE NEEDED TO ENSURE THAT STATE AGENCIES HAVE SUFFICIENT STAFFING, EQUIPPED WITH THE SKILLS AND TECHNOLOGY TO UNDERTAKE THIS CRITICAL WORK IN AN ACCURATE AND MEANINGFUL MANNER.”

DR. KIMBERLEE BELCHER-BADAL,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL
WORKFORCE REGISTRY ALLIANCE

Workforce data helps support a professional development framework within states that leads to quality child care settings in every community and accountability for the expenditure of public funds.

Recommendations

FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

- Develop and issue a policy statement outlining minimum information needed to know about the workforce within every state. The policy statement should include, at a minimum, the 10 data elements in this report and standard role definitions so that states have guidance related to workforce data collection and retention.
- Convene state child care administrators to examine challenges they face in creating, expanding, and verifying workforce data and supports that would be most helpful to them.
- Identify and share success stories for innovative ways in which workforce data has been used to improve the quality of the workforce or expand access to high quality care.
- Use Child Care and Development Fund state plans to establish a baseline related to workforce information collected by states and post the cross-state analysis publicly.

FOR STATES

- Identify a point of contact at the state level who is the data lead responsible for working across state divisions or agencies to ensure that workforce data is integrated and is representative of the field (e.g., state licensing, child care subsidy systems, quality rating systems, public pre-K programs, and Head Start).
- Create or expand a workforce registry with required participation for all individuals legally working in regulated child care or early learning programs.
- At a minimum, collect the following 10 data points: workforce size by role and setting; ages of children served; workforce ages; employment status (full time vs. part time); gender; highest level of education and any ECE certifications (including the nationally recognized CDA); years of experience; race; average compensation by role and setting, and access to benefits by program. Many more potential fields would be helpful, but all states should have data related to each of the 10 basic elements.
- Prioritize the use of federal quality dollars for workforce registries that will collect, retain, maintain, and regularly update workforce data. Such funding should cover sufficient staffing to manage statewide data, verify data, and convert data into timely and informative reports.
- Ensure that user application and profile management tools used for data are accessible in multiple languages and modes that allow for easy navigation.

Methodology

For this report, BPC and the National Workforce Registry Alliance identified 10 key data points that capture basic information about the child care workforce. A data collection template was created and sent to states, where it was completed by either the state's early care and education workforce registry or state child care administrator. After states returned the information, BPC and NWRA cleaned and analyzed the data for each state's profile. States then participated in a verification process, where they confirmed the accuracy of the information for each fact sheet and provided clarifications and footnotes. States were given a deadline by which to provide feedback. In some cases, states were alerted that if they did not provide feedback, the profile would be published as created.

The data in this report concerns those workers in direct-care roles as categorized in the first section, Workforce Size. The total number in this section is the total number of employees in each state's

workforce who meet this criteria. Across states, the totals reported for each of the 10 categories may not equal the total workforce number in Section One. Where there are discrepancies in the total workforce and the total reported for a section, an unreported category was added to capture those individuals who are part of the workforce but had missing data. Additionally, each state varies in the definitions assigned to positions, program type, and education classification. For the purposes of this report, varying state definitions were consolidated into the categories outlined in the template.

Where possible, percentages were calculated using the total workforce size. To prevent the distortion of percentages, workforce size was calculated using the total reported number for the section. The numbers used to calculate the percentages for a section can be found in the footnotes section of each state profile. Within the state profiles, there is a distinction between "N/A" and "Data Missing." N/A is found in data fields where the state does not collect that data, or where the data is collected but no data was reported. Data Missing is found in data fields where states indicated that the data was available, but they were unable to pull it at the time of this report.

Endnotes

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- 5 Ibid.; Office of Child Care, "GY 2023 CCDF Allocations (Based on Appropriations)," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/data/gy-2023-ccdf-allocations-based-appropriations>.



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