



APRIL 2022

Infant & Toddler Child Care Roadmap EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An exploration of ways Illinois can better meet the needs of families through the lens of the State's child care community





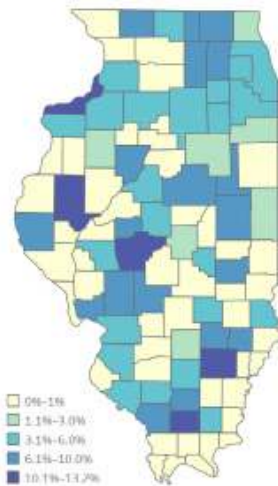
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Communities across the country are experiencing a dearth of child care options for families with infants and toddlers. Frequently described as a crisis, the availability of high-quality child care for infants and toddlers has only worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic began in spring 2020.

In Illinois, the crisis is acute, as current capacity of licensed child care provides access to only 17.4% of infants and toddlers across the State, with many communities experiencing access rates of less than 10%. Access rates fall even further when it comes to high-quality care, with capacity for only 5% of infants and toddlers to access ExceleRate Gold or Silver Circle of Quality rated programsⁱ.

These staggering numbers are the result of many barriers to providing high-quality child care, mostly relating to high costs and workforce challenges—quality care for children under age 3 is labor intensive and expensive to provideⁱⁱ. Neither reimbursement rates through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) nor the amount of money parents pay for care is enough to cover the true cost of care that is inclusive of adequate wages for staffⁱⁱⁱ. In fact, on average, teachers in infant-toddler classrooms in



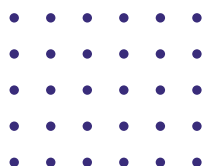
Map shows the percent of infants and toddlers in a county that could be served by the licensed capacity of silver- and gold-rated programs in that county.



Illinois are compensated less than those working in preschool age classrooms^{iv}. Poor compensation coupled with difficult and demanding working conditions create high turnover and workforce shortages.

Lack of safe, quality child care options for families with infants and toddlers leaves too many families with difficult choices to make—pay for care they can't afford, forgo working altogether, or rely on inconsistent, patchwork care arrangements.

The need for expanded access to quality care for infants and toddlers in Illinois is clear—what is less clear is how to overcome the many challenges to meet this urgent need. The *Infant and Toddler Child Care Roadmap* project, led by [Start Early](#), explores various ways Illinois can better meet the needs of families with infants and toddlers through the lens of the State's child care community. The purpose of the project is to examine the current supply, demand and impact of infant-toddler child care on family



well-being and the economy, and to surface community-informed recommendations for meeting the demand of high-quality care that supports positive economic growth and child development in Illinois. The project is part of [Raising Illinois' Prenatal-to-Three Policy Agenda](#) and is funded through the Preschool Development Birth through Five Grant, in partnership with the Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.



The *Infant and Toddler Child Care Roadmap* includes a review of recent and relevant literature on infant and toddler child care, a scan of relevant policies and practices in Illinois and other states, and a summary of findings from our engagement with Illinois's child care field through focus groups and surveys. To better contextualize and interpret the data collected through these activities and to identify subsequent policy recommendations, a series of community conversations were convened around the State to share findings from the literature, state policy scan and surveys and focus groups and to reflect with communities on their implications.

Input received from community conversations was integrated into the final report, which details the project's findings and recommendations for increasing access to infant and toddler child care in Illinois. Recommendations include:

- Strengthening the perception of the early childhood field
- Strengthening the workforce
- Increasing engagement with local communities
- Improving the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)
- Increasing supports for children with disabilities, and early childhood staff and families struggling with mental health and social emotional challenges
- Increasing business and operational supports to child care programs
- Improve availability of data on infants and toddlers





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