

Gov. Evers: Announces additional CARES Act funds for early care and education

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today announced an additional \$30 million of federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) dollars are being directed toward supporting early care and education providers. The additional funds will allow the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to conduct an additional round of Child Care Counts payments.

“As I’ve said before, what’s best for our kids is what’s best for our state,” said Gov. Evers. “Our early care educators stepped up in a big way for Wisconsin families – and their kids – to help keep our state’s economy strong during the pandemic. Frankly, our state needs them now more than ever. These funds are a recognition of the vital role they play in our communities.”

Access to safe, affordable, quality child care has risen to the forefront for Wisconsin families as the new school year begins. Yet the early care and education sector is still reeling from the impact of COVID-19. At the height of the public health emergency, just under 40 percent of child care providers (1,729 of 4,444 providers open on Jan. 1, 2020) closed their doors. That number has decreased to just over 12 percent of providers remaining closed (538 providers) as of Aug. 27, 2020. The [Wisconsin Tomorrow plan](#), authored by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), also highlighted the importance of early care and education to the state’s economy. The report notes the role access to early care and education plays in returning everyone, but especially women, to the workforce.

“Wisconsin families rely on access to child care in order to stay employed,” said DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson. “That is especially true for women, who still carry a disproportionate burden raising children. The additional funding the state is providing to early care and education will help to stabilize the industry and ensure families have safe and reliable options for care.”

The Child Care Counts: COVID-19 Supplementary Payment Program is designed to help counter those trends. The additional round of funding will be distributed through two, new programs targeted at the current challenges early care and education providers are facing. Applications and program eligibility details will be available starting Sept. 9, 2020, on [DCF's website](#), with the application window closing Sept. 18, 2020, at 11:59 p.m. Payment notifications will be issued on Sept. 26, 2020.

The individual payment programs are detailed below.

Providing safe, healthy, and high-quality child care opportunities

This program is intended to support the costs of maintaining or enhancing compliance status, quality level (YoungStar rating), and increasing health and safety practices. Funds will help ensure high-quality care is available across state, specifically at younger ages where reasonable alternatives to child care do not exist.

Funding staff recruitment and retention efforts

As providers move back to regular operations, many have struggled to bring back staff due to depressed wages. This program is designed to support the costs associated with recruiting and retaining high-quality staff.

In addition to the individual payments for eligible early care and education providers, the State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC) has made personal protective equipment (PPE) available for providers statewide. DCF is finalizing a survey that will be distributed to all regulated providers with information about how PPE can be accessed and distributed within the week.

NOTE: DCF recently launched an initiative to connect families with local child care, including [an interactive map](#) that displays open, available care.