Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships:

Top 10 Ways CCDF Can Support Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships

Early Head Start (EHS) and the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) both serve low-income families and their children; however, there are some differences in policy, operations, and funding requirements. EHS-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnerships will benefit from strategies to bridge these differences. These strategies might include aligning policies to encourage stability and continuity of care, streamlining administrative procedures, and identifying opportunities to support Partnerships and providers.

This document highlights 10 specific areas of CCDF policy that can support EHS-CC Partnership efforts.

1) Align Eligibility—Lead Agencies can align policies so that most EHS families are eligible for subsidies

CCDF and EHS both serve families below the federal poverty level (FPL), though CCDF also can serve a broader range--up to 85% of State Median Income (SMI). While there can be differences between the two programs regarding which income is counted, families with incomes below poverty who apply for CCDF can confidently be referred to EHS-CC Partnerships. States, Territories, and Tribes can also define parents' employment, education, and training requirements in a way that allows more CCDF families to be eligible for EHS, which does not have a work requirement. CCDF agencies also do not have to limit authorized hours of care to a parent's work schedule and can authorize care through EHS even if a parent works nights or a flexible schedule.

2) Serve Vulnerable Populations—Special eligibility considerations help neediest children receive care

States, Territories, and Tribes can allow special eligibility considerations for vulnerable populations. CCDF allows States to define types of children in need of **Protective Services,** and does not limit this to those formally involved with child protective services or the child welfare system. The definition can also include other populations that are particularly vulnerable, such as families who may be experiencing homelessness or migrant workers. CCDF allows States to waive work and training requirements, and in some cases, the income requirement for such families. Children in the foster care system, and children experiencing homelessness are categorically eligible for EHS services, and the income requirements do not apply to these children who are categorically eligible.

3) Allow Job Search Eligibility—Job search eligibility assists parents and promotes continuity of care

States, Territories, and Tribes can allow a parent to continue eligibility after job loss. While the CCDF agencies can specify a length of time that a family is allowed to receive child care during this period, the Office of Child Care (OCC) encourages a job search period that is responsive to the needs of the family. When families are able to retain eligibility during a job search, it helps to reduce stress, to assist parents returning to the workforce, and to support children's development.

4) Refer Eligible Families—States refer families to Partnerships via CCDF eligibility processes

The processes by which families enter into EHS-CC Partnerships vary in each state and community. If families below poverty come in for a subsidy and get turned away or wait-listed, the subsidy agency should refer them to an Early Head Start program, when available and if age-appropriate. Even when a family is able to access a subsidy, the agency can refer the family into a high-quality partnership program that utilizes layered funds. Given the role that child care eligibility can play in referring families, States should strive to make the eligibility process more family-friendly. This can be done through a variety of methods, such as extending office hours, setting up call centers, and allowing a variety of application submission methods. States can customize a way of identifying families and completing applications for Partnerships, especially by using community partners. They can delegate eligibility determination to a contracted entity. CCDF Lead Agencies can also designate a parent liaison to assist families in the eligibility process for Partnerships.

5) Align Length of Eligibility—Families can be eligible for subsidy as long as they are enrolled in EHS

Many CCDF programs are moving to 12-month eligibility for most of their families, which would allow eligibility in EHS-CC Partnerships for a year. CCDF Agencies may also establish a different eligibility period for those participating in EHS-CC Partnerships to allow for continued eligibility throughout the child's enrollment in the Partnerships. Lead Agencies can further allow for continuity of care by aligning the beginning and ending dates of the eligibility period with EHS enrollment dates, and by easing requirements for reporting changes in circumstances, if they have such policies.

6) Waive Parent Fees—Copayments can be waived for families in EHS-CC Partnerships

Families receiving child care subsidies are generally responsible for a copayment based on a sliding fee scale. States, Territories, and Tribes can waive the copayment requirement for some or all families below poverty. Since EHS is provided at no cost to eligible families, who cannot be required to pay any fees for EHS/HS services, waiving the copayment would be an important alignment of policies.

7) Establish Grants or Contracts—Grants/Contracts help build supply and promote accountability

Using grants and contracts in CCDF and EHS-CC Partnerships can be a powerful tool to build supply in underserved areas, provide stable funding, and ensure accountability. Grants/contracts for child care services normally include a scope of services and responsibilities, which may be negotiated to ensure high quality services for children.

8) Pay Rates Supporting Quality—High quality providers can receive higher rates via tiered reimbursement

Lead Agencies typically set payment rates by type of provider and age of the child. OCC encourages Lead Agencies to establish base provider rates that adequately support quality care. Lead Agencies can also offer increased rates to higher quality providers. Since EHS providers are high quality, some states pay higher rates to these providers.

9) Sustainable Payment Practices—Sustainable payment practices encourage involvement in Partnerships

States can design provider payment practices to provide the stability necessary for working effectively with EHS-CC Partnerships. Stable, predictable payment strategies such as ensuring timely payments, pay based on enrollment, and aligning attendance policies with EHS will help providers with sustainable financing. Another way to help providers is to identify a provider liaison in the subsidy agency.

10) Layer Funding—Inherent in designing the financing of Partnerships is the idea of layering funds

Partnerships will want to budget subsidy payments, layered with Partnership funds. States can layer EHS and CCDF funds for the same child as long as there is no duplication in payments for the exact same part of the service. This is an option that some states are already implementing, and the EHS-CC Partnerships offer an opportunity for further utilization of this funding strategy.