

# A BETTER BABY CARE AGENDA

## MEETING THE NEEDS OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS IN NEW YORK CITY

### Executive Summary

#### A Brief Profile

- There is a critical shortage of regulated child care services for infants and toddlers in New York City, which can only serve 18% of the 100,000 children under three in need of out-of-home care.
- Regulated child care for children under age three costs three times as much as tuition at a four-year City University.
- Training for child care professionals in infant and toddler care and development is sporadic and there are limited opportunities for advancement. There are no specific training requirements for providers that focus on children under age three.
- Parents and caregivers have little access to information on infant/toddler development or available services for families with young children.

#### Quality Care is Vital for Children During the Earliest Years

##### Key Research

Findings from early brain research as well as an extensive evaluation of the federally funded Early Head Start program confirm the critical connection between childhood experiences before age three and subsequent cognitive, social and emotional development. Major disparities exist among social and economic classes of children entering kindergarten and these disparities are often directly connected to early opportunities and prognostic of future academic performance. A national evaluation of the federally funded Early Head Start (EHS) program for low-income families with infants and toddlers, found that children ages birth to three who participated in EHS showed more positive outcomes on measurements of cognitive, social and emotional development and family functioning than children who did not participate. These studies point to quality early childhood experiences as the best way to promote further positive developmental growth that can lead to later academic, social and emotional success.

## **The National Better Baby Care Campaign**

The Better Baby Care Campaign seeks to provide focused attention on a coherent strategy for addressing infant and toddler care. It strives to enhance public awareness regarding the needs of infants and toddlers and advocates for improved public policies that will truly serve babies and their families. The Campaign has developed a 12-step program that focuses on professional development, quality improvement, public investment and parent supports. These recommendations have influenced the effort in New York City and in other US cities and states.

## **Our Goals**

Child Care, Inc. brought together a working coalition of 20 organizations to form the New York City Better Baby Care Campaign strategic working group. This partnership is committed to working towards improvement and expansion of infant and toddler services in New York City. Our specific goals are as follows:

1. To ensure that parents have access to quality child care options for their infants and toddlers;
2. To ensure that both regulated and informal care is developmentally appropriate for children under age three;
3. To strengthen support for parents in caring for their children; and
4. To provide appropriate connections to social and health services and special needs intervention for infants, toddlers and their families.

## **Resources to Build On**

### **Initiatives for Infant and Toddlers in New York State and Comprehensive Plans in Other US States.**

Lessons can be learned from other states where more coordinated efforts to improve and expand infant and toddler care have been implemented. Initiatives in place in California, Washington State, Kansas and Oklahoma, inform the work of the New York City and State effort, such as:

1. A two-tiered system of training in California, where a cadre of infant/ toddler specialists is built within the child care community to offer training in their local communities.

2. A supportive system of health consultation in Washington State, which employees Department of Health nurses in local jurisdictions to provide advice and expertise to local child care programs.
3. A child census completed in Kansas documents the availability of services for children under three including center-based care, regulated family child care and informal care.

We have key building blocks in place to expand upon in New York City and State, including service models such as Early Head Start and the Board of Education LYFE program for teen parents, as well as professional development opportunities such as the Infant and Toddler certificate program and the Child Development Associate program. The New York State Child Care Coordinating Council and the Center for Early Care and Education is developing a statewide blueprint for early care and education including a plan for universal infant and toddler care, which informs the New York City effort.<sup>1</sup>

## **Recommendations for Moving Forward**

The recommendations reflect what we learned from our national review, focused discussions and interviews and the work groups at the policy conference. These recommendations provide both long and short term strategies to address the needs of infants and toddlers.

### **Access to Information about Regulations, Training and Funding**

1. Develop an information clearinghouse for child care professionals and parents that will support them in caring for children under age three. A web-based clearinghouse will make this resource easily accessible for many in the field.
2. Document the availability of infant and toddler care in family child care settings to assist in community planning and development efforts.

### **Building Quality Through Training**

1. A coordinated approach to developing a training plan should be undertaken. Entry level, continuing service education and training and other professional development

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<sup>1</sup> The Center for Early Care and Education is a partnership between Child Care, Inc. and the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy.

opportunities need to be accessible and tied to compensation for child care professionals.

2. Create a two-tiered training support system with Infant/ Toddler specialists housed in local Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies to coordinate training efforts and provide hands-on technical assistance and support to providers. In turn, create a cadre of 'Quality Advisors' to serve as mentors and experienced trainers in community child care programs.
3. Complete a review of in-service training requirements for child care providers and develop recommendations for policymakers.
4. Require all child care providers to become trained in identifying young children with special needs as developed by New York City Department of Health, Office of Early Intervention.
5. Require informal child care providers serving city subsidized children to complete the basic health and safety training that is mandated for regulated providers.

### **Paid Family and Medical Leave**

1. Support augmentation and expansion of New York State temporary disability insurance from a 6 week maternity leave benefit to allow families to receive 12 weeks of paid leave to care for a new child, or ill relative or to recover from one's own illness.

### **Outreach and Linkages**

2. Focus on continuous building of bridges among key communities including health care, early intervention, early literacy and education.
3. Engage the business and labor communities to support new investments in child care and more family oriented work policies.

### **Service Expansion**

1. Make a major investment in child care subsidies for children under three.
2. Provide incentives to encourage programs to offer services to infants and toddlers, such as increased compensation for family child care providers and targeted grants to centers and family homes for equipment and renovations to prepare a program for children under three.

3. Fund family child care networks to offer technical assistance and support for providers caring for infants and toddlers.

### Advocacy

1. Maintain and build the New York City Better Baby Care Campaign strategic working group and continue to create awareness of the needs of infants and toddlers in New York.
2. Work with statewide advocacy coalitions to advance the cause of improving and expanding infant and toddler care.

### Conclusion

A major investment involving federal, state and city governments along with employers is needed in order to meet our goals of expanding child care options for families with children under three and improving the quality of the care available for these children. Other states have effectively used their quality set-aside funds to offer training and expansion initiatives as well as service linkages. However, the magnitude of the shortage of care for infants and toddlers will require resources beyond those offered through the set-aside including public as well as private means.

### Co-Sponsors of the New York City Better Baby Care Campaign Strategic Working Group

#### Child Care, Inc. with:

Bank Street College	National Black Child Development Institute, New York Affiliate
Borough of Manhattan Community College	New York State Paid Family and Medical Leave Coalition
Child Development Support Corporation	New York University Child and Family Policy Center
Chinese-American Planning Council	New York University Head Start Quality Improvement Center
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York	Resources for Children with Special Needs, Inc.
Children's Defense Fund- New York	UJA Federation of New York
Committee for Hispanic Children and Families	United Neighborhood Houses
Federation for Protestant Welfare Agencies	United Way of New York City
Infant/ Toddler Coalition	Union Child Care Coalition
Family Child Care Citywide Association Provider Support Network	