

# AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE PROGRAMS IN CALIFORNIA

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## 1. How do I get affordable child care in California?

Visit your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency (R&R) to find out what affordable child care program(s) you qualify for, how to choose the best child care for you, and how to sign up.

Find the R&R in your community, by calling 1-800-543-7793 or going to [www.rrnetwork.org/find\\_child\\_care](http://www.rrnetwork.org/find_child_care).

If you are getting CalWORKs cash assistance, ask your CalWORKs worker for child care. You can use [this form](#) to ask for CalWORKs child care.

If you received CalWORKs cash assistance or a diversion payment in the last 2 years, you can still get CalWORKs child care. Ask your local R&R about CalWORKs child care.

## 2. What affordable child care programs are available in California?

Publicly-funded affordable child care is also called a “child care subsidy” or “subsidized child care.” The main affordable child care programs include:

1. CalWORKs Child Care
2. Non-CalWORKs Child Care Programs
3. Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Children in Foster Care
4. California State Preschool Program
5. Head Start and Early Head Start
6. Other Affordable Child Care Programs

The California Department of Social Services administers all the above publicly-funded affordable child care programs, except for the California State Preschool Program which the California Department of Education administers.

### 3. CalWORKs Child Care

#### **Who Qualifies**

If you currently receive or received CalWORKs cash assistance or a diversion payment in the past 2 years, then you may be entitled to CalWORKs child care for any child who lives with you, and you are responsible for.<sup>1</sup> Resource parents, parents, and other caregivers can qualify for CalWORKs child care.<sup>2</sup>

#### **How it Works**

CalWORKs child care payments are in the form of a voucher that you can use to pay the child care provider or center you choose to take care of your child. The local Child Welfare Agency or Alternative Payment Program paying for your CalWORKs child care usually makes the voucher payment directly to the person or child care center providing child care.

CalWORKs has three stages of child care:<sup>3</sup>

#### **CalWORKs Stage 1 Child Care**

Families, resource parents, and caregivers who receive CalWORKs cash assistance are entitled to immediate, continuous CalWORKs Stage 1 child care for 12 months or until transfer to the CalWORKs Stage 2 child care program when the County determines the family is “stable.”<sup>4</sup> To qualify, the family, resource parent, or caregiver must be working or engaging in a Welfare-to-Work (WTW) activity such as attending parenting classes; education-related appointments for their child; domestic violence, substance use or mental health counseling; court and medical appointments; or searching for a job or home.<sup>5</sup>

Because Stage 1 is an entitlement, qualifying parents and caregivers should not be placed on a child care waiting list.<sup>6</sup> They have good cause for not participating in their WTW activity if they cannot find suitable child care. The County Welfare Office is the starting point for families seeking CalWORKs assistance, including child care.<sup>7</sup>

#### **CalWORKs Stage 2 Child Care**

Families, resource parents, and caregivers who received CalWORKs cash assistance or a diversion payment within the past two years are eligible to receive assistance paying for child care under the CalWORKs Stage 2 program, which is also considered an entitlement program.

Just like with Stage 1 CalWORKs child care, families should not be put on a waitlist for Stage 2 CalWORKs child care either. To qualify for Stage 2, families must have received cash assistance

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<sup>1</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11323.2\(a\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11323.2\(a\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10370](#).

<sup>4</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11323.2\(a\)\(1\)\(B\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11323.2\(c\)](#).

<sup>6</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11323.2\(a\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code §§ [11320.3\(f\)](#), [11323.2\(a\)\(1\)](#).

or a diversion payment within the past two years *and* fall into one of the following eligibility categories:

1. Families who earn below 85% of the state median income (\$6,842 per month for a family of three in 2023) or currently receive cash assistance *and* they have a need for child care because they are working, attending school, or searching for a home or job.<sup>8</sup>
2. Families with a child who receives protective services or has been identified as abused, neglected or exploited, or at risk thereof. To qualify for child care under this category, families must receive a written referral from a legal, medical, or social services agency; an LEA liaison for homeless children and youth, designated pursuant to 42 USC 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii); a Head Start program; or an emergency or transitional shelter.<sup>9</sup>
3. Families experiencing homelessness.<sup>10</sup>

If you qualify based on homelessness or at-risk status, then it doesn't matter if your income goes over 85% of the state median income.<sup>11</sup> Families experiencing homelessness or caring for children who are identified as at risk or receiving protective services do not need to have any additional need for CalWORKs child care such as working or going to school.<sup>12</sup>

### **CalWORKs Stage 3 Child Care**

Depending on sufficient funding, families, resource parents, and caregivers are transferred from CalWORKs Stage 2 in the 24<sup>th</sup> month to CalWORKs Stage 3 child care.

Families should be seamlessly transferred between the CalWORKs child care stages without a break in services.<sup>13</sup>

### **How to Get It**

Ask your CalWORKs worker for child care. You should get immediate and stable child care once you are approved for CalWORKs cash assistance and are doing, or plan to do, a CalWORKs activity.<sup>14</sup> Ask your worker for the full list of activities that you can do to get CalWORKs child care. You can ask for child care whenever you need it.<sup>15</sup> You can use [this form](#) to ask for child care. If you are receiving CalWORKs cash assistance and are not currently receiving CalWORKs child care, you can ask for CalWORKs child care and get approved immediately. If you *are not* currently receiving CalWORKs cash assistance, but you received cash assistance or a diversion payment within the last 2 years, you should be approved immediately for child care after you ask for it.

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<sup>8</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(a\)-\(b\)](#).

<sup>9</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(a\)\(1\)\(A\)\(iv\)](#), [\(b\)\(1\)\(B\)\(i\)](#).

<sup>10</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(a\)\(1\)\(A\)\(iii\)](#), [\(a\)\(1\)\(B\)\(i\)](#).

<sup>11</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(a\)-\(b\)](#).

<sup>12</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(a\)-\(b\)](#).

<sup>13</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10370](#).

<sup>14</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11323.2\(a\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>15</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11323.2\(a\)\(1\)\(B\)](#).

**Tip:** Ask your CalWORKs worker for child care as soon as you need it, because you can only get reimbursed for up to 30 days of child care payments before the date you requested child care.

**It's best to do this in writing.**

**Parents, Resource Parents, and Caregivers:** If you receive or received CalWORKs cash assistance in the last 2 years, and you cannot get child care, contact us by filling out our online intake form: [www.childcarelaw.org/help](http://www.childcarelaw.org/help)

**Attorneys:** If your client is a resource parent, a family experiencing homelessness, or is or was getting CalWORKs cash assistance, and was denied child care, please fill out our online intake form: [www.childcarelaw.org/help](http://www.childcarelaw.org/help).

### **How Long It Lasts**

Children can be enrolled in CalWORKs child care through age 12,<sup>16</sup> and up to age 21 if they have a disability.<sup>17</sup> Once a child is enrolled in CalWORKs child care, they can remain in any stage of CalWORKs child care for 12 continuous months until the family recertifies for care.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, a 13-year-old may receive CalWORKs child care until their 12 months run out.<sup>19</sup>

CalWORKs Stage 1 child care has 12-month eligibility. This rule means you get CalWORKs child care without losing it or having to report any changes in your situation for at least 12 months or until you are transferred to Stage 2.

CalWORKs Stages 2 and 3 child care also have 12-month continuous eligibility.<sup>20</sup> Once you are certified for CalWORKs child care, you are considered to meet all eligibility and need requirements for not less than 12 months.<sup>21</sup> You do not need to report any changes to your income unless you qualified for Stage 2 or Stage 3 *based on your income* and your family income exceeds 85% of the state median income.<sup>22</sup> If you qualified for Stage 2 or Stage 3 based on other eligibility categories, such as homelessness, at-risk status, or receiving CalWORKs cash assistance, you do not need to report changes in your family income and you should not lose your child care if your family income exceeds 85% of the state median income.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code §§ [10213.5\(i\)](#), [11323.2\(a\)\(1\)\(A\)](#).

<sup>17</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10260 \(b\), \(d\)\(2\)](#).

<sup>18</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(h\)-\(i\)](#).

<sup>19</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(h\)-\(i\)](#); Cal. Dep't of Soc. Serv., Child Care Bulletin No. 22-04 CalWORKs Stage One Child Care Program (Jan. 13, 2022), <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/CCBs/2022/CCB22-04.pdf?ver=2022-01-26-083624-903> (last visited Jan. 25, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(h\)](#).

<sup>21</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(h\)](#).

<sup>22</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(h\)](#).

<sup>23</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(h\)](#), Cal. Code of Regs, tit. 5 § [18083 \(d\)\(1\)](#) (clarifying aid in the statute to be "CalWORKs cash aid.")

## 4. Non-CalWORKs Child Care Programs

### Who Qualifies

You automatically qualify for Non-CalWORKs child care if your family has a child who is

- Receiving child protective services, or
- Identified as abused, neglected, or exploited, or
- At risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation, or
- Experiencing homelessness<sup>24</sup>

All other families must have an (1) income equal to or below 85% of the state median income or receive certain government benefits AND (2) a “need” for child care.

#### **(1) Income or Public Benefits**

Examples of income that count for eligibility include wages, salaries, child or spousal support, disability or unemployment, payments, annuities, cash assistance (but not SSI), self-employment income, worker’s compensation, and veteran’s benefits.

Families may also be eligible for child care if they receive CalWORKs cash assistance or other public benefits such as Medi-Cal, CalFresh, the California Food Assistance Program, the California Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the federal Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, Head Start, or Early Head Start.<sup>25</sup>

#### **(2) Need for Child Care**

You meet the “need” requirement if you are working, searching for work, searching for a home, going to school, or taking work training. You may also meet the need requirement if you cannot care for your child because you have a physical or mental health condition.

You don’t need to meet the “need” requirement to qualify for child care if your family is experiencing homelessness, or you have a child who is receiving child protective services, or who is identified as being at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.<sup>26</sup>

### How to Get It

Ask your local R&R if you qualify for any affordable child care program. Non-CalWORKs child care comes in the form of a voucher, or a parent can sign-up directly with a child care center (a

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<sup>24</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(a\)-\(b\)](#)(Families under these categories must have a written referral from a legal, medical, or social services agency, a local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youths, a Head Start program, or an emergency or transitional shelter.

<sup>25</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(a\)\(1\)\(A\)\(v\)](#).

<sup>26</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(a\)\(1\)\(B\)](#).

space). Either way, the parent can go to the R&R to find out where they can use their voucher or sign up directly with a center.

### **Who Gets Priority**

There is a waitlist for non-CalWORKs child care programs. If you are eligible, your local Alternative Payment Program (APP, usually located with the R&R) that administers publicly-funded affordable child care programs will put your name on a waiting list if there is no space available. Families are called off the waiting list in order of priority. Direct-contracted centers and Family Child Care Home Education Networks (FCCHENs) also have waiting lists for parents who qualify for publicly-funded child care.

The child care waiting list has two priorities:

#### **First Priority**

If you are a parent, resource parent, or caregiver whose child is

- Receiving child protective services,
- Not receiving child welfare services but is identified as abused, neglected, or exploited, or
- At risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

If you fit into one of these groups, the APP must put you at the top of the child care waiting list.<sup>27</sup>

To get first priority, parents, parents, caregivers

*must have* a written referral from:

- a legal, medical, or social services agency,
- a local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youths,
- a Head Start program, or
- an emergency or transitional shelter

#### **Second Priority**

If you don't have first priority and you are put on a child care waiting list, your place on the list is based on your income. When a child care subsidy becomes available, the family with the lowest income on the list gets child care first. When two families have the same income, a family with a child who has a disability will get child care first before the other family with the same income. If no child has a disability, families whose primary language is not English will have priority over another family with the same income.<sup>28</sup>

### **How Long It Lasts**

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<sup>27</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(b\)](#).

<sup>28</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(b\)\(2\)](#).

You get non-CalWORKs child care without losing it or having to report any changes in your situation for at least 24 continuous months.<sup>29</sup>

The only exception is if you qualify based on your family's income, which is above 85% of the state median income. If your family's income is above 85% of the state median income (\$6,842 per month for a family of 3 in 2023<sup>30</sup>), then you must report your income and check with the agency where you get your child care subsidy to see if you still qualify.<sup>31</sup>

Note: This income reporting requirement does not apply to you if you have child care because your child receives protective services, or is identified as abused, neglected, or exploited, or is at-risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

As long as you continue to qualify for a non-CalWORKs child care program, you will get it until the next time you certify for child care until your child turns 13 years old.<sup>32</sup> If your child has a disability, you could get child care until your child is 21 years old.<sup>33</sup>

## 5. Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children

It can be hard to quickly find good, affordable child care when a child is unexpectedly placed in your home. The Emergency Child Care Bridge navigators help families find child care and get a 6-month emergency child care bridge voucher to pay for it.<sup>34</sup>

### **Who Qualifies**

The Child Care Bridge Program is for

- Resource families and families who have a child placed with them
- Licensed foster family homes or certified family homes
- Approved homes of relatives or non-relative extended family members
- Parenting youth in foster care and non-minor parents in foster care.

Parents do not qualify for the Bridge Program for their biological or adopted children living with them.

Most counties have the Child Care Bridge Program, but some do not.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(h\)](#).

<sup>30</sup> Cal. Dep't of Soc. Servs., Child Care Bulletin No. 22-12 Revised State Median Income (SMI) Ceilings and Income Ranking Table for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 at 2, <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/CCBs/2022/CCB22-12.pdf?ver=2022-06-21-143059-450> (last visited Jan. 24, 2023).

<sup>31</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10271\(h\)\(3\)](#).

<sup>32</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code §§ [10213.5\(i\)](#), [10271\(h\)\(1\)](#). See also Cal. Dep't of Soc. Servs., Child Care Bulletin No. 22-37 Implementation of the Provision of Senate Bill (SB) 1047 (Chapter 923, Statutes of 2022) Pertaining to 24-Month Eligibility at 3, [https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/CCBs/2022/CCB\\_22-37.pdf?ver=2023-01-09-103517-093](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/CCBs/2022/CCB_22-37.pdf?ver=2023-01-09-103517-093) (last visited Jan. 24, 2023).

<sup>33</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code §§ [10213.5\(i\)](#), [10260\(b\)](#), [\(d\)\(2\)](#).

<sup>34</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11461.6](#).

<sup>35</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11461.6\(b\)](#).

### **How To Get It**

Ask your child's child welfare social worker if your county offers the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program and how to sign up for it. You can also ask your local R&R about the program. The Child Care Bridge Program navigators will help you find child care.<sup>36</sup>

### **How It Works**

The Child Care Bridge Program is in the form of a voucher that pays for child care. The agency paying for the Child Care Bridge Program voucher either pays the family or the person providing the child care.<sup>37</sup>

### **Who Gets Priority**

The Child Care Bridge Program has a waiting list. You might have to be placed on the waiting list if the program does not have enough vouchers for everyone who qualifies. Each county has its own rules for the way they prioritize families on the waiting list.

### **How Long It Lasts**

You can receive the Child Care Bridge Program voucher for up to six months, sometimes up to twelve months or longer for a compelling reason. The voucher can pay for your child until they turn 13 years old or until they are 21 years old if they have a disability.<sup>38</sup>

Navigators help families find long-term child care after the Child Care Bridge Program voucher expires or when a child moves back with their family of origin.

**Tip:** Programs sometimes don't understand the eligibility rules, so be persistent and ask for the Child Care Bridge Navigator at your Resource and Referral agency (R&R) or call the Child Care Law Center for help.

## 6. State Preschool

### **Who Qualifies**

Parents, resource parents, and caregivers qualify for California State Preschool if their preschool-age child is

- Receiving child protective services, or
- Identified as abused, neglected, or exploited, or

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<sup>36</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11461.6\(a\)](#).

<sup>37</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [11461.6\(d\)](#).

<sup>38</sup> Cal. Dep't of Soc. Servs., Child Care Bulletin No. 19-18 Emergency Child Care Bridge Program For Foster Children (Bridge Program) Opting In Fiscal Years (FY) 2019-20, 2020-21 (Feb. 20, 2019), <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/ACL/2019/19-18.pdf?ver=2019-02-21-080829-240> (last visited Jan. 25, 2023).



- At risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation<sup>39</sup>

If a child in your care meets one of the above definitions, you do not need to meet income guidelines, work, or have another reason to get help paying for child care.<sup>40</sup>

### **Income**

You can also qualify based on your income.<sup>41</sup>

- Part-day state preschool - Your family income is equal to or less than 100% (\$8,049 per month for a family of 3 in 2023<sup>42</sup>) of the state median income. You do not have to work or go to school for your child to attend part-day state preschool.<sup>43</sup> You do not have to pay a family fee.<sup>44</sup>
- Full-day state preschool - Your family income must be equal to or less than 100% of the state median income. You must work, go to school, or have some other need.<sup>45</sup>

### **Other Ways to Qualify**

If you are experiencing homelessness, then you qualify for part-day and full-day state preschool and do not need to meet the income or need requirements.<sup>46</sup>

You can also qualify without taking into account your income if

- You receive public assistance such as CalWORKs or SSI, or
- Your child has a disability<sup>47</sup>

### **Child's Required Age for State Preschool**

To enroll in State Preschool, your child must have their third birthday between July 1 and December 1 if you are enrolling on or after July. After December 1, a state preschool can also enroll a child who turns 3 on or after December 2. Four-year-olds can stay in preschool through age 5.<sup>48</sup>

### **How To Get It**

Ask your local R&R about whether you qualify for state preschool or preschool options.

### **Who Gets Priority**

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<sup>39</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8208\(a\), \(d\)](#).

<sup>40</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8208\(a\), \(d\)](#).

<sup>41</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8213](#).

<sup>42</sup> Cal. Dep't of Educ., Management Bulletin 22-05 Revised State Median Income (SMI) Ceilings and Income Ranking Table for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/mb2205.asp> (last visited Jan. 24, 2023).

<sup>43</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8208\(a\)](#).

<sup>44</sup> Cal. Code Regs. tit. 5 § [17735](#).

<sup>45</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8208\(d\)\(B\)](#).

<sup>46</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8208\(a\)\(1\)\(C\), \(d\)\(1\)\(A\)\(iii\)](#).

<sup>47</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8208\(a\)\(1\)\(E\)-\(F\), \(d\)\(1\)\(A\)\(v\)-\(vi\)](#).

<sup>48</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8205\(aa\)-\(ab\)](#).

If you are eligible for state preschool, the preschool might need to put your name on a waiting list if there are not enough spaces. Families are called off the waiting list in order of priority. The preschool waiting list has five priorities:

### **First Priority**

Families whose child receives protective services, or is abused, neglected or exploited or at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation:<sup>49</sup> Your income should not be taken into account for your place on the waiting list.<sup>50</sup> If the school is unable to enroll your child, it must refer you to the local R&R who can help you find another child development program.

### **Second Priority**

Eligible three- and four-year-old children with disabilities from families below the income threshold: As preschool spaces become available, families with the lowest income get preschool first. If two families have the same income, the family that has been on the wait list the longest is enrolled first.<sup>51</sup>

### **Third Priority**

Eligible four-year old children who are not in Transitional Kindergarten (TK): As preschool spaces become available, families with the lowest income get preschool first. If two families have the same income, the family that has been on the wait list the longest is enrolled first.<sup>52</sup>

### **Fourth Priority**

Eligible three-year old children: As preschool spaces become available, families with the lowest income get preschool first. If two families have the same income, the family that has been on the wait list the longest is enrolled first.<sup>53</sup>

### **Fifth Priority**

After all otherwise eligible children have been enrolled, families with income no more than 115% of the state median income (\$9,257 per month for a family of three in 2023<sup>54</sup>) may be enrolled. Within this category, three- and four-year-olds are enrolled first.<sup>55</sup>

### **How Long It Lasts**

Your child can stay in state preschool without you having to report any changes in your situation for at least 24 continuous months.<sup>56</sup> The only exception is if you qualify based on your family's income and it goes above 100% of the state median income. If your family's income is

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<sup>49</sup> Cal. Educ. Code §§ [8210\(a\)\(1\)](#), [8211\(a\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>50</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8208\(a\), \(d\)](#).

<sup>51</sup> Cal. Educ. Code §§ [8210\(a\)\(2\)](#), [8211\(a\)\(2\)](#).

<sup>52</sup> Cal. Educ. Code §§ [8210\(a\)\(3\)](#), [8211\(a\)\(3\)](#).

<sup>53</sup> Cal. Educ. Code §§ [8210\(a\)\(4\)](#), [8211\(a\)\(4\)](#).

<sup>54</sup> Cal. Dep't of Educ., Management Bulletin 22-05 Revised State Median Income (SMI) Ceilings and Income Ranking Table for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/mb2205.asp> (last visited Jan. 24, 2023).

<sup>55</sup> Cal. Educ. Code §§ [8210\(a\)\(5\)](#), [8211\(a\)\(5\)](#).

<sup>56</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8208\(e\)](#).

above 100% of the state median income, then you must report your income and check with your preschool to see if you still qualify.<sup>57</sup>

This income report requirement does not apply to you if you qualify for state preschool because you are experiencing homelessness or have a child who receives protective services, or is abused, neglected, or exploited, or at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.<sup>58</sup>

## 7. Head Start and Early Head Start

### **Who Qualifies**

If you are a resource parent with a child in out-of-home care, or if you have a child with a disability or who is experiencing homelessness, your child qualifies for Early Head Start and Head Start, regardless of your family's income.<sup>59</sup> All other families may qualify for Early Head Start and Head Start if their income is equal to or below the federal poverty line.<sup>60</sup> You can get Early Head Start if your child is 0-2 years-old or if you are pregnant. You can get Head Start if your child is 3-5 years old.

### **How To Get It**

Contact the nearest Head Start program or your local R&R to find one. The Head Start program will help you directly to determine whether you are eligible for the program.

### **How Long It Lasts**

When your child moves from Early Head Start (ages 0- 3) to Head Start (ages 3-5), your family will be reevaluated for eligibility.<sup>61</sup>

If you are caring for a child in an out-of-home placement and your child returns to their home of origin or is adopted while in Head Start, they can remain in the program for the rest of that program year and the next program year.<sup>62</sup>

## 8. Other Affordable Child Care Programs

Other types of state and local affordable child care programs are available throughout California.

Visit your local Child Care Resource & Referral program (R&R) to find out which programs you qualify for. The R&R will also help you choose the best child care for you.

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<sup>57</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8208\(e\)\(3\)](#).

<sup>58</sup> Cal. Educ. Code § [8208\(e\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>59</sup> 45 C.F.R. § [1302.12\(c\)\(ii\)-\(iv\)](#).

<sup>60</sup> 45 C.F.R. § [1302.12 \(c\)\(i\)](#).

<sup>61</sup> 45 C.F.R. § [1302.12\(j\)\(3\)](#).

<sup>62</sup> 45 C.F.R. § [1302.12\(j\)](#).

To find the R&R in your community, call 1-800-543- 7793 or go to [www.rrnetwork.org/find\\_child\\_care](http://www.rrnetwork.org/find_child_care).

## 9. Do I pay anything for affordable child care?

It depends on your family's situation and the type of child care program you choose. You may have to pay a family fee or a copayment, but it will be a lot less than the full cost of child care.

### **Family Fees**

As families make more money, they usually must pay for a share of cost of the child care.<sup>63</sup> These are called family fees and will never be more than 10% of your family's income.<sup>64</sup>

Your family may not have to pay a family fee for your child for up to 12 months, if your child:

- Receives protective services, or
- Is abused, neglected, or exploited, or
- Is at-risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation,

If you are caring for someone who is not your biological or adopted child, and you have a family fee, only the child's income will count for determining the fee amount.

You cannot be charged a family fee if:

- Your family is getting CalWORKs cash assistance
- Your child is in Head Start
- Your child is in part-time state preschool
- Your child receives services from the Severely Disabled Program

### **Copayments**

If you choose a child care provider who charges a fee that is more than the most that the agency will pay for your voucher, then you must pay for the extra cost as a copayment directly to the child care provider.

State preschool programs and Head Start programs cannot charge you a copayment. Child care centers also cannot charge you a copayment for a subsidized space.<sup>65</sup>

## 10. What kinds of child care settings are available?

### **Licensed family child care home**

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<sup>63</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10290](#).

<sup>64</sup> Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § [10290\(d\)](#).

<sup>65</sup> Cal. Code Regs. tit. 5 §§ [18111](#), [17736](#); [45 C.F.R. § 1302.18](#).

Family child care homes offer a warm environment located in the provider's home. Many meet the cultural and linguistic needs of families.

- A small family child care home cares for up to 6-8 children.\*<sup>66</sup>
- A large family child care home has an assistant and cares for up to 12-14 children.\*<sup>67</sup>

Family child care homes are licensed by the California Department of Social Services and must meet health, safety, and fire requirements.<sup>68</sup> Many also meet child development requirements.

Many parents with young children prefer family child care homes because of their convenient locations, flexible hours, and home-like environment that is conducive to a child's development.

\*The number of children depends on their age and child/staff ratios.<sup>69</sup>

### **Licensed child care center**

Child care centers generally care for more children than family child care homes. They are usually located in a building in your community or at a local elementary school. Child care centers are licensed and must meet health, safety, and fire requirements. All must meet developmental requirements.<sup>70</sup>

### **Family, friend and neighbor care (FFN care)**

Family, friend and neighbor (FFN) providers include grandparents, aunts and uncles, older siblings, friends, neighbors, and others who provide child care. FFN care is generally license-exempt. Individual FFN providers may care for only one family's children and their own children. If you are paying for FFN care with a child care subsidy, the person caring for your child must usually register with Trustline, California's criminal background check program.<sup>71</sup>

### **Other Types of Unlicensed Child Care**

Other child care settings include after-school programs, day camps, parent cooperative care, and other recreational programs.<sup>72</sup> You can pay for these other types of care with a child care subsidy so long as the people caring for your child have registered with Trustline.

If the child in your care is involved with Child Protective Services (CPS), you must check with the child's social worker about whether your county allows your child to be cared for in unlicensed care.

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<sup>66</sup> Cal. Code Regs. tit. 22 § [102416.5\(a\)-\(c\)](#).

<sup>67</sup> Cal. Code Regs. tit. 22 § [102416.5\(a\), \(d\)-\(f\)](#).

<sup>68</sup> Cal. Code Regs. tit. 22 §§ [102351.1-102426](#) (family child care home requirements).

<sup>69</sup> Cal. Code Regs. tit. 22 § [102416.5](#).

<sup>70</sup> Cal. Code Regs. tit 22 §§ [101151-101639.2](#) (child care center requirements).

<sup>71</sup> Cal. Health & Safety Code §§ [1596.792](#) (listing different types of care that are license exempt), [1596.66](#) (Trustline requirements for family, friend and neighbor care), [1596.67](#) (family friend and neighbor care requirements for families participating in CalWORKs).

<sup>72</sup> Cal. Health & Safety Code § [1596.792](#); Cal. Code Regs. tit. 22 § [102358](#).

*This publication provides general information about the topic covered. It should not be considered legal advice. We believe the information is current as of December 2021, but the law changes often.*

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