



Kentucky's Future Starts in ECE

Made in partnership with



All children deserve opportunities to eat healthy foods and be active wherever they live, learn and play. Early care and education (ECE) providers are hungry for training and support to make their programs healthier for kids. But these opportunities don't just happen on their own. Early care programs can take small steps toward creating healthier environments, and investment from your organization can help them do it.

Parents rely on ECE programs to support children's developing brains and bodies. ECE programs can also shape a child's nutrition and activity habits for life. With 2,168 ECE programs caring for over 150,000 children across Kentucky, ECE can play a pivotal role in making sure we have the maximum impact on children's health and wellbeing.

Why Healthy Eating & Physical Activity in ECE Matters

School Readiness

Healthy foods and physical activity in early childhood are associated with better executive function, language development, and learning outcomes ensuring children enter kindergarten ready to learn. ⁴

Brain Development

Good nutrition is the foundation for healthy brain development. The nutrients that children get from healthy meals in ECE help to fuel rapid growth in their brains' cognitive, motor, and learning systems. ¹

Food Insecurity

One in five children live in homes that don't have access to nutritious foods. Investing in healthier meals and nutrition education in ECE helps programs like WIC and SNAP meet their anti-hunger goals and ensures that all children have access to healthy foods throughout their day. ^{6,7}



Social/Emotional & Mental Health

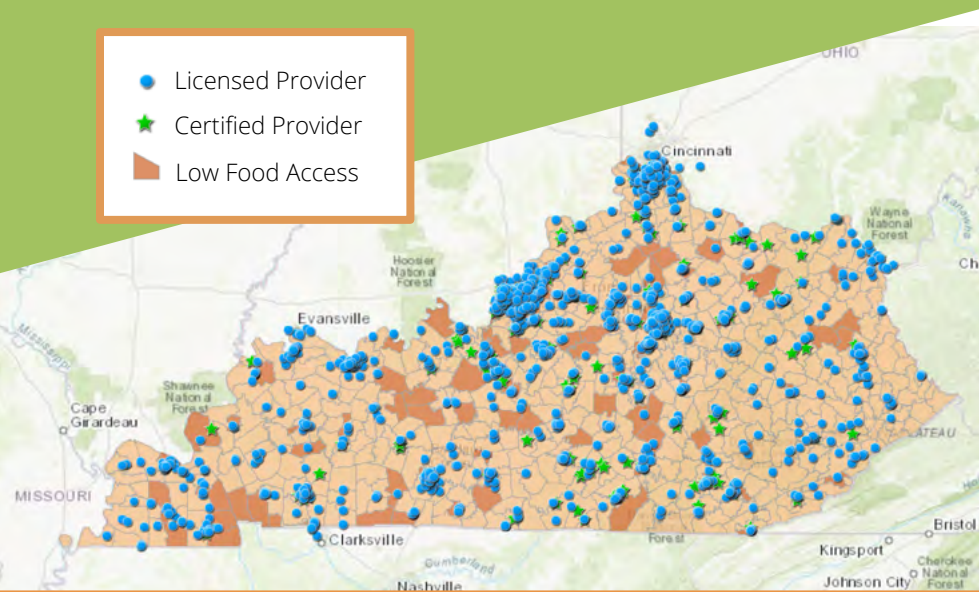
Research shows that healthy diets promote positive social development and physical activity is associated with improved mental health. When children have access to good food and active play in ECE, they can get a strong start toward positive social and emotional development. ^{2,3}

Healthy Weight

Low nutrient, high calorie foods and lack of physical activity lead to unhealthy weight and diseases that are costly to the health system. Investing in nutrition and active play in ECE is a low cost solution that can reduce health care spending in the long run and help children grow up to live their healthiest lives. ⁵

Where ECE Can Make a Difference

All children deserve opportunities to eat healthy foods and be active wherever they live, learn and play, but not all have access to healthy food or active play at home. So, they should get access in child care. We [developed a map](#) that shows which communities might benefit most from nutrition and active play supports. Early care programs can take small steps toward creating healthier environments, and investment from many state agencies can help them do it.



Strategies That Work

STRATEGY
1

Training and Technical Assistance

Equip providers with the training, resources, and technical assistance they need to create healthier ECE programs.

STRATEGY
2

Support from Families & Communities

Encourage families and communities to participate as partners in supporting the development of children's healthy habits.

STRATEGY
3

Strong Standards

Promote the alignment of Kentucky child care regulations, Kentucky All STARS, and professional development with national best practices for healthy foods and beverages, screen time limits, physical activity, and breastfeeding.

A Note on Health Equity

We know that access to affordable healthy food can help with social emotional and brain development, but some communities have a harder time getting healthy food because they don't have a nearby store that sells fresh and healthy foods, parents work long hours or it's not feasible for parents to cook fresh food.

Likewise, we know that physical activity is important at a young age in keeping the body healthy and preventing the development of chronic diseases such as diabetes. But, not all children have adults who can lead them in activities to develop important gross motor skills.

By giving child care providers training and coaching to buy and serve healthy foods, we can make sure that children in communities where fresh food is not as available can get at least one or two meals per day that help them build strong bodies and prepare them for school.

When child care providers build in active play as part of their day both indoors and outdoors, they teach kids activities that help keep their bodies healthy no matter where they are! And if a child lives in a place where outdoor play is not safe, having the opportunity to do so during their day is even more important.

1. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4981537/>
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27419040>
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4911759/>
4. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/mcn.12321>
5. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/133/5/854>
6. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/kentucky>
7. <http://foodsecurity.missouri.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/cacfp-heflin-arteaga-gable-2015.pdf>