

## **Making Child Care Strong:** *The Role of Child Care Resource & Referral Organizations*

### **Purpose**

For over 50 years, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)<sup>1</sup> organizations have been “the perfect vehicle for making child care in their local communities work better precisely because they touched all the groups that used, provided, and impacted on child care.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time, CCR&Rs have not always been fully understood or recognized by families, child care providers, communities, and policymakers. Like most of America’s patchwork child care system, CCR&Rs have been chronically under-resourced, are not available in many states and communities—and consequently, their powerful potential has not always been fully realized.

The purpose of this position statement is twofold:

- To clarify the role and scope of practice of community-based<sup>3</sup> child care resource and referral organizations and state child care resource and referral networks.
- To support policymakers, child care resource and referral organizations, and practitioners in determining, advocating for, and investing in comprehensive, integrated strategies that promote access to high-quality child care that supports all children’s healthy development and learning, allows parents to work and provide for their families, keeps businesses running, and enables our communities to grow and thrive.

## Child Care Aware® of America Statement of Position

**Child Care Aware® of America (CCAoA) asserts that every state and community needs comprehensive, well-resourced Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) organizations to turn a patchwork of resources into a system that helps families work, supports children's healthy development and learning, and keeps our economy growing. When child care is strong, everyone is stronger.**

Quality child care is the backbone of every aspect of our nation's well-being. Yet America has a broken child care system that is holding us back and hurting everyone. Families struggle to find and afford quality child care, the child care workforce cannot afford to stay in the field, child care programs struggle to stay open, employers are losing billions of dollars in productivity, and the military has determined that the child care crisis is impacting mission readiness.<sup>4</sup>

The facts are compelling:

- Nearly 85% of primary caregivers say problems with child care hurt their efforts at or time commitment to work.<sup>5</sup>
- The average annual cost of child care for one child is nearly \$12,000—10% of a married couple's median income. The cost of center-based care for two children exceeds average annual rent payments by 25% to more than 100%.<sup>6</sup>
- The brain develops faster and is most adaptable in the first few years of life—with more than 1 million neural connections formed every second. As a result, high-quality child care has positive long-term effect on school, health, and life outcomes.<sup>7</sup>
- Everyone is impacted by the lack of affordable, accessible, high-quality child care. Lack of available child care for infants and toddlers alone costs \$122 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue each year.<sup>8</sup>
- 86% of voters agree that improving the quality and affordability of child care is a good investment of taxpayer money.<sup>9</sup>

Solving our nation's child care challenges will take targeted and sustained action at the federal, state, and community level. CCR&Rs are a critical part of the solution: building the supply and quality of child care, growing the child care workforce, helping families and businesses solve their child care challenges, and delivering on-the-ground information and solutions.

Effective, well-resourced Child Care Resource and Referral organizations deliver comprehensive, integrated services, making it easier for families and child care providers to access multiple services in one place, reducing duplication of services and resources, and driving better outcomes informed by data and experience with the whole child care landscape. CCR&Rs are uniquely positioned to turn a patchwork of local and state resources into a system that helps families work, supports children's healthy development and learning, and keeps our economy growing.

## Community-Based Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Organizations

Effective Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) deliver a core set of comprehensive and integrated services. CCR&Rs build the supply and quality of child care, grow the child care workforce, help families and business solve their child care challenges, and deliver on-the-ground information and solutions to policymakers to advance high-quality child care for every child and family.

### Effective CCR&Rs:

- ✓ Offer full-service solutions for communities, impacting all parts of the child care system. They build the supply and quality of child care, grow the child care workforce, help families and business solve their child care challenges, and deliver on-the-ground information and solutions.
- ✓ Are rooted in their communities, respecting and honoring culture, building trust, and focusing on solutions that value all families.
- ✓ Are mission focused for the public good, offering accessible and inclusive services for everyone.

Organizations providing core child care resource and referral services may provide additional and non-child care related services and work across local communities. Three characteristics maximize their success:

- **Full-service solutions.** Effective CCR&Rs impact all parts of the child care system, allowing them to best meet community needs. For example, they work with families to understand their child care needs first-hand, then leverage that information to target child care supply-building and other needed services. They work with child care business owners and teachers and use what they learn to improve training, resources, and regulations.

- **Rooted in their community.** Every community has its own culture, relationships, and needs. Effective CCR&Rs provide services that are delivered with local knowledge, input, and participation. CCR&Rs focus on solutions that value all families and recognize that communities in rural areas, that are under-resourced, or that are recognized to face distinct challenges and need unique strategies.
- **Mission-focused for public good.** Every child, family, and community should have access to quality child care that meets their unique needs. CCR&Rs have the primary purpose of improving the lives of people in their communities and making quality child care affordable and accessible for all families. These organizations are best positioned to meet the child care needs of the whole community.

### Community-Based Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Core Services:

- **Support Family Choice and Access to Quality, Affordable Child Care Services:** Provide families with information about choosing and using quality child care, connect them to child care options that can meet their unique needs, and provide information about how to access help paying for child care if needed.
- **Build the Supply, Quality, and Diversity of Stable Child Care Options:** Help individuals start and run quality, stable center and home-based child care programs. Assist child care providers with feasibility studies, workforce and program development, business planning and management, compliance, and financial viability. Understand, value, and partner with under-resourced communities.
- **Grow and Sustain a Skilled Child Care Workforce:** Coordinate and provide training and on-site support (coaching, mentoring, technical assistance, training) for the child care workforce (teachers, administrators, and owners) so that they can provide developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate child care that supports each child's health and learning.
- **Provide Real-World Child Care Data to Inform Community Decision-Making:** Collect, analyze, and disaggregate data on child care need and demand from families, child care program supply, and quality, and cost, and availability. Doing so will allow decision-makers to needed to enact data-informed solutions to local and statewide child care challenges that address the unique needs of different communities.
- **Influence Policy and Regulations and Help Build Solutions:** Leverage community connections and experience to advocate for policies and funding that support access to quality child care for every child and family.





### **Additional Community-Based Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Services:**

- ***Deliver Solutions for Businesses and Communities:*** Partner with businesses, community leaders, Chambers of Commerce, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), and other stakeholders to develop child care solutions and public-private partnerships that support businesses and community economic development.
- ***Foster Children's Healthy Development and Belonging:*** Support young children's healthy development and well-being through efforts such as early childhood mental health resources, child care health consultants, supports for children with disabilities, or literacy initiatives.
- ***Help Families Afford Child Care:*** Administer child care subsidies/financial assistance to help families offset the high cost of child care.
- ***Support Families in Caring for Their Children:*** Help families navigate and access an array of services they may need like food assistance and housing, parent education and support groups, play groups, or home visiting.

## State Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Networks:

State Networks amplify and bolster the work of community-based child care resource organizations by coordinating best practices and statewide service delivery; compiling and disaggregating local family, provider, and community data to inform state policy and targeted investment strategies; and identifying and developing strategies to address service gaps to drive access to quality, affordable child care for every child and family.

State child care resource and referral networks provide a core set of services that support and amplify community-based Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) organizations and help build strong state child care systems. State Networks coordinate or manage the work of the local CCR&Rs in their state. State Networks support consistent quality and accountability across the state and advocate for and promote improved child care policy, funding, and service coordination.

State Networks providing core services may offer additional and non-child care related services and/or also deliver community level CCR&R services in select areas. Two characteristics are critical to maximizing their success:

- **Full-service solutions.** State Networks touch all parts of the child care system at the state level—reducing duplication of services and resources, and driving better outcomes informed by data and experience with the whole child care landscape. They conduct activities that promote and ensure productive relationships with other state-level organizations and leaders to identify and develop strategies to address service gaps and coordination, equitable access, and public policy and funding concerns.
- **Statewide coordination.** State Networks coordinate with, gather data from, and support all community-based CCR&Rs within the state, enabling them to understand the full range of child care conditions across the state. For example, State Networks can demonstrate the differing child care needs of rural, urban, and under-resourced communities, what types of care (such as infant-toddler or non-traditional hours) are in higher demand, and what type of local innovation or investment is being made to advance child care across these community needs.

## State Network Core Services:

- **Promote Use of Best Practices Statewide:** Convene and support community Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) organizations to promote the use of best practices and innovative ideas and solutions that support access to high-quality, affordable child care in every community across the state.
- **Provide Real-World Child Care Data:** Compile, disaggregate, and analyze community child care supply, demand, and quality data. Using these data, provide reports to inform state policy, program design and targeted investment, prioritizing rural areas or that are under-resourced and recognized and face distinct challenges that need unique strategies.
- **Support Statewide Awareness of and Access to CCR&R Services:** Operate a toll-free hotline and website to help families across the state find, select, and afford quality child care options and build public awareness of community-based CCR&R services.
- **Influence Policy and Regulations and Help Build Solutions:** Leverage state-level connections and experience to advocate for policies and funding that support access to quality child care for all children and families.







### State Network Additional Services:

- **Ensure Consistent Services Statewide:** Contract with community-based Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) organizations to deliver services in their communities and hold them accountable for meeting contractual performance goals.
- **Evaluate Effectiveness of Services:** Conduct research and evaluation activities to determine if community CCR&Rs are improving services and outcomes for families, child care providers, or communities.
- **Deliver Direct Services to Families, Child Care Providers, or Businesses:** When appropriate, deliver services that may be more efficiently and effectively delivered regionally or statewide or may augment locally delivered services. For example, State Networks may have business and/or economic development staff who work with local and state governments and private businesses seeking child care solutions for their employees in a region or across the state.
- **Provide Real-Word Data to Understand and Grow the Child Care Workforce:** Manage statewide data on the child care workforce to inform state policy, program design, and targeted investment in child care staff including recruitment, retainment, and professional development.

## Recommendations:

### Recommendations for Policymakers and Elected Officials

- Invest in comprehensive and integrated community-based and state Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services that build the supply and quality of child care, grow the child care workforce, help families and business solve their child care challenges, and deliver on-the-ground information and solutions to support child care demand, supply, and quality. Integrated and comprehensive service delivery makes it easier for families and child care providers to access multiple services in one place, reduces duplication of services and resources, increases coordination, and drives better outcomes informed by data and experience with the whole child care landscape.
- Consider establishing child care resource and referral organizations and State Networks in policy as a necessary part of the state's child care system, specifying their role and position supporting the child care system.
- Use CCR&Rs' data and on-the-ground expertise to inform child care policy changes and system improvements.
- Partner with local and state child care resource and referral organizations to reach families, child care providers, and other under-represented groups to inform policy and program development, such as through hosting community forums, roundtables, events, and focus groups.
- Invest in evaluation of comprehensive, integrated community-based CCR&R services and State Networks.

### Recommendations for State Child Care Administrators

- Invest in comprehensive and integrated community-based and state Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services that build the supply and quality of child care, grow the child care workforce, help families and business solve their child care challenges, and deliver on-the-ground information and solutions to support child care demand, supply, and quality. Integrated and comprehensive service delivery makes it easier for families and child care providers to access multiple services in one place, reduces duplication of services and resources, increases coordination, and drives better outcomes informed by data and experience with the whole child care landscape.
- Develop relationships with state and community-based CCR&Rs as trusted partners with institutional knowledge in developing policies or programs that improve access to high-quality child care across the state.
- Execute data sharing and data use agreements with state and community-based CCR&Rs to maximize efficiency and increase consistency and reliability of data across sources.



- Build aligned policies that rely on the work of CCR&Rs to help child care teachers and programs achieve and maintain licensing and higher Quality Rating and Improvement System standards.
- Set clear deliverables for CCR&Rs regarding data, access, workforce development, and other core services.
- Invest in evaluation of comprehensive, integrated community-based CCR&R services and State Networks.
- Work with funders and policy makers to facilitate the delivery of the full set of integrated services described above.

#### Recommendations for Business and Community/State Leaders

- Develop relationships with state and community-based Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) organizations as trusted partners with institutional knowledge in developing policies or programs that improve access to high-quality child care across the state.
- Ensure CCR&Rs have a seat at the table for economic and community development efforts.
- Work with CCR&Rs to understand community and state child care needs, expand child care capacity, and create child care solutions that meet business and economic development goals.

#### Recommendations for Organizations Delivering Community/State Child Care Resource and Referral Services

- Develop trusting relationships with state child care administrators and policymakers by focusing on solutions, delivering results, and finding common ground.
- Demonstrate impact by negotiating contracts and grants that lay out clear, impactful, and responsive deliverables aligned to the appropriate level funding and staffing necessary to achieve them. Measure and report on how work is making a difference within a community or state.
- Demonstrate data expertise by providing relevant, unbiased, reliable, and up-to-date data and reports for families, providers, policymakers, and community stakeholders.
- Evaluate and align your organization's policies, practices, and staff to reflect the many needs and populations you serve and contribute to better access to high-quality child care for all young children and families.
- Hold your organization responsible for promoting and operating programs that recognize the distinct needs of communities in rural areas, that are under-resourced.
- Proactively contribute to community and policy development and decision-making and advocate for targeted investments and improved policies informed by the communities you partner with and serve.

## About Child Care Aware® of America

Child Care Aware® of America (CCAoA) is the only national organization that supports every part of the child care system. Together with an on-the-ground network of child care resource and referral organizations working in states and communities, CCAoA provides research that drives effective practice and policy, builds strong child care programs and professionals, helps families find and afford quality child care, delivers solutions leadership to the military and direct service to its families, and provides a real-world understanding of what works and what doesn't to spur policymakers into action and help them build solutions. Together we make America child care strong—and that makes everyone stronger.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The term 'Child Care Resource and Referral' is a term that was codified in the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 9858 et seq. (1990); and reaffirmed in the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014, 42 U.S.C. § 9858 et seq. (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Siegal & Lawrence, 1982

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this position statement, Child Care Aware of America aligns to the [public health definition](#) of community: a group of people who share common interests, concerns, or identities, and are linked by social ties. Communities can be defined by geography, shared interests, or cultural groups.

<sup>4</sup> Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve, Mission Readiness, 2009

<sup>5</sup> From "\$122 Billion: The Growing, Annual Cost of the Infant-Toddler Child Care Crisis," by Sandra Bishop, Ph.D., Council for a Strong America, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> From "Child Care at a Standstill: Price and Landscape Analysis 2023 – Child Care Aware of America" by Child Care Aware of America, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> From "Brain Architecture" by Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> From "\$122 Billion: The Growing, Annual Cost of the Infant-Toddler Child Care Crisis," by Sandra Bishop, Ph.D., Council for a Strong America, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> From "Child Care and Early Learning Polling" from First Five Years Fund, 2025.

## References

- Child Care Aware of America (2024). Child Care at a Standstill: Price and Landscape Analysis 2023. <https://www.childcareaware.org/thechildcarestandstill>
- Child Care Aware of America (2023). CCR&Rs are the Eyes and Ears of America's Child Care System. <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Eyes%20and%20Ears%20Data%20One-Pager%202023.pdf>
- Child Care Aware of America (2018). Child Care Resource & Referral: The Secret Solution. <https://info.childcareaware.org/blog/child-care-resource-referral-the-secret-solution>
- MacQueen, K. M., McLellan, E., Metzger, D. S., Kegeles, S., Strauss, R. P., Scotti, R., Blanchard, L., & Trotter, R. T., 2nd (2001). What is community? An evidence-based definition for participatory public health. *American journal of public health*, 91(12), 1929–1938. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11726368>
- Mission Readiness (2009). Ready, Willing, And Unable to Serve. <http://cdn.missionreadiness.org/MR-Ready-Willing-Unable.pdf>
- Morgan, G (1986) Supplemental Care for Young Children, in Michael Yogman & T. Berry Brazelton (Eds) In Support of Families. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (2007). Covering the Map. [https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Parent%20Svc%20Report\\_03.pdf](https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Parent%20Svc%20Report_03.pdf)
- Oregon Early Learning Division (2020). Preliminary Report on Regional Entities: Child Care Resource & Referral Entities and Early Learning Hubs. <https://www.oregon.gov/delc/Documents/Hub-CCRR-Report-2-1-20.pdf>
- Siegel, P. & Lawrence, M (1982). The Role of Child Care Information and Referral Services in Child Care Delivery Systems. In Making Day Care Better, Winger, 1983. <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/archive%201982%20role%20of%20i&r%20in%20child%20care.pdf>
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (2022). Employer Roadmap: Child Care Solutions for Working Parents. [https://www.uschamber.com/assets/documents/Employer-Roadmap\\_March-2022.pdf](https://www.uschamber.com/assets/documents/Employer-Roadmap_March-2022.pdf)