



COLORADO

Office of Early Childhood

Department of Human Services

On April 8th, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) hosted a town hall, “Colorado’s Early Childhood Strategies for the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act.”

- The town hall recording [can be found here](#).
- The town hall slides [can be found here](#).
- More information about the stakeholder survey that informed uses for the funds in Colorado [can be found here](#).
- More information about each of the strategies [can be found here](#).

Below is a list of questions that were asked during the town hall, with corresponding answers. This document will continue to be updated as new information is made available. If you have a question not addressed in this document, please contact Lynlee Espeseth, Communications Manager - Office of Early Childhood, at lynlee.espeseth@state.co.us.

General CRRSA Funding Questions

1. How and when can providers apply for these various funds?

Answer:

For all applications, the OEC will share information via email to child care providers and other early childhood stakeholders. To make sure you are receiving this information, [you can sign up to receive emails from the OEC here](#).

- **Strategy 1, CIRCLE Grants:** CIRCLE grants will begin being awarded in September, 2021. The OEC will send information to child care providers and all stakeholders as soon as the applications are available.
- **Strategy 2, Workforce Supports (including scholarships, free Director and Licensed Educator coursework, etc.):** There is no application process for this strategy. The OEC will work with the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) to make the minimum qualifications (6 credit hours) coursework available for free through the community college system (ECE 101 and ECE 103). The OEC will also work to create six clock hours of free online training on the Professional Development Information System (PDIS) for Directors.

- **Strategy 3, Access:** There will be no application for Early Childhood Councils. Rather, funds will be directed to each Early Childhood Council (ECC) to increase their staff capacity to: conduct outreach and report real-time availability of child care slot openings; increase child care availability, particularly infant and toddler care; serve as family child care home navigators; and support providers in applying for and receiving the inclusive child care grants. OEC will work with ECCs to develop budgets and contract amendments to their FY 2021-22 contracts. The inclusive child care training and grant applications are expected to be available to licensed providers in early 2022, after the training and materials have been developed.
- **Strategy 4, Lowering CCCAP Copayments:** These funds will focus on lowering CCCAP copayments for families, and will go into effect on July 1, 2021. There is no associated application process.
- **Strategy 5, Sustainability Grants:** The OEC will share additional information on when this application will be open as soon as it is available.
- **Strategy 6, Increasing CCCAP Rates and Absence Payments:** There is no application process associated with these funds. Providers accepting CCCAP will automatically be eligible.
- **Strategy 7, Early Childhood Mental Health Supports:** These funds will support additional early childhood mental health consultants. There is no associated application process.

2. If programs already get federal funding (for example Head Start) can you apply for CRRSA funds?

Answer: Yes

3. Will providers who already received sustainability grants be eligible to receive sustainability grants from the CRRSA money as well?

Answer: Yes, child care providers who have previously received other grants or supports (including sustainability grants) can still receive grants and other support from the CRRSA funds.

4. Do programs have to accept the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) to receive any of the stimulus funds?

Answer: For any funds directly related to CCCAP (i.e. higher reimbursement rates), providers will need to accept CCCAP to receive these funds. For the other funds, you do not have to accept CCCAP funds.

5. Will the Colorado Shines rating impact receiving funds?

Answer: The Colorado Shines rating will not impact whether or not a program receives funding; however, it may impact the amount of funding that a program receives. For example, the increased CCCAP rates may continue to be tiered based on Colorado Shines quality rating (more information is available below, under the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program section). Sustainability grants may consider Colorado Shines quality ratings, in recognition of the increased costs associated with higher quality programs.

6. Is there an open date that programs have to meet to receive funds?

Answer: This is currently undecided. For all application requirements, the OEC will share information via email to child care providers and other early childhood stakeholders when it becomes available.

7. With the necessity of the times, why aren't school-aged programs able to apply for these funds as well?

Answer: School aged programs are not restricted from applying for sustainability grant funding. These programs would not be eligible for any bonus funding targeted to programs serving infants and toddlers, but they would still be eligible for grant funding.

8. What percentage of the \$119 million dollars would go directly to child care providers?

Answer: Some strategies include a mix of funds that will go directly to providers and funds that will go to other entities who are supporting providers. However, approximately \$71.4 million (60% of the total funding) will go directly to providers through Strategy 5 (sustainability grants) and Strategy 6 (CCCAP rates and increased absence payments).

9. How will these grants align with the current [SB21-236](#)? Are they related?

Answer: The CIRCLE grants are authorized in SB21-236, if passed by the legislature. The workforce supports will have some alignment in SB21-236, if passed, but will provide more funding than is proposed to be appropriated in the bill.

10. Will any of these funds be flexible enough to use to support our family, friend, and neighbor providers?

Answer: Because these funds are being distributed to states through the Child Care and Development Fund, sustainability grant funds can only go to eligible providers under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act. This would exclude Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) care, except in instances where a CCCAP family has requested to use a family, friend or neighbor and that individual has been approved to operate as a CCCAP qualified exempt provider and is currently serving a CCCAP child. Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) providers would be eligible to apply for scholarship opportunities to take Early Childhood Education coursework (ECE 101 and 103) and other professional preparation opportunities. Additionally, FFN providers may benefit from the assistance of the Family Child Care Home Navigators to understand and help them pursue the licensing process. Finally, the OEC and partner groups are working on a number of strategies through the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) to support this important group of providers. More information about work under the Preschool Development Grant [can be found here](#).

11. CRRSA requires states to “use CRRSA funds to support the stability of the child care sector To help child care providers pay for increased operating expenses during COVID-19 public health emergency.” In response to this, nearly every other state’s proposal consists of distributing the funds as grants directly to providers based upon licensed capacity (\$500 per child in Alabama, \$525 per child in California, \$8,500 for each licensed center in Minnesota, \$22 per child per week in Pennsylvania, \$6,500 for each provider in Washington, etc), that can be used flexibly- for payroll, cash flow, hazard pay, to send an existing staff member to take ECE coursework, to offer a bonus, increase wages, etc. Why did Colorado decide not to employ this approach?

Answer: The Colorado CRRSA spend plan does include funding for flexible payroll actions in the sustainability grants and in the workforce supports. Hazard pay, employee benefits, payroll, and other activities identified by the applicant as a need can be supported by the sustainability grants. Scholarships, apprenticeships, bonuses, and free ECE coursework can be funded by the workforce support grants.

12. We know many children with special health care needs are not attending child care. Can you provide a sense of which funds may help with the health consultation needed to increase capacity for these children? Also, which of these funds may help us secure child care health consultants in areas of the state where they aren't available?

Answer: CIRCLE grants are available to ensure equal access to child care, including children with special needs, including special health care needs.

13. Is the Emerging and Expanding Grant under the CRRSA or the CARES Act?

Answer: The Emerging and Expanding Grant is not funded by federal funds. This program is funded by the State General Fund authorized by HB 20B-1002, which was enacted during the special state legislative session in December 2020.

14. Will funds be disbursed through the Early Childhood Councils or will applicants be applying to the state of Colorado?

Answer: This will depend on the funding strategy. For example, under Strategy 3 - Access, these funds will go to Early Childhood Councils to use with their local communities. For the CIRCLE Grants, funds could go through a variety of entities, including CCDF-eligible child care centers or homes or Early Childhood Councils, but also education-based or community-based organizations, or governmental agencies. For other strategies, such as the Sustainability Grants, providers will apply to the State.

15. How much of the stimulus dollars will be used to fix/update OEC technology systems (for example CHATS, Colorado Shines, PDIS, providing real time supply and demand)?

Answer: Under the CIRCLE Grants, as well as funds for access through Strategy 3 that will go to Early Childhood Councils, addressing local technology systems may be included (for example, to address real time supply and demand). While these stimulus funds are not going to be used by the OEC to update systems such as Colorado Shines, PDIS and CHATS, updates to a number of these systems are addressed with funding from the Preschool Development Grant (PDG). More information about PDG work [can be found here](#).

Community Innovation and Resilience for Care and Learning Equity (CIRCLE) Grant Questions (Strategy 1)

1. Will the CIRCLE grants be open to nonprofit or for profit organizations? Or are they only for Early Childhood Councils and government entities?

Answer: CIRCLE Grants are open to child care providers, other community groups (both for profit and nonprofit), education entities, Early Childhood Councils and government agencies.

2. Can you provide a timeline for the first round of applicants to the CIRCLE grants?

Answer: The OEC anticipates that CIRCLE grants will begin to be awarded in September, 2021. We will send information to child care providers and all stakeholders as soon as the applications are available.

3. What percentage of the CIRCLE grants would go directly to providers?

Answer: The amount that will go directly to providers will be determined by the recipients of the grants, and the activities that the awarded grantees will conduct with funds.

4. Can a community receive multiple CIRCLE grants awarded to different entities (for example a health department, early childhood council, school district, higher education, etc.)?

Answer: Yes, multiple entities in a community may apply for, and may be awarded, a CIRCLE grant.

Child Care Workforce Questions (Strategy 2)

1. Is there an estimate of the number of people working in the early childhood field? What percentage increase is the state able to achieve with these funds?

Answer: There are approximately 25,000 child care providers working in the state of Colorado. This strategy seeks to add another roughly 2,700 professionals to the field, or a 10.8% increase.

2. Can the workforce dollars be used to help teachers who want to specialize in something that isn't offered through a community college, but is also a recognized and accredited teaching certification, like Montessori teacher training?

Answer: Funding is dedicated to help professionals meet qualifications to become early childhood teachers and directors through a menu of options such as higher education or other certifications. A vendor selection process will occur for this and additional information about accepted training programs will be published at that time.

3. Can funds be used to pay for teaching teams to be formally trained in comprehensive curriculum and comprehensive child assessment tools? If so, a critical companion is funding for ongoing classroom-level coaching to ensure that curriculum/assessment tools are used with validity.

Answer: At this time, it is anticipated that funding will only be dedicated to help professionals meet qualifications to become early childhood teachers and directors. This idea may be considered for future rounds of funding.

4. As a family child care provider, is there any grant to pay for the Director course?

Answer: Yes, the workforce grants can support courses to earn Director qualifications.

Child Care Business Questions (Strategy 3)

1. What is the definition of a family child care navigator and what will they do to support family child care homes?

Answer: Family Child Care Home Navigators will connect family child care homes with support and resources that improve business practices, support quality, and retain and grow their business. Specific responsibilities for the local Family Child Care Navigator role include:

- Providing information on and connections to existing supports, including financial, professional development, shared services, family child care home associations, and benefits opportunities;
- Providing technical assistance to new family child care home providers as they move through the licensing process in their community and in accessing financial resources to begin their business;
- Providing technical assistance to existing family child care home providers in completing applications for grants and other opportunities;
- Connecting family child care providers with quality improvement navigators and coaches within their service area

- Assisting new and existing family child care providers understand the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) and supporting them as they obtain a fiscal agreement to enroll children participating in this program;
 - Helping new and existing family child care providers access important program benefits and consultative supports, such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and consultative supports, including, but not limited to early childhood mental health consultation, child care health consultation, infant and toddler specialists, and coaching supports;
 - Recruiting new family child care home providers in their communities;
 - Becoming trained as health insurance navigators to ensure that family child care homes and small child care centers that do not offer health care benefits know how to enroll individuals in the Connect for Health Colorado Exchange; and
 - Accessing the language line, as needed, to support translation needs of providers for whom English is not their first language.
2. What things are or will be in place to protect the existing child care infrastructure (private programs), and to help that infrastructure to strengthen, thrive and grow, rather than be replaced by new programs as the funds are being allocated?

Answer: The goals of the CRRSA funds are to both strengthen and sustain existing child care businesses and help new private child care programs open.

3. How exactly does this money go directly to small private preschools or help these providers stay in business?

Answer: Depending on the strategy, there are a number of ways private preschool programs will be supported. For example, programs may receive a sustainability grant and/or CIRCLE grant, and use those funds to directly support their program with existing needs, or for new innovations. If a program accepts CCCAP, the increase in rates and paid absences are designed to support programs. Strategy 2, that supports building a strong early childhood workforce, and strategy 7, providing early childhood mental health supports, are designed to ensure programs can hire and keep the staff they need to continue operating. Additionally, strategy 3 will help Early Childhood Councils support providers in their communities, for example, by connecting providers who have openings to families looking for care.

4. Will the funding we used to address any of these business expenses: a fund for affordable health insurance for staff? reducing or eliminating the cost of background checks and TRAILS checks for each program?

Answer: Yes. In terms of health insurance and other support for staff (hazard pay, maintaining hours for employees, paying for time off, etc.) Strategy 5 specifically calls out that these funds can be used for such expenses. Background checks could also be paid for with these funds, though the majority of grant funding would need to be used for workforce support. More information about specific funding uses will be released with the application.

5. Where could providers look for capital funds for facilities? High costs are huge barriers to expanding capacity for child care?

Answer: Currently, state-funded [Emerging and Expanding Grants](#) exist to help programs with the costs of starting a new licensed child care program or expand the licensed child care slots in an existing program. The OEC also uses CCDF funds to pay for capital improvements through the Colorado Shines Quality Improvement (CSQI) program. [Early Childhood Councils](#) are generally a good source of information for both state-funded and private grant programs to support family child care homes and child care centers with capital improvement costs.

Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) Questions (Strategies 4 & 6)

1. There was discussion of using CRRSA funds for CCAP rates and absences - is there any additional information on what exactly will happen with rates?

Answer: There will be an increase in daily reimbursement rates by 5% for all licensed provider rates, plus additional targeted stimulus-related increases to licensed infant, toddler and preschool rates that are designed to cover a portion of the disparity between the current CCCAP rate and the cost of quality child care for that rate type and county demographic.

2. There was [recently a report by Early Milestones](#) that described a pilot program for CCCAP contracted slots. Is it possible to use these funds to respond to that report, either expanding it from a pilot or implementing some of their findings?

Answer: The [Preschool Development Grant](#) is funding efforts to expand contracts for Slots. Expanding contracts for slots is a strategy that the state will consider with federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) dollars. In 2020, the Contract for Slots Policy Workgroup met to review the 2019 pilot program report and make recommendations to guide policy changes. Proposed rules were finalized by the workgroup and prepared for the rule rewrite process. The workgroup also identified recommendations for implementation, resulting in the creation of new templates for reporting and fiscal agreements. This year, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) is convening the System Build Workgroup to support requirements gathering to inform necessary changes to CHATS and the Attendance Tracking System. These system changes are expected to be deployed in December 2021. The OEC will continue to develop training and technical resources to support broader implementation of contracts for slots.

3. What percentage of Colorado licensed early childhood providers currently accept CCCAP? And, more specifically, what percentage of licensed providers in the urban areas, like Denver, where the costs to operate are high?

Answer: As of March 2021, statewide, 44.4% of QRIS eligible child care providers accept CCCAP. In Denver County, 43.2 % of QRIS eligible child care providers accept CCCAP.

4. When are these strategies going to be implemented (increase in reimbursements, increase in paid absences, etc.)?

Answer: The increase in paid absences will begin on July 1, 2021. The goal is to implement the increase in provider rates by September 1, 2021.

5. What was the CCCAP co-payment limited to previously?

Answer: The CCCAP co-payment ranged from 1%-14% of a family's countable household income.

6. Is CCCAP going to pay absences based on enrollment? Or is this going to be a certain amount of absences per month?

Answer: No, absences will not be paid based on enrollment. It is the following amounts per month: a minimum of 6 absence days per month for all licensed child care programs at Colorado Shines levels 1 and 2, and 7 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 3-5 from July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022; 3 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 1 and 2, and 4 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 3-5 thereafter.

7. For the increase in CCCAP absent days, will the counties be required to meet a certain number per month? There is a great disparity in how many absent days each county is paying.

Answer: Yes, counties will be required to pay a minimum of 6 absence days per month for all licensed child care programs at Colorado Shines levels 1 and 2, and 7 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 3-5 from July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022. Counties will be required to pay a minimum of 3 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 1 and 2, and 4 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 3-5 thereafter.

8. Will there be any funds available to help lower the costs of child care for children who don't qualify for CCCAP?

Answer: Yes. In particular, this is specifically called out in the CIRCLE Grants (Strategy 1). This strategy will focus on innovative solutions to challenges in child care, including the affordability of child care for families whose incomes are too high to qualify for CCCAP.

9. Could the state use some of the funds to modify the CHATS system? It is cumbersome and discourages providers from accepting CCCAP contracts. It also creates stigma and highlights which families are receiving CCCAP rather than being full pay in a program when a parent signs in differently than other families

Answer: The Child Care Automated Tracking System (CHATS) is the case management system for counties and the State and is not used by providers. The Attendance Tracking System (ATS) is used by providers to track attendance for CCCAP families and was a replacement for the point of service device in 2018. There are no plans to make major modifications to ATS.

10. Family home child care providers need more allocated guaranteed slots. CCCAP only gives 3 absences, child care centers have 30. Will this funding address this?

Answer: The number of monthly absences covered by CCCAP does not vary between licensed child care homes and licensed child care centers. Counties will be required to pay a minimum of 6 absence days per month for all licensed child care programs at Colorado Shines levels 1 and 2, and 7 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 3-5 from July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022. Counties will be required to pay a minimum of 3 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 1 and 2, and 4 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 3-5 thereafter.

11. Any chance CCCAP would pay on enrollment vs. attendance using these stimulus dollars?

Answer: CCCAP will not be moving to a payment based on enrollment model at this time. Counties will be required to pay a minimum of 6 absence days per month for all licensed child care programs at Colorado Shines levels 1 and 2, and 7 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 3-5 from July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022. Counties will be required to pay a minimum of 3 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 1 and 2, and 4 absence days per month for Colorado Shines levels 3-5 thereafter.

Sustainability Grant Questions (Strategy 5)

1. Are the sustainability grants going to be disbursed like last time based on capacity of the center?

Answer: No. The grants will focus on supporting programs' workforce with programs completing a simple application that identifies their needs and how they will use the funds to support their workers. Examples include hazard pay, maintaining hours for employees, and paying for benefits. Bonus funds will be available for programs that meet specific criteria, such as caring for infants or toddlers or operating in a child care desert.

2. How much total is available for sustainability grants, and how much will the grants be for?

Answer: \$35 million is budgeted for the sustainability grant program. OEC will use a small percentage to administer the program, and the rest of the funds will be distributed to providers. The amount of specific grants given to providers is still being determined. This information will be shared as soon as it is available.

3. For the Workforce Sustainability Grants (hazard pay, retention bonus, etc.), would the employer be taxed as the grant recipient (as if this was income for the employer) in addition to any payroll taxes?

Answer: There is nothing in the CRRSA Act that exempts the funding from taxation, so grant funds received by a provider would be taxable. Providers should consult with a tax professional or the Internal Revenue Service for guidance on how this will impact their business.

Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Questions (Strategy 7)

1. Will the mental health consultants be available to all child care programs to get support at no cost?

Answer: ECMH Consultation is a free and voluntary support program for all parents, caregivers, and providers caring for children ages six and under who desire extra support to foster the social-emotional development and mental health of the children in their care.

2. Will early childhood mental health consultants be hired in areas/regions where there are currently no consultants or areas/regions where consultation services are limited? Or, will they go to where the need is most prevalent?

Answer: Final criteria have not been determined. Preference will be given to sites that demonstrate need as well as the ability to support early childhood mental health consultants in their areas/regions. All awardees will be encouraged to engage in technology to reach remote and underserved populations.

3. For the early childhood mental health priority, will funds only be provided for child care providers to hire contractors for mental health? Or organizations that specifically do early childhood mental health but are not directly a child care provider?

Answer: Funds will be used to support early childhood and mental health organizations who have demonstrated expertise to support consultants and consultation work in their area. Strategies will be explored to extend access to areas with limited coverage.

American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Related Questions

1. How is the funding for Head Start accessed/allocated?

Answer: Head Start funding from ARP is based on a formula that equates to approximately \$1,100 per child. Grantees will apply for funding directly from the Region 8 Head Start office.

2. When will ARP funding be available?

Answer: The Office of Early Childhood has not yet received ARP funding. When these funds are available, and (when applicable) strategies for the funds have been determined, we will quickly share more information.