

2023

In Brief: Learning from the New Round of PDG B-5 Systems Building Grants



## Child Care Access-Focused Strategies

**Build**  
INITIATIVE



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Early connections last a lifetime



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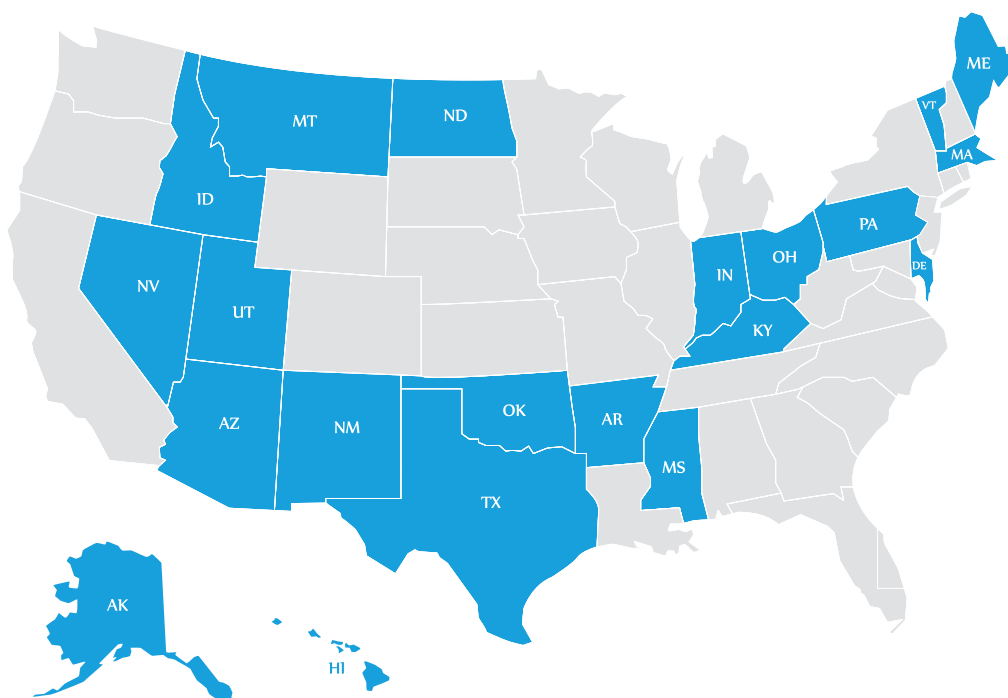
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## Introduction to *In Brief: Learning from the New Round of PDG B-5 Systems Building Grants*

Twenty-one states are drawing on the Preschool Development Birth through Five Renewal Grant (PDG B-5 Renewal) to advance their early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems. These states are undertaking a rich and broad variety of work with this infusion of resources. The BUILD Initiative, ZERO TO THREE, and Start Early, all of whom are members of the National TA Collaborative to Maximize Federal Early Childhood Investments, collaborated on these briefs to share critical early childhood issues that states and their partners are addressing by using the information available in the PDG B-5 Renewal applications. These grants not only provide immediate benefits and long-term systems implications for the states and their communities; they also shed light on the state of the field, which we attempt to outline through this set of briefs.

**Figure 1 Map of PDG B-5 Renewal States 2023**



PDG B-5 Renewal Grants are being used by states across a wide range of content areas in the early childhood care and education system, and in a variety of ways. The federal funding provides a systems framework and seeks to offer flexibility within that framework. The federal funding came with overall guidance focused on coordinating the programs and services within the early childhood care and education system. It aimed to help young children enter kindergarten prepared and ready to succeed by targeting support to populations the states deem priorities based on their assessments of need, particularly their new understanding of the impact of COVID on families and communities. The guidance placed significant emphasis on the early childhood care and education workforce and doing what it would take to attract, train, and retain the workforce needed to maintain high-quality and supportive environments that promote child development and can meet families' unique logistical, linguistic, cultural, and financial needs. Within that broad framework, however, states had enormous latitude. This series of briefs will make clear that states are charting their own course, with many strategies being used to develop and improve their early childhood systems.

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States are using the federal funding to build capacity, create infrastructure, provide direct services, and pilot work that is new for them. This work is occurring within a broad framework provided by the federal government. As the review of the grant applications in this series of briefs will make clear, states chart their own course when it comes to early childhood system development. States are working in many varied and exciting ways as they use these resources to take action to improve their ECCE systems; they are undertaking many different projects and initiatives and, often, multiple projects under each of the required activities.

**States are using the federal funding to build capacity, create infrastructure, provide direct services, and pilot work that is new for them.**

Our review suggests that states seem hesitant to take too long a view for their PDG B-5 Renewal plans. There are many possible explanations for this. Perhaps it is because each iteration of the federal PDG B-5 competition has been different, and states do not see PDG B-5 as a stable, continuous funding source. It could also be that state decisions that seem to focus on the shorter term could stem from the need to manage expectations and produce near-term results. There could be a lack of confidence amongst the state and territory grantees that state funding will be available to sustain the work. Or it may be that the broad framework used in the PDG B-5 competition, with so many possibilities identified with each of the required activity areas, detracts from states' ability to have a sharp focus, and leads to many responsive, diffuse strategies. We must ask: Would the children and families who want and need early childhood care and education, the workforce that delivers it every day, and the states be better off if the states understood that they could choose to have a concentrated focus on a few projects rather than on so many?

This series of briefs focuses attention on several topics within PDG B-5 Renewal implementation activities. Not all critical topics or aspects of PDG B-5 Renewal plans are covered, such as updates to needs assessment and strategic plans, but we anticipate that other organizations will continue to analyze this rich set of plans and share their analyses. We note, as well, that the briefs are grounded in the plans submitted by the states to the federal government. States may modify their plans, and their grant submissions did not allow for the states to provide in-depth information..

To access the full set of briefs in this series, which are being produced throughout 2023, please visit: <https://buildinitiative.org/learningfrompdgb-5systemsbuildinggrants/>

## Acknowledgements

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## Why Child Care Access-Focused Strategies?

Accessible and affordable child care is a linchpin of a healthy, prosperous society. It nurtures the growth of our children, supports the financial stability of families, and fuels the economic vitality of our communities. But today, our child care system is facing a crisis. Families are confronted with high costs, limited availability, and a scarcity of quality options that can cater to their unique needs. The root issues of our child care infrastructure are complex and interconnected, demanding immediate and substantial investments. These challenges are not something that can be resolved in isolation or with temporary fixes.

Central to this crisis is a problematic financial equation: the high cost of child care for parents, particularly those from low- and middle-income households, and the low wages for child care workers. Even as families bear the brunt of hefty fees, providers grapple with minimal profit margins due to the high costs of delivering quality care. This paradox not only places a burden on families but also undervalues the critical role of child care workers. Meanwhile, in areas known as “child care deserts,” the lack of available services leaves families without any feasible options. The intricacy of these challenges calls for sweeping, comprehensive reforms. We must work to increase accessibility, alleviate the financial burden on parents, and improve the compensation and working conditions for child care workers.

In this brief, we turn our attention to how PDG B-5 Renewal applications are addressing complex issues to improve child care access. States are using PDG B-5 Renewal funds to bolster child care availability, showcasing a diverse range of efforts to improve child care options for families with young children and reflecting the multiple solutions that are needed to truly make child care accessible.



## Discussion of Child Care Access-Focused Strategies

PDG B-5 Renewal plans in support of improved child care access are found in five areas: 1) use of grants to support stabilization, expansion, quality improvement, and start up, 2) removal of obstacles to entry and simplifying administrative procedures, 3) increasing public awareness of early childhood programs, 4) collaborative efforts to boost child care supply and quality, and 5) expansion of Early Head Start/Child Care Partnerships. Table 1 provides an at-a-glance view of how states directed PDG B-5 Renewal funding specifically towards enhancing child care supply for home- and center-based child care, noting the five areas and more than a dozen strategies that are addressed in state plans for PDG B-5 Renewal. In total, all but one state chose to use funding to improve child care access and supply. Discussion of each of these five areas, with highlights from the strategies being used, is found after the table.

**States are using PDG B-5 Renewal funds to bolster child care availability, showcasing a diverse range of efforts to improve child care options for families with young children...**



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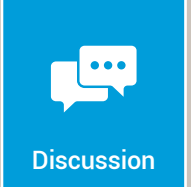
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Table 1. Child Care Access Focused Strategy Overview

CHILD CARE ACCESS FOCUSED STRATEGY	AK	AZ	AR	DE	HI	ID	IN	KY	MA	MS	MT	NV	NM	ND	OK	OH	PA	TX	UT	VT	
<b>Quality Enhancement and Access Expansion Grants</b>																					
Provide community grants	•																				
Expand access		•	•	•		•					•	•	•		•	•					•
Improve quality and infrastructure			•	•		•						•				•					
Provide start-up funding		•				•	•	•	•	•	•						•				
<b>Entry Obstacles and Administrative Simplification</b>																					
Develop online portals and improve automation				•		•								•							
Improve regulations and policies						•															
Provide support and training to providers									•					•				•			
Offer support related to business and organizational processes											•										
<b>Collaborative Supply and Quality Efforts</b>																					
Create family child care networks				•									•								
Establish technology-enabled business supports						•															
Create early child care warmlines										•											
Share business services and benefits for child care workers					•						•										
Create statewide accelerator and rapid response teams													•				•				
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Develop comprehensive inventories of early childhood programs	•																				
<b>Early Head Start/Child Care Partnerships</b>																					
					•						•										



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# Quality Enhancement and Access Expansion Grants

Table 2. Quality Enhancement and Access Expansion Grants

	AK	AZ	AR	DE	ID	IN	KY	MA	MS	MT	NV	NM	OK	OH	PA	VT
Provide community grants	•															
Expand access		•	•	•	•					•	•	•	•	•		•
Improve quality and infrastructure			•	•	•						•			•		
Provide start-up funding		•			•	•	•	•	•	•					•	

Activity Six of the PDG B-5 Renewal grant, "Subgrants to Enhance Quality and Expand Access to Existing and New Programs," allowed states to use up to 60 percent of the grant funds in the first year, and up to 75 percent in the second and third years of the project period for subgrants aimed at local programs. These subgrants can be used to expand access to existing services (Option A), initiate new programs to meet unique needs (Option B), or upgrade the quality of current programs (Option C). PDG B-5 Renewal funding is providing an opportunity for states to target investments in stabilization, expansion, quality improvement and infrastructure, and the reduction of start-up costs to strengthen the child care sector and increase access to high-quality early childhood care and education for families with young children.

In total, sixteen states recognized the importance of supporting and enhancing child care supply through the use of grants. Notably, the emphasis on infant and toddler care is a common trend across many states, highlighting the recognition of the unique needs and importance of that population. There is a strong emphasis on focusing in high-need and rural communities, showcasing a significant drive for equity. In many instances, strategies states proposed to expand or enhance care in rural or areas designated as "high need" centered on home-based care providers. Furthermore, nearly half of the states that proposed grants focused on helping providers with start-up costs underscoring the importance of addressing the financial challenges a provider faces when expanding or starting their business.

States proposed the following grant strategies in their applications:

- **Community Grants** - Alaska plans to allocate \$1,500,000 to support the stability of child care programs, building on the stabilization grants previously distributed using COVID relief funds. This funding aims to enhance the resilience of the child care sector, and to implement Learn & Grow, Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System, which offers early childhood education programs comprehensive resources and supports for continuous quality improvement.
- **Expansion Grants** - Several states are prioritizing the expansion of child care supply through grant initiatives to increase access to high-quality early childhood care and education. *Arizona*, *Arkansas*, and *Delaware* are focusing on expanding capacity in high-need areas. Arizona will provide subgrant funding for infants and toddlers in high-need communities. Arkansas's Department of Child Care and Early Childhood Education will provide subgrants directly to local programs in targeted communities, with a focus on increasing high-quality infant/toddler slots. *Delaware* seeks to expand its full-day state-funded preschool program seats to include infants and toddlers, serving more children with disabilities within inclusive early childhood environments and prioritizing multilingual families in two of its three counties.

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*Idaho, Ohio, and Montana* are targeting rural communities for expansion. *Idaho* will provide subgrants ranging from \$35,000 to \$400,000 to increase and enhance the supply of quality early childhood care and education options in rural and disadvantaged communities. Using a needs assessment, *Ohio* will provide subgrants to expand access to targeting rural areas or increasing capacity to serve low-income children or infants and toddlers. *Montana* will designate a grant program specialist to focus on expansion initiatives, exploring in-home child care options like Family, Friend, and Neighbor and Relative Care Exempt as potential untapped resources for expansion.

**Nevada will subgrant to Local Education Agencies and programs for preschool seat expansion, targeting vulnerable populations and providing additional infant/toddler seats for children experiencing homelessness.**

*Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Vermont* are investing initiatives to expand child care supply in their states. *Nevada* will subgrant to Local Education Agencies and programs for preschool seat expansion, targeting vulnerable populations and providing additional infant/toddler seats for children experiencing homelessness. *New Mexico* will use a portion of its annual Renewal Grant award to support the conversion of Head Start slots to Early Head Start slots in rural counties. *Oklahoma* will administer Child Care Desert Grants and Exceptional Needs Reimbursement Grants to support existing and new programs. *Vermont* will award subgrants to expand access to existing or new Early Childhood Network programs and support quality improvement within communities.

- **Quality Improvement/Infrastructure Grants** - *Arkansas, Delaware, Idaho, Nevada, and Ohio* are focusing on quality improvement and infrastructure grants to support and enhance their child care programs. In *Arkansas*, the state's Department of Child Care and Early Childhood Education will provide subgrants to local programs for improving the quality of their existing services, as well as expanding the family child care network's work to offer technical assistance and coaching to family child care providers. *Delaware's* Department of Education plans to implement Quality Improvement grants in the next three years, prioritizing resources for providers in high-need communities with significant gaps in their Quality Improvement Plans. Additionally, the state will expand technical assistance and services to FCC networks, preparing them to deliver state-funded preschool programming and meet or exceed Head Start qualifications. *Idaho* will provide quality improvement grants to support ECCE providers in securing and implementing evidence-based curriculum. *Ohio* will provide subgrants to support new and existing local programs that need to make facility accommodations, complete additional training (i.e., medical or behavioral), and to support lower ratios when necessary to meet the needs of families. *Nevada's* Quality Improvement grants will focus on furnishing materials grants to programs creating new or expanding state-funded seats, allowing them to purchase the necessary materials to serve children. These quality improvement and infrastructure grants play a vital role in helping child care programs meet and maintain high-quality standards, ultimately benefiting the children and families they serve.
- **Start-up Grants** - *Arizona, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Montana, and Pennsylvania* are focusing on start-up grants to support the establishment of new child care programs and increase access to high-quality early childhood care and education. In *Arizona*, the Department of Education will offer subgrants for early learning programs in high-need communities. *Idaho* plans to provide subgrants to current and prospective child care providers, emphasizing rural and disadvantaged areas, to increase child care capacity. In *Indiana*, providers can apply for funding in two

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categories: Existing Site Expansion/Update or New Site Creation. In both categories, providers must explain how the expansion or repositioning effort helps to meet or address local family demands.

*Kentucky* will offer matching funds to child care start-ups in counties identified as child care deserts, ensuring financial stability until they achieve sustainable enrollment levels.

In *Massachusetts*, the state is considering subgrants for local start-ups to encourage new child care programs, with a particular focus on family child care providers. The goal is to provide funding for initial expenses and support for new FCC educators and center-based directors to successfully launch and sustain programs that respond to local gaps in child care availability. The subgrants will also help new providers learn the skills necessary for success in their new roles.

*Montana* will designate a grant program specialist to focus on expansion initiatives for in-home child care options and explore partnerships with businesses for a hub-and-spoke model to increase child care slots. *Mississippi's* Department of Human Services plans to offer up to 100 start-up grants for Family, Friend, and Neighbor care and traditional child care providers who will increase subsidy slots in rural areas for infants and toddlers, children with special needs, and extended hours care.

*Pennsylvania's* Office of Child Development and Early Learning will award "start-up" grants to individuals who initiate and complete the steps necessary to become a licensed child care facility, with financial support for licensing and certification fees, supplies, furniture, learning materials, marketing, repairs, and hiring costs.

**In Massachusetts, the state is considering subgrants for local start-ups to encourage new child care programs, with a particular focus on family child care providers.**





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# Entry Obstacles and Administrative Simplification

**Table 3. Entry Obstacles and Administrative Simplification**

	DE	IN	MA	MT	ND	TX
Develop online portals and improve automation	•	•			•	
Improve regulations and policies		•				
Provide support and training to providers			•		•	•
Offer support related to business and organizational processes				•		

The PDG B-5 Renewal grant provides an opportunity for states to address barriers providers face and adopt innovative strategies that reinforce child care supply, allowing more providers to enter the market and offer a diverse array of services. These strategies include online portals, regulatory and policy reform, provider support and training, and business process and organizational improvement.

A total of six states chose to focus in this area. Their plans include strategies that enhance supports to providers to successfully navigate child care licensing systems and that leverage technology as a digital solution to mitigate administrative burden and create greater efficiencies for providers. Other strategies included regulatory changes and increased provider training and supports.

States proposed the following strategies in their applications:

- **Online Portals and Automation** - *Delaware, Indiana, and North Dakota* are prioritizing online platforms and automation to streamline licensing applications, renewals, and reporting requirements. *Delaware* is working to improve its online portal to decrease licensing monitors' workload and eliminate duplicative processes. *Indiana* is focusing on increasing automation and streamlining reporting and compliance requirements, while *North Dakota* is introducing an online Child Care Licensing Data System to ease the licensing application and renewal process.
- **Regulatory and Policy Reform** - *Indiana* is committed to assessing and revising regulations, policies, and licensing systems to simplify requirements and remove barriers to entry. The state is acting on recommendations from the Early Learning Advisory Committee and a provider workgroup to reconcile requirements and update related licensing systems.
- **Provider Support and Training** - *North Dakota and Texas* are offering standardized training, technical assistance, and resources to new and prospective providers. *North Dakota* is developing tools and resources to support new providers, offering standardized state-supported training and technical assistance. *Texas* is investing in Child Care Regulation navigator positions to support prospective child care providers throughout the licensing process with the primary goal of decreasing the length of time from application to opening. *Massachusetts* is providing trainings to help programs build their skills in marketing their programs and communicating effectively with families.
- **Business Process and Organizational Improvement** - *Montana* is conducting a child care licensing assessment in hopes of enhancing existing processes, regulations, data systems, and organizational culture to reduce the administrative burden on providers.



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## Collaborative Supply and Quality Efforts

Table 4. Collaborative Supply and Quality Efforts

	DE	HI	ID	MS	MT	NM	PA
Create family child care networks	•					•	
Establish technology-enabled business supports			•				
Create early child care warmlines				•			
Share business services and benefits for child care workers		•			•		
Create statewide accelerator and rapid response teams						•	•

The PDG grant allowed states to “help ECCE programs to identify and access resources that can support long-term stability”. As such, several states are concentrating on initiatives that encourage collaboration, networking, and support for early childhood care providers. These efforts aim to build a solid foundation for the growth and development of the early childhood education sector while ensuring families have access to high-quality child care options. These strategies, included in six state proposals, collectively underscore a clear commitment to improving child care provision through collaboration and shared services, with a specific focus on supporting home-based providers. Such collaborative initiatives have the potential to strengthen the provider’s administrative capacity, enhance the quality of care provided, and ultimately improve the overall accessibility of high-quality child care for families.

States proposed the following strategies in their PDG B-5 Renewal applications to boost child care supply and quality through collaborative efforts:

- **Family Child Care Networks** - *Delaware* is piloting a system of family child care (FCC) networks to help providers build necessary administrative infrastructure, while *New Mexico* is establishing staffed FCC networks, offering comprehensive support to providers across the state.
- **Technology-Enabled Business Support** - *Idaho* is partnering with Wonderschool to develop a platform simplifying application, eligibility, and enrollment processes for families seeking home-based care, and to provide FCC providers with an online portal featuring support features for cost and revenue analysis.
- **Early Child Care Warmlines** - *Mississippi* is implementing an early child care warmline for home-based providers, offering free support, advice, and answers to questions related to providing high-quality child care.
- **Shared Business Services and Benefits for Child Care Providers** - *Montana* is exploring shared benefits for child care providers using the state’s Practitioner Registry, aiming to make benefits like health and life insurance and retirement plans more affordable and accessible. *Hawaii* is expanding a shared services program that provides support for managing operational functions such as billing and invoicing, attendance tracking, and records management, building on a pilot that demonstrated the benefit of a shared services model (e.g., group insurance, bulk ordering of supplies, substitute pools, coaching, etc.).
- **Statewide accelerator and rapid response teams** - *New Mexico* is introducing a statewide accelerator for FCC providers, offering business support, quality coaching, and training in a cohort-based approach, while *Pennsylvania* is deploying Rapid Response Teams in communities to support early childhood education programs struggling with challenging child behavior.



# Public Awareness

**Table 5. Public Awareness**

	AK
Develop comprehensive inventories of ECCE programs	•

The PDG B-5 Renewal grant called on states to “maximize family and parental choice, and knowledge of and engagement with existing programs in the state’s mixed delivery system, easing access to services.”

A critical aspect of supporting families in their search for quality early childhood care and education is building their knowledge of existing programs.

One state, Alaska, decided to focus on this strategy by proposing the following:

*Alaska* is leveraging PDG B-5 Renewal funding to design and implement awareness campaigns, which focuses on making comprehensive inventories of early childhood care and education programs accessible to the public, organized by community and by region. By boosting public awareness, Alaska aims to empower families to make well-informed decisions about their children’s education and ensure that a greater number of families can take advantage of high-quality early childhood care and education services.

**A critical aspect of supporting families in their search for quality early childhood care and education is building their knowledge of existing programs.**



# Early Head Start/Child Care Partnerships

**Table 6. Early Head Start/Child Care Partnerships**

	HI	MT
Increase EHS/Child Care Partnerships	•	•

Activity Five of the of the PDG B-5 Renewal grant, “Support Program Quality Improvement,” allowed states to “build the supply of high-quality providers as well as comprehensive services and supports across settings in the early childhood mixed delivery system, such as through the development and/or support of partnerships across programs including Head Start, Early Head Start, child care (including family child care), state preschool and other service hub models, early intervention, early childhood special education and schools to expand access to full-day and full-year high-quality services.” Utilizing this strategy and leveraging existing federal funding, two states, *Hawaii* and *Montana*, are focusing on Early Head Start (EHS) and Child Care Partnerships. These collaborations between EHS programs and child care providers aim to expand access to comprehensive services for infants and toddlers from low-income families while enhancing the overall quality of care. By coupling EHS funds with PDG resources, these strategies aim to amplify the impact of investments, thereby creating a more robust and resilient child care sector.

Hawaii and Montana proposed the following strategies:

- *Hawaii* is working to fund and support more EHS/Child Care partnerships by linking subsidy support for families with EHS federal funding. This approach promotes the EHS comprehensive service model through partnerships with family child care or center-based care providers. *Hawaii* plans to award three subgrants: two to fund EHS-Family Child Care Home (FCCH) partnerships and one to fund an EHS partnership with a center-based program. These partnerships will help shift current program capacity in home- and center-based settings toward serving more infants and toddlers from low-income families.
- *Montana* is building on its existing 14 Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership sites and 10 providers by offering stipends to licensed programs and EHSs currently participating in the partnership. These stipends will support continued participation, quarterly convening, and potential slot expansion, ensuring that more infants and toddlers from low-income families have access to high-quality child care services.



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**Next steps for states and the federal government.** As states continue to invest in child care access-focused strategies, monitoring their progress and outcomes is crucial so that other states can learn from their experiences. Various approaches, such as stabilization, expansion, and quality improvement grants, as well as efforts to simplify administrative procedures, showcase states' commitment to fostering a more equitable and inclusive child care system. States are using PDG B-5 Renewal grants to recognize the important role of home-based child care, and other priorities such as expanding access to high quality care for infants and toddlers, and building supply in rural areas and communities designed as "high need".

PDG B-5 applications reflect a knowledge of strategies and approaches to solving the problem of child care access. But it is evident from these applications that states are seeking to improve access through pilot programs and temporary strategies with limited budgets. Greater federal investment is needed - and must be permanent, robust, and sustained - to truly make a difference.

“Various approaches, such as stabilization, expansion, and quality improvement grants, as well as efforts to simplify administrative procedures, showcase states’ commitment to fostering a more equitable and inclusive child care system.”

