

For Immediate Release

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MANY STATE POLICIES IGNORE RESEARCH ON HEALTHY CHILD DEVELOPMENT
Leading National Organization Releases Report on Policies for Young Children

NEW YORK, May 16, 2007— In advance of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s summit on early childhood development, the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), has released a new report, *State Early Childhood Policies: Improving the Odds*. The study finds unevenness and deficiencies across the 50 states in policies that affect the well-being and development of young children.

“For young children to thrive, they need high-quality health care and early learning experiences, as well as nurturing parents who are economically secure,” said Dr. Jane Knitzer, report co-author and Director of NCCP. “Poor and low-income children—regardless of where they live—have the same needs, but we found significant inequities and inadequacies across the states in their early childhood policies.”

Research has proven that early childhood development has lifelong consequences, and that without support, low-income families struggle to provide the basic necessities their young children need to thrive. But economists have shown that smart investments in young children yield long-term gains. In short, early childhood policies can make a difference.

Key findings from *State Early Childhood Policies: Improving the Odds* reveal a mixed picture across the states:

- Ten million children, 42% of all young children under six, are especially vulnerable to poor school outcomes and poor health. Poverty and economic hardship are root causes.
- Only 15 states provide access to both health insurance and child care subsidies for a family of three earning about \$35,000 per year—the minimum it takes for a low-income family to cover basic costs.
- Between 2001 and 2006, health insurance eligibility levels were either stable or increased in most states, while 33 states reduced eligibility for child care subsidies, despite the fact that most low-income women work.
- Of the 27 states that increased funds for pre-kindergarten since 2002, 15 decreased funds for child care subsidies.
- Access to quality health care AND early learning opportunities AND family economic support is unbalanced across the states

"Decades of scientific research have taught us that a child’s first few years establish the foundation for good health and educational attainment," said Helene Stebbins, a co-author of the study and president of HMS Research. "Investing in quality relationships strengthen this foundation, but state policies do not reflect this research."

- Only 8 states meet nationally recommended licensing standards for child care for toddlers, and in some states, one adult is allowed to care for nine 18-month olds. Only one-quarter of the states meet recommended standards for 4 year olds, and one state, Florida, allows one adult for every 20 four-year-olds.
- Only six states provide paid medical/maternity leave.

“We also know that helping parents helps young children, but here too, state efforts are very uneven,” continued Stebbins.

- In most of the states (41), low-income children and pregnant women have access to health insurance, but only four states cover working parents at the same level.
- In 15 of the 42 states that tax family income, a family earning less than the poverty level must still pay taxes.

Full comparative state data tables are online at http://nccp.org/projects/improvingtheodds_stateprofiles.html

“If we want a more productive work force for the next generation,” Knitzer said, “we need to level the playing field for young children now. We need sound state policies and we need sound federal policies that help the states better help young children.”

To remedy this, NCCP makes the following recommendations to policymakers:

- **Make policy choices based on research.** Translating research findings about early brain development and sound economic investments into policy requires leadership and foresight. But to do less risks not making the most of every dollar we now invest.
- **Focus on the whole child.** Families with young children need multiple supports, and strong policies in one policy area (e.g., health care) can be undermined by weak policies in another (e.g., child care).
- **Combine anti-poverty investments with early childhood investments.** Research, and common sense, tells us that helping parents get ahead will help their children get ahead. Families can’t meet their children’s basic needs on poverty level incomes--\$17,170 for a family of three. Benefit eligibility levels need to be at least twice the poverty level.
- **Invest in infants and toddlers.** Research is clear that we need to invest early. The earliest relationships and experiences shape early brain development, which in turn affects the skills needed to succeed in school and beyond.

To read *State Early Childhood Policies: Improving the Odds* visit www.nccp.org.

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The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation’s leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health, and well-being of America’s low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.