

Child Care & Early Education RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

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Child Care and Early Education for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness: Research-to-Policy Resources

It is [estimated](#) that in the United States more than 1.2 million or approximately one in 18 children under the age of six years experiences homelessness. This includes children in families placed in motels, shelters, or other transitional settings, those staying with relatives or friends because of lack of housing or economic hardship, or families who have no shelter arrangement. Children through five years of age—the period that has the greatest potential for influencing life-long health, development, and learning—form [the largest single group](#) experiencing homelessness as measured by use of shelters and transitional housing programs, which itself captures only a small proportion of this population.

Children experiencing homelessness experience [multiple challenges](#) which include but are not limited to unstable and inadequate housing arrangements, family financial difficulties, inadequate health care, and exposure to violence. Young children experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable to experiencing developmental delays and social emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, and trauma, compared to their peers with stable housing. Infants and toddlers are particularly vulnerable to developmental delays when affected by traumatic experiences, which often are associated with homelessness. Even after leaving homeless shelters and moving into more permanent housing arrangements, young children are at higher risk for developmental delays and challenging behavior than same age children overall.

Due to the wide range of difficulties experienced by young children and their families, it is important that they are linked with comprehensive services that support the children's health, development, and learning. Families need assistance in securing safe and stable housing, becoming financially secure, and addressing health and mental health issues that may have been associated with or precipitated by homelessness. For children, consistent access to safe, stable, and enriching learning environments, including to high quality early care and education programs and services, is particularly important. Providing early care and education opportunities not only supports children's development and learning, it also increases access for both children and their families to other critical services, including developmental screening and linkages to other community resources. However, many young children leaving shelters continue to experience instability in both their child care and housing arrangements.



Currently, Early Head Start and Head Start programs provide quality learning opportunities and services for children experiencing homelessness. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 enhanced access for children experiencing homelessness to Early Head Start and Head Start programs. The revised Head Start performance standards emphasize the importance of developing community partnerships to assist children and families experiencing homelessness and of helping families who do not have access to stable housing support their children's transitions between early care and education programs and into kindergarten. Head Start also instituted a program change in creating a three percent funding set-aside for serving children experiencing homelessness and those in foster care.

The 2014 reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant program also identified children and families experiencing homelessness as a particularly vulnerable group for which states are to give priority in subsidizing early care and education services. It called for greater attention to identifying and promptly serving children experiencing homelessness by actively reaching out to families of this population. This parallels the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act—first signed in 1987—that states must assure equal access to public schooling, including preschool, for children experiencing homelessness as well as offering services to support their enrollment, attendance, and success.

In October 2016, the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Education issued guidance on meeting the needs of families with young children experiencing and at risk of homelessness. This statement reviewed recent research on the prevalence of homelessness among young children, its detrimental effects on development and learning, and the need to address the unique needs of homeless families with young children to avoid or ameliorate those effects. The three federal agencies proposed recommendations for state and local action in three areas: providing comprehensive services to both children and parents through cross-system partnerships; integration of early childhood programs and services into local homeless assistance “coordinated entry” processes; and use and sharing of data to better understand the circumstances facing families and young children experiencing homelessness, identify gaps and unmet needs, and assess effectiveness of programs and policies.

This **Research-to-Policy Resource List** identifies resources in the *Research Connections* collection published in 2010 or later that examine access to and use of early care and education by children in families experiencing homelessness, early childhood programs and practices that are designed to address their specific developmental needs, and policy options to increase access to high quality care and education for this particularly vulnerable group of young children.

Access to and Use of Early Care and Education for Children Experiencing Homelessness

Boylan, E., & Splansky, D. (2010). [Access to pre-k education under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#). Newark, NJ: Education Law Center.

DaCosta Nunez, R., Yang DeLeone, F., & Starkey, L. (2012). [Profiles of risk: Child care. \(Research Brief No. 7\)](#). New York: Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness.

Perlman, S. M., Shaw, S. H., Kieffer, C. H., Whitney, G. C., & Bires, C. (2017). [Access to early childhood services for young children experiencing homelessness](#). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Stillman, L., Hurd, K., Kieffer, C.H., Taylor, J., & Gibson, B. (2016). [*A qualitative assessment of parental preschool choices and challenges among families experiencing homelessness: Policy and practice implications*](#). Washington, DC: United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research.

Taylor, J., Gibson, B., & Hurd, K. (2015). [*Parental preschool choices and challenges when young children and their families experience homelessness*](#). *Child and Youth Services Review*, 56, 68-75.

United States Administration for Children and Families. (2016). [*Access to early childhood development services for homeless families with young children: An exploratory project*](#). Washington, DC: United States Administration for Children and Families.

Early Care and Education Programs and Practices that Support Children Experiencing Homelessness

Curran-Groome, W. & Atkinson, A. (2017). [*Best practices in early care and education for young children experiencing homelessness*](#). Philadelphia, PA: Public Health Management Corporation.

McDonald, S., & Grandin, M. (2009). [*Early education home visiting: Supporting children experiencing homelessness*](#). Newton, MA: National Center on Family Homelessness.

National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE & National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (U.S.). (2013). [*Early care and education for young children experiencing homelessness*](#). Greensboro, NC: National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE.

United States. Administration for Children and Families. (n.d.). [*Building partnerships to address family homelessness*](#). Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families.

State Policies Affecting Access to Early Care and Education for Children Experiencing Homelessness

Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness. (2014). [*Meeting the child care needs of homeless families: How do states stack up?*](#) New York: Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness.

United States. Administration for Children and Families. Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development. (2014). [*Promising practices for children experiencing homelessness: A look at two states*](#). Washington, DC: United States Administration for Children and Families, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development.

Federal Policies Affecting Access to Early Care and Education for Children Experiencing Homelessness

Duffield, B., Whitney, G. C., & Bires, C. (2016). [*Aligning early childhood programs to serve children experiencing homelessness: A comparison of preschool, Head Start, and child care policies*](#). Minneapolis, MN: National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. (2015). [An overview of federal policy on homeless infants, toddlers, and preschoolers](#). Minneapolis, MN: National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

Schumacher, R., Le, M., & Sprague, M. (2016). [CCDF 2015 NPRM topical webinar: Providing equal access to stable, high quality child care for low-income children](#) and [CCDF 2015 NPRM topical webinar: Providing equal access to stable, high quality child care for low-income children \[PowerPoint\]](#). Washington, DC: United States Office of Child Care.

United States. Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Housing and Urban Development, & Department of Education. (2016). [Guidance on meeting the needs of families with young children experiencing and at risk of homelessness](#). Washington, DC: United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Note: In July 2015 *Research Connections* published a [Research-to-Policy Resource List](#) on this topic, developed by Soohyun Park and Samuel Stephens, with helpful input and feedback from Dr. Staci Perlman (at that time in the Department of Human Development and Families Studies, Delaware Education Research & Development Center, at the University of Delaware) and staff at the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE). That document is the basis for this updated version.

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