

Child care subsidies provide financial assistance to families with low incomes to make child care more affordable. Access to care allows families to pursue employment or educational opportunities and fosters young children’s health and wellbeing during the most rapid and sensitive period of development.

A rigorous review of federal child care policy over the last 125 years shows that subsidized care has been inaccessible and inadequate for many families with low incomes, particularly families of color. Specifically, the availability and generosity of financial support for care have been consistently set according to subjective judgments of “deservingness,” this judgement in turn serves to justify the inadequate subsidy system families with low incomes still experience today.

The following table provides an overview of child care policies throughout history; to learn more, read the full report [here](#).

Program – Policy	Effective Year	Target Population	Funding	Administration	Child Care Provisions	Access and Implementation
Mother’s Pensions	1900s-1930s	Mothers with low incomes who were widowed, deserted, or divorced	Counties responsible for providing 100% of funding	Counties set eligibility and administered cash assistance	Policies designed for mothers to stay at home to care for their children, failing to recognize the needs of working mothers	Based on subjective criteria, working-class, immigrant, and especially Black women were refused pensions
Emergency Nursery Schools (ENS) – Works Progress Administration	1933-1943	Children in families receiving welfare	Partially federally funded, with the remainder funded locally	States set eligibility and administered program sought employment	ENS programs, when available, provided a safe environment for children while parents sought employment	Access to ENS was variable, with only some states offering programs for children of color and all programs having a limited number of slots
Child Care – Lanham Act of 1940	1940-1946	War-impacted communities	Federal funding at two-thirds of the cost, with the remainder locally funded, typically through tuition	Local administrators set program standards	Child care, when available, provided a safe environment for children during mothers’ war work	Accessing care was especially difficult for Black and Hispanic mothers, who experienced discrimination in child care admission policies

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Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) - Social Security Act of 1935 Name changed to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) under the Public Welfare Amendments of 1962.	1935-1996	Children of mothers with low incomes who were widowed, deserted, or divorced; later broadened to include one- and two-parent households	Federally funded at one-third of total expenditures; states responsible for remainder. This formula fluctuated over time, until 1965 when states were reimbursed at the Medicaid matching rate.	States that chose to participate set eligibility and administered program, submitting plan outlining choices to federal government	Originally, ADC was designed for mothers to stay at home to care for their children, failing to recognize the needs of working mothers. Once work programs were implemented (see immediately below), child care subsidies became available.	Discriminatory eligibility practices at the federal and state level kept families of color from accessing aid
Amendments to AFDC						
Community Work and Training (CWT) - Public Welfare Amendments of 1962	1962-1967	Parents receiving aid, especially unemployed fathers	Federally funded at 75% of costs, with states responsible for the remainder	States that chose to participate set eligibility and administered program within broad federal guidelines	Child care was available to CWT participants during work hours	Work program was not widely accessible and replicated low-wage work traditionally held by workers of color
Work Incentives Program (WIN) - Social Security Amendments of 1967	1967-1988	Parents receiving aid (except mothers with children under age 6)	Federally funded at 80% of costs, with states responsible for the remainder	States set eligibility and administered program within broad federal guidelines	Child care was available to WIN participants during work hours	Work program replicated low-wage work traditionally held by workers of color
Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) Training - Family Support Act of 1988	1988-1996	Parents receiving aid (except mothers with children under age 3)	Federal funding match rate of 90% of state costs	States set eligibility and administered program within broad federal guidelines	Child care was guaranteed through AFDC-Child Care and Transitional Child Care	Work program replicated low-wage work traditionally held by workers of color
Child Care Development and Block Grant - Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Act of 1990	1990-Present	Families with low incomes	Federal government responsible for providing 100% of funding	States set eligibility and administer program within broad federal guidelines, submitting application for federal approval every 3 years	Provides child care subsidies for eligible families with low incomes	Inequities in eligibility, application processes, family contributions, and provider regulations disproportionately harm Black, Hispanic, and Native American families
Child Care Entitlement to States – Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996	1996-Present	Families with low incomes	Federal government responsible for providing 100% of mandatory funding. Matching funding is federally funded according to the Medicaid matching rate	States set eligibility and administer program within broad federal guidelines	Provides child care subsidies for eligible families with low incomes	Inequities in eligibility, application processes, family contributions, and provider regulations disproportionately harm Black, Hispanic, and Native American families