



Created September 5, 2025

## Universal Access to Child Care

New Mexico has the chance to do what no other state has done: make child care accessible to all families. This opportunity reflects the years of groundwork laid by early childhood advocates, backed by the bold action and sustained investments by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and the Legislature.

Today, our state is closer than ever to establishing the nation's first universal child care system, but 'close' is not enough. New Mexico can act decisively to finish the job and model a world-class early childhood system. The opportunity is extraordinary. Families are waiting, providers are ready, and the solutions are within reach.

### WHY UNIVERSAL?

Costs of living have skyrocketed. Right now, some New Mexicans pay more for child care than for a mortgage. Caring for children is a shared responsibility and families should not shoulder this burden alone. This commitment to universal child care supports families, strengthens communities, and builds a future we all share.

By sustaining a robust, mixed-delivery system, families can choose the type of care that best fits their needs, preferences, and values—whether that's a center- or home-based provider, a language-immersion or faith-based program, or care available during evenings, weekends, or overnight hours.

- Parents can keep working, return to school, or pursue new careers without fear of setbacks to their financial stability.
- Children can have access to safe, healthy, and nurturing learning environments.
- Early childhood educators can expect to be fairly compensated and valued for their important contributions.
- Providers can count on steady, adequate reimbursement, strengthening their business models and improving the quality of care statewide.

Average annual benefit  
per child of

**\$12,804**

gives families financial  
relief and providers  
reliable funding to  
sustain quality care.

### HOW WILL IT WORK?

Starting November 1, 2025, Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) will implement universal access, paired with targeted investments to expand child care supply and strengthen the early childhood workforce.

### UNIVERSAL ACCESS

We have the power to ensure every family can rely on safe, high-quality child care without financial strain. This is all in service to the promise made to support thriving families and young children.

- **Remove income limits.** All families, regardless of income, will be eligible to receive child care assistance.
- **Waive copays.** Copays will remain waived, so care is completely free for participating families.
- **Activity requirements.** Families involved with CYFD or CARA, or those experiencing housing instability, and grandparents raising grandchildren will be eligible even if they are not working or in school.
- **Flexibility for families' schedules.** Activity hours will no longer dictate hours of care.

## STRENGTHENING THE WORKFORCE

New Mexico's child care professionals do essential, highly skilled work. A strong workforce requires fair pay to deliver the quality care that families need.

- **Higher provider rates.** Provider rate increases will be based on the true cost of high-quality care, allowing providers to offer fair pay.
- **Pay and hours incentive.** Providers will earn additional funding if they pay all entry-level staff at least \$18-\$21 per hour, depending on quality level, and remain open at least 10 hours per day, five days per week.
- **Better workforce data.** ECECD is launching a custom data system to track compensation, credentials, and staff retention while reducing administrative burden on providers.



## BUILDING THE SUPPLY

Universal access needs a stronger, more resilient supply of care to succeed. Communities across New Mexico still lack enough providers to meet families' needs, particularly for infants, toddlers, and parents working non-traditional hours.

- **Capital for growth.** Low interest loans and capital outlay dollars for construction, expansion, and renovation of licensed facilities.
- **Easier entry for home-based care.** By reducing unnecessary administrative barriers, more registered family, friend, and neighbor caregivers can get paid for their critical work.
- **Partnerships with employers.** Industry leaders and our state's largest employers are already stepping up to grow child care capacity to support their employees. Now is the moment to strengthen and scale these partnerships statewide.
- **Targeted growth for infants and toddlers.** Expansion efforts will prioritize low-income families and children with special needs or at risk.

*These investments are foundational—not optional. Without them, we won't achieve the outcomes families want and our youngest learners deserve.*

### Meeting Families' Demand for Child Care

*By strengthening a system of care, it not only supports parents and children in the present, but invests in the wellbeing of generations to come. Expanding care by the numbers shown below is necessary to realize this vision.*

