



Universal Child Care

At a Glance for Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes

Starting **November 1, 2025**, families in New Mexico can get assistance paying for child care, no matter their income.

This means less stress for you, more support for your child's caregivers, and a safe, caring place for your child to learn and grow. Raising children is not something families should do alone. When your family is supported, the whole community benefits.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR NATIONS, PUEBLOS, AND TRIBES

This announcement allows Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes (NPTs) to dedicate their ECECD Child Care Assistance funding to support direct care, while weaving other available funding supports to strengthen early childhood priorities. More funding pathways mean greater support for Native children, families, and communities.

This includes:

- A range of early care options, from center-based to home-based programs
- Tribal language immersion and other culturally grounded care
- Cultural Relevance and Choice: Families can choose programs that honor their values and traditions.
- Economic Empowerment: Parents can work, pursue education, or train for new careers without child care costs becoming a barrier.
- Support for Providers: Tribal child care programs, family providers, and early educators will benefit from higher reimbursement rates, pay incentives, and opportunities to expand capacity.
- Shared Responsibility: This statewide commitment reflects our collective duty to care for children and strengthen future generations.



Collaborative Pathways For Nations, Pueblos, and Tribal Early Childhood Programs

TRIBAL GOVERNMENT LICENSURE PATHWAY

- Provider can apply for a courtesy license to connect to ECECD supports
- Families apply for assistance through ECECD
- Tribe issues licenses and conducts inspections

ECECD LICENSURE PATHWAY

- Providers apply through ECECD
- ECECD conducts licensing and inspections
- Providers operate under the state's mixed-delivery system

HOW IT WORKS

- No income limits. Families who work or go to school can get child care assistance, regardless of income.
- No copays. No fees for families. Child care is expensive, averaging about \$12,000 per child each year. With Universal Child Care, state and federal funds cover the costs. That means there will be no more co-pays or fees for families. Families will no longer have to choose between child care and other essentials.
- Flexibility for families' schedules. Families can choose care arrangements that fit their needs, not just their work or class schedules.



Questions? Visit nmececd.org/universal or scan the QR code for answers and resources, including a communication toolkit.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FROM NPTS

Considerations to inform dialogue, planning, and next steps for Tribal leaders and early childhood partners.

Can grandparents, or other relatives raising children, become registered home providers for their own grandchildren or other children?

Yes, grandparents, can apply to become a registered home to provide care subsidized by ECECD for up to four (4) non-residential children, in addition to any children living in the residence, including their own grandchildren, other relative children, or non-related children. Grandparents with legal custody or guardianship of their grandchildren are not eligible to receive subsidy payments directly from ECECD for those children.

Are there supports for language nests or culturally based early learning programs?

Yes. Programs that promote Native language and culture are eligible to participate and may receive additional supports under the New Mexico Tribal Investment Strategy (TIS).

NMSA 1978, § 9-29-8(P) “The department [ECECD] shall: upon a request from an Indian nation, tribe or pueblo located in whole or in part in New Mexico, enter into an intergovernmental agreement with the Indian nation, tribe or pueblo, or a tribal organization authorized by the Indian nation, tribe or pueblo by tribal resolution, to plan, conduct, disburse funding to and administer one or more early childhood education and care programs, including the programs listed in Paragraph (1) of Subsection B of this section, with the Indian nation, tribe or pueblo, or authorized tribal organization, using its own culturally and linguistically relevant standards, assessments and evaluations.”

What workforce and capacity supports are available for NPTs?

NPT can access ECECD funding for staff recruitment, training, and retention. Incentives and stipends are available for Native language speakers and cultural specialists who wish to become providers.

What if a NPT child care center already receives federal funding but is short staffed or has a wait list?

ECECD will work with each NPT individually to coordinate and collaborate in understanding their circumstances and determining how the department can best support their needs.



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What if a Tribal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) funded child care center already receives federal funding but needs additional operating funds?

This is a case where the NPT could develop an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with ECECD. Child care assistance cannot provide operating funds.

See the pathways information on page one to determine which works best for your NPT child care program.

How can NPTs access and combine funding to expand child care?

Federal, state, and NPT funding streams are aligned to expand child care access. NPTs have flexibility to braid funding sources (such as CCDF, state allocations, and NPT funds).

Can ECECD license or register homes without infrastructure (for example, running water)?

Depending on the circumstances and how the home plans to ensure the safety and welfare of children in care, ECECD may grant waivers or variances for these situations.

Can providers with limited operating hours participate?

Yes. They may receive subsidy at the standard child care assistance rates, but not the enhanced rate.

NEXT STEPS FOR NATIONS, PUEBLOS, AND TRIBES

- Review how universal child care aligns with your community's goals.
- Identify which pathway (Tribal License or ECECD License) best fits your programs.
- Consider applying for the Child Care Facility Loan Fund to expand or improve facilities.
- Continue engagement with ECECD through government to government consultation to shape implementation.



NEW MEXICO
Early Childhood
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