

Supporting Quality in Home-Based Child Care

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Project Description

Home-based child care—regulated family child care and child care provided by family, friends, and neighbors who are legally exempt from regulation—accounts for a significant share of the child care supply in the United States. Researchers estimate that more than 40 percent of all children under age 5 receive care in these settings; It is the most common form of child care for infants and toddlers (Brandon, 2005). Home-based child care also represents a significant proportion of the child care arrangements of families who use child care subsidies.

In the past decade, recognition of the role that home-based child care plays has prompted an increasing interest in this type of child care among policymakers, child care administrators, and researchers. Researchers and child care administrators have endeavored to estimate the prevalence of home-based child care, to assess its quality, and to develop quality initiatives for home-based caregivers. These data collection and development efforts, however, have been largely scattered and small scale.

Research questions

To provide useful information for policymakers and administrators who aim to develop or fund initiatives for home-based caregivers and researchers seeking to build the knowledge base about home-based care, the project had three primary objectives:

- *To systematically gather information from existing research on home-based child care and on initiatives that aim to support these caregivers,;*
- *To synthesize the available evidence on home-based care; and*

- *To propose next steps for designing and evaluating initiatives that aim to improve the quality of care in these settings.*

Products. The project has produced a series of four reports that present a more complete picture of home-based care based on the research evidence.

- **A literature review** of more than 135 articles—primary literature on home-based child care, related literature on family support and home visiting, and potentially related literature on parent well-being, work-family issues, and child development—that summarizes what is known about home-based child care and identifies knowledge gaps.
- **A compilation of brief summaries** of 96 home-based care initiatives identified through a scan of the field that included reviews of state Child Care and Development Fund plans, the research literature, internet searches, and contacts with experts to solicit nominations.
- **A compendium of detailed profiles** of 23 well-established initiatives from the compilation with diverse goals, target outcomes, caregiver characteristics, program auspices, service delivery strategies, and intensity and duration of services.
- **A report on design options for home-based child care** that describes potential strategies for supporting quality in home-based child care settings as well as considerations for design and ongoing evaluation of home-based care initiatives.

Findings. A synthesis of the home-based care research literature and information about recent home-based care quality initiatives points to a critical need for more systematic efforts to develop and test quality initiatives for this type of child care. Although it is a highly prevalent form of child care, research suggests the quality of most home-based care is of poor-to-mediocre quality. Most quality initiatives are not targeted to the specific needs and interests of home-based caregivers. Moreover, little is known about the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Implications for policy/practice. The review of the literature and the scan of the field suggest that initiative developers should select strategies and consider combining them into a single initiative based on targeted outcomes for children, parents, and caregivers; the proposed content; the characteristics of the targeted population of caregivers; and the supports and incentives needed to sustain participation. Two approaches for combining strategies might include: creating a continuum of services based on levels of service intensity, formality of approach to training, and caregivers interest in professionalization; and tailoring services to individual needs. In addition, the findings suggest that initiative developers consider the alignment of the comprehensiveness and intensity of planned services with the anticipated intermediate and long-term outcomes. High intensity strategies include home visiting, coaching, consultation, and professional development; those with moderate intensity include workshops, peer support, and Play and Learn groups; and those with low intensity include materials and mailings, reading vans, and grants to caregivers.

Implications for research. The proposed research and program agenda recommends: (1) the need for additional work on model specification, particularly in theories of change; (2) research on feasibility of implementation and related challenges such as dosage and staff qualifications; (3) the need to develop and test measures of fidelity for monitoring and program

improvement; and (4) research on model adaptation based on caregivers' needs.

For more information:

Porter, T., Paulsell, D., Del Grosso, P., Avellar, S., Hass, R., and Vuong, L. (2010a). *A Review of the Literature on Home-Based Child Care: Implications for Future Directions*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research.

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