

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

## PURPOSE

To examine Tribal Child Care and Development Fund programs, focusing specifically on resource utilization and program operation.

## BACKGROUND

Federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) grants enable Tribes to provide child care subsidies to low-income Indian families so they can work, attend training or return to school. In fiscal year 1998, Tribes received over \$60 million in Federal CCDF grants, more than doubling previous Federal child care grant amounts. During discussions with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), questions were raised about how Tribes use and account for these grants.

More than 17,000 Indian children currently receive child care services funded wholly, or in part, by CCDF Tribal grants. State CCDF programs also serve Indian children, as dual eligibility provisions within the law permit Indians to access the CCDF program through Tribes or the State. Tribes in 31 States receive CCDF grants directly from the Federal Government.

We visited 29 Tribal CCDF programs in Alaska, Arizona, California, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Washington and Wisconsin. More than 60 percent of the Tribal CCDF grantees are located in these seven States. Tribes in these States receive 80 percent of 1998 Tribal CCDF funding. The Tribes we visited account for one-third of the total 1998 CCDF funding to Tribes. We selected them based on geographic location, Tribal population, number of children served and CCDF grant amounts. We also considered whether Tribes ran their own program or were part of a consortium. Our findings are based on information obtained from the 29 Tribes we visited and other respondents.

## FINDINGS

### *Tribal CCDF grants provide Indian children greater access to child care*

Tribes design their programs to meet community needs, providing child care services through center-based programs, certificate programs or both. They often use more expansive eligibility criteria than States, allowing more working families and parents in school to use subsidies. Tribal programs also improve access by making child care more affordable.

### *Lack of Tribal and State coordination adversely impacts child care*

Tribes and States lack knowledge about each others' programs. This limits access to child care services. Lack of coordination also impacts cost, wastes resources and increases the potential for fraud. Despite barriers, Tribes and States can collaborate successfully. Many Tribes use child-

care workgroups to improve coordination and share information with other Tribes and the State.

***Impediments exist in the coordination of Head Start and child care programs***

Many Tribes separately administer their Head Start and CCDF programs. Differing views about program functions or absence of leadership often hinder efforts at collaboration. When coordination exists, Tribes can improve their use of resources.

***Child care plans, payment systems and reporting are flawed***

Tribal child care plans may not reflect current program operations. Inadequate time sheets and poor documentation contribute to provider payment errors and may contribute to the reporting discrepancies we found. Tribes that complete the Administration for Children and Families Annual Report (ACF-700) state that they have a difficult time making their information fit the form's required categories. The ACF recognizes that Tribes have trouble completing the ACF-700 and is in the process of revising the form. Nevertheless, it is unclear to us how much of the reported information is used by ACF.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

To improve access to child care, we recommend that ACF encourage Tribes and States to:

- Share information about their child care programs and create explicit policies and procedures for coordinating these programs.
- Develop reciprocal licensing agreements, develop shared automated systems and establish single points of enrollment for Tribal families.

We support ACF's decision to find ways to improve coordination between Head Start and CCDF. We recommend that ACF:

- Hold regional meetings that would enable Tribal Head Start and CCDF personnel to discuss common ground, differences and ways to overcome barriers to coordination.
- Compile and disseminate information about Tribal best practices and model Head Start/child care collaborative initiatives.

To address vulnerabilities we found in Tribal reporting and payments, we recommend that ACF:

- Compile, develop and disseminate model time sheets and accounting practices.
- Require Tribes reporting under Public Law 102-477 to certify that their CCDF grants were used for appropriate CCDF-related activities.

To make the most of resources provided by the technical assistance contractor and regional ACF staff, we recommend that ACF:

- Ensure that the technical assistance contractor works with ACF regional office staff.
- Encourage the technical assistance contractor to hold individual, on-site meetings with Tribal CCDF staff whenever possible.
- Establish a precedent file.

### **AGENCY COMMENTS**

The ACF concurred with the findings and highlighted their ongoing efforts in the areas we discussed in this report. Based on ACF's comments, we made some changes and technical corrections to the report. The complete text of these comments can be found in Appendix A.

The ACF concurred with all of our recommendations. The agency has taken steps to encourage States and Tribes to work together, and indicates that it will continue to facilitate such cooperation. Through its bureaus, the ACF will continue to facilitate Tribal Child Care-Head Start collaborations. The ACF is also taking steps to address Tribal data collection issues. Central office staff, regional offices and the technical assistance contractor plan to work together to address Tribes' technical assistance needs.

We recognize and look forward to ACF's implementation of efforts to provide technical assistance to Tribes and to address the issues presented in the report.