



Highlights of [GAO-03-840T](#), a report to Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

## Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government invests over \$11 billion in early childhood education and care programs. These programs exist to ensure that children from low-income families are better prepared to enter school and that their parents have access to early childhood education and care that allow them to obtain and maintain employment. The federal government invests more in Head Start, which was funded at \$6.5 billion in fiscal year 2002, than any other early childhood education and care program. Head Start has served over 21 million children at a total cost of \$66 billion since it began. The Chairman, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions asked GAO to discuss Head Start—how it fits within the array of early childhood education and care programs available to low-income children and their families and what is known about its effectiveness.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO--03-840T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO--03-840T).  
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above.  
For more information, contact Marnie S. Shaul at (202) 512-7215 or [shaulm@gao.gov](mailto:shaulm@gao.gov).

## EDUCATION AND CARE

# Head Start Key Among Array of Early Childhood Programs, But National Research on Effectiveness Not Completed

## What GAO Found

Head Start, created in 1965, is the largest funded program among an array of federal early childhood education and care programs, most of which did not exist until decades later. The early education and child care demands of families have changed significantly since Head Start's inception. More women are working, the number of single parents has been increasing, and welfare reform has resulted in more families, including those with young children, entering the workforce. To help meet families' demands for early childhood education and care services, an array of federal programs, such as the child care block grant, have been added over time. Program legislation requires some of these programs to coordinate the delivery of early childhood education and care services for low-income families with young children. For example, to provide parents with full day coverage, Head Start, a predominately part day program, may coordinate with child care programs for the other part of the day. However, barriers—such as differing program eligibility requirements—sometimes make it difficult to blend services across the different programs.

Although extensive research exists that provides important information about Head Start, no recent, definitive, national-level research exists about Head Start's effectiveness on the lives of the children and families it serves. In its last reauthorization, Congress mandated a Head Start effectiveness study and specified that it be completed this year. According to HHS, the study will be completed in 2006.