

## PART IV – PROCESSES WITH PARENTS

### Section 4.1 – Application and Receipt of Child Care Services

*The following describes the process for a family to apply for and receive child care services (658D(b)(1)(A), 658E(c)(2)(D) & (3)(B), §§98.16(k), 98.30(a) through (e)). If the process varies for families based on eligibility category, for instance, TANF versus non-TANF, please describe. The description should include:*

- *How parents are informed of the availability of child care services and about child care options;*
- *Where/how applications are made;*
- *Who makes the eligibility determination;*
- *How parents who receive TANF benefits are informed about the exception to individual penalties as described in 4.4; and*
- *Length of eligibility period including variations that relate to the services provided, e.g., through collaborations with Head Start or prekindergarten programs.*
- *Any steps the State has taken to reduce barriers to initial and continuing eligibility for child care subsidies.*

#### Promoting Awareness of Child Care Subsidies

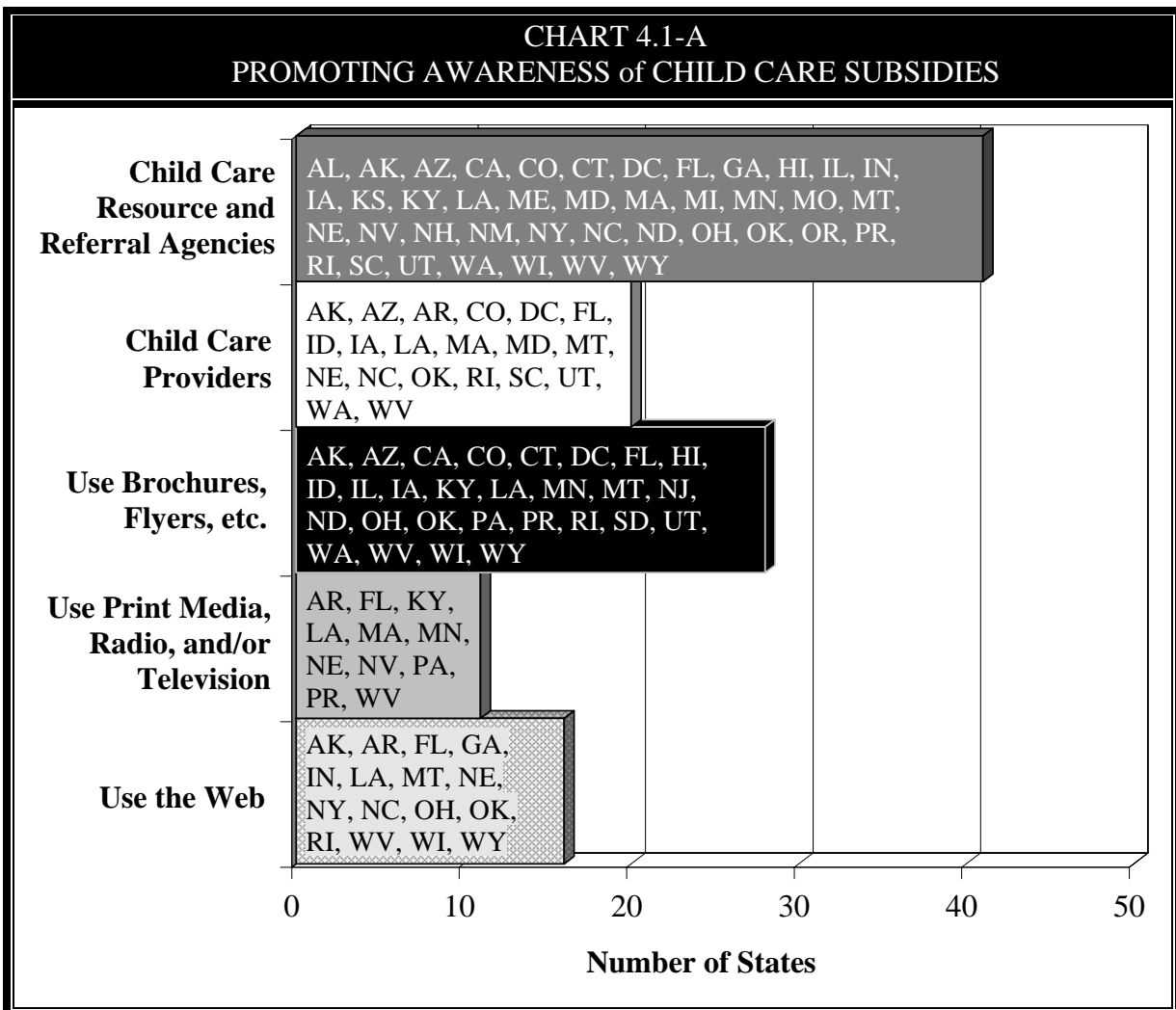
Child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) continue to be primary partners in State efforts to inform parents of the availability of child care assistance. In many States, child care providers also help inform parents about child care subsidies. States commonly develop and disseminate promotional materials about child care assistance.

- Forty-one Lead Agencies (AL, AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, FL, GA, HI, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, MT, NE, NV, NH, NM, NY, NC, ND, OH, OK, OR, PR, RI, SC, UT, WA, WI, WV, WY) reported that they use CCR&Rs to provide information to families about the availability of child care subsidies and the types of child care programs available.
- Twenty States (AK, AZ, AR, CO, DC, FL, ID, IA, LA, MA, MD, MT, NE, NC, OK, RI, SC, UT, WA, WV) reported that child care centers and family child care homes were part of their outreach efforts.
- Twenty-eight States (AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, FL, HI, ID, IL, IA, KY, LA, MN, MT, NJ, ND, OH, OK, PA, PR, RI, SD, UT, WA, WV, WI, WY) indicated that they had developed brochures, flyers, and other outreach tools to inform families about child care subsidies. These materials are typically available at State and local offices where families apply for public assistance and may be distributed by community agencies, Head Start grantees, child care programs, employment and training centers, and CCR&Rs.
- Eleven States (AR, FL, KY, LA, MA, MN, NE, NV, PA, PR, WV) indicated that they use print media, radio, and/or television to distribute information about child care subsidies.

- Sixteen States (AK, AR, FL, GA, IN, LA, MT, NE, NY, NC, OH, OK, RI, WV, WI, WY) noted that information about child care subsidies is available on their Web sites, including application forms in some cases.
- States are using a variety of partners to assist in providing families with information about the availability of child care assistance. In addition to the CCR&Rs, Head Start grantees (seven States: HI, MI, NC, ND, SC, UT, VT), public schools (four States: IN, NC, ND, UT), and community-based organizations (four States: MO, RI, VT, WA) team with Lead Agencies to promote awareness of subsidies for child care.

Examples of how States promote awareness of child care subsidies follow:

**Michigan** indicated that it partners with agricultural extension offices to help inform parents about the availability of child care services.



Source: Information compiled from State CCDF Plans, FY 2004-2005.

In **Maine**, information regarding potential child care subsidies is available through the child care resource and referral agencies, the Lead Agency's regional offices, Head Start agencies, and other community-based service organizations.

To make the process of applying for child care as clear as possible, the **Massachusetts** Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) worked with the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to produce a brochure specifically geared toward TANF families needing child care. DTA workers and area office staff distribute the brochure, titled *Important Information Concerning Child Care*, to TANF families throughout the State. The brochure informs TANF families step-by-step of the process required to obtain subsidized child care services and of the available child care options, and also describes a family's eligibility for subsidized child care services after it is no longer receiving TANF. DTA now routinely sends information to TANF recipients on child care eligibility. DTA and the Department of Public Health have established a hotline for DTA recipients who are leaving public assistance that addresses issues of child care eligibility. Every TANF family also has child care as part of an ongoing plan for transitioning from public assistance.

**Missouri** parents are informed of the availability of child care services and of available child care options when they make contact with various State resources:

- Child care resource and referral agencies;
- Division of Family Services county offices;
- Department of Health, Bureau of Child Care;
- Local community action agencies;
- Statewide consumer education campaign; and
- Other human resource agencies throughout the State.

A consumer information packet is provided for families who call the Missouri Statewide Child Care Resource and Referral Network toll-free for information. This packet contains information that assists families in choosing a high-quality child care facility including: a minimum of three referrals per family in order to maximize parental choice; information regarding child care licensure standards and accreditation; information regarding local health, social services, and educational services available to assist families and children; information on indicators of quality child care; local child care costs; child care options available based on facility type and accreditation status; information on child care assistance programs; and information regarding inclusion of children with special needs. The packet is mailed to the caller within two working days of the contact.

**Nevada** parents are informed of the availability of child care services in a variety of ways. The print media is used as well as television and radio. As an example, the Economic Opportunity Board in southern Nevada owns its own radio station and has regular programs concerning child care. Representatives of the Children's Cabinet in northern Nevada are regularly interviewed on television. Both organizations maintain resource and referral capabilities to provide parents with a full range of child care options.

Parents are informed of the availability of child care services by a variety of means in **North Carolina**: county departments of social services, local child care resource and referral

agencies, family resource centers, local Smart Start Partnerships, public schools, child care providers, and Head Start programs all offer information to parents about the availability of subsidized child care services. In addition, the Lead Agency's Web site offers information about these services.

In **Rhode Island**, families are informed of the availability of child care assistance through a variety of sources:

- Contact with Department of Human Services (DHS) field staff: For cash recipients in the Family Independence Program (FIP), child care as a supportive service for activities specified in an approved FIP Plan is discussed with parent(s) as part of an intake interview immediately following application. FIP families are required to attend an interview to establish and sign an approved plan—child care needed as a supportive service for approved plan activities is arranged at that time, if not requested earlier. Staff inform families about the types of providers available to them through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP);
- Information in DHS offices: Posters and flyers displayed and distributed through DHS offices inform parents about the CCAP and give examples of eligibility limits and requirements. In fall 2003, a new informative video will be available for families to view in both English and Spanish. The video *The DHS Starting Right Child Care Assistance Program* will be played in DHS offices and distributed to community-based organizations that work with low-income families, and it will be accompanied by a informative booklet;
- The DHS Web site;
- Community-based organizations;
- Employment programs;
- DHS CCAP Approved Providers; or
- Options for Working Parents, Rhode Island's child care resource and referral program.

When funding is available, **South Carolina** utilizes a variety of options to make child care applications available, including Level 2 and Level 3 providers, child care resource and referral agencies, Head Start, Early Head Start, Department of Health and Environmental Control, and Tribal Head Start grantees. Applications can be mailed to the Lead Agency for eligibility determination.

Information regarding potential financial assistance for child care and child care options is made available in **Vermont** through community child care support agencies, the Child Care Services Division, early childhood agencies including Head Start, parent child centers, early education programs, Success by Six, and community health services. Reach Up specialists (caseworkers in the Department of Prevention, Assistance, Transition, and Health Access) also inform families transitioning from TANF about options for financial assistance for child care.

In **Washington**, posters and brochures that publicize the availability of child care services are available in six languages.

**West Virginia** CCR&R agencies have placed posters in Department of Health and Human Resources offices in waiting areas to notify parents of eligibility for services and have used various advertising campaigns, including billboards, radio, and newspaper articles, to spread the word. CCR&Rs also have set up application sites at college campuses and local businesses and have attended community fairs and Parent Teacher Organization meetings to provide information on child care services. Each CCR&R has a Web site that is connected to the State child care Web site, which includes information on how to apply for child care and the options as far as types of child care providers. The CCR&R agencies also use their Traveling Resource and Information Library System (TRAILS) vans to advertise the program. The vans set up at fairs, festivals, and conferences across the State and offer information about available services.

### **Where and How Families Apply**

States provide parents with a variety of ways to apply for child care assistance. Typically, parents apply in person at the Lead Agency or the State or local agency responsible for administering the TANF program. However, some States do not require families to schedule an in-person interview for initial eligibility determination or review, and more are using the Internet to deliver applications to families, to help them estimate whether they might be eligible for assistance, or to complete and submit the application itself.

- Twenty-eight States (AZ, AR, CA, CT, DE, ID, IL, IN, KS, ME, MD, MS, MO, MT, NV, NH, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, VT, WA, WV, WY) permit families to request an application for child care assistance via mail or telephone.

In response to client request for phone access to workers and an ability to complete transactions or receive information without going into an office, the Community Services Division (CSD) of the **Washington** Lead Agency created Customer Service Centers in all six regions of the State. Three models currently exist: 1) virtual—staff are in the local Community Service Offices (CSO) and connected by phone; 2) centralized—staff are in one regional site; and 3) CSO-based staff are in the CSO. Customer Service Centers are designed to simplify the process of accessing services. Customers can call one local number to learn about all available CSD services, get child care services and/or medical assistance, and report changes for all programs. Customer satisfaction surveys will be used to assess service delivery. By November 2003, customers will be able to access all these services by simply calling The Answer Phone. The caller will be directed to the appropriate call center.

- Eight States (CT, DE, IL, MD, MS, ND, OK, RI) reported that families can complete applications for assistance by mail or telephone without a face-to-face interview for initial eligibility determination.

In **Oklahoma**, a request for child care assistance is usually made at the local county office. The parent may also pick up an application form at an outreach location or from the child care provider and bring it or mail it to the county office. A verbal request for child care services can be made over the telephone to a county worker, who can then explain processing procedures and either set up an interview with the applicant or complete an interview over the telephone, and then send the completed application form to the client to sign and return with needed verification. It is also possible for county offices to train volunteers to take child

care applications and send them to the county office. An authorized representative, designated by the applicant, may complete and submit the interview for the parent.

- Ten States (AZ, AR, FL, ID, KS, LA, MI, OH, OK, SD) reported that child care subsidy applications are available on the Web.

**Kansas** is in the final implementation stage of providing an online application for parents to request cash, Food Stamps, health benefits, and child care. Access sites across the State are being identified where parents will have use of computers and assistance in completing this application.

The **Michigan** Child Development and Care Application is available on the Web in Spanish and English and may be obtained at local/district Family Independence Agency (FIA) offices. It is also available at Michigan Works! Agency offices, which operate the Work First (TANF) employment and training programs, and at other locations.

In **South Dakota**, an application also can be requested or downloaded on the Child Care Services Web site. Applicants are able to complete and submit applications online through the Child Care Services Web site.

- One State (IL) also permits families to complete applications via e-mail.
- Two States (IL and MA) reported that they provide an online tool for estimating eligibility for child care assistance.

Because more and more families have access to the Internet through a computer at home, work, school, or the local library, **Massachusetts'** Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) is using state-of-the-art technology to make accessing affordable child care easier and more helpful for families. OCCS has developed a Web site ([www.qualitychildcare.org](http://www.qualitychildcare.org)) that helps families easily access information about their child care options. Families can search for a list of all the licensed child care providers in their area by the type of care provided (e.g., family child care homes, center-based school-age, and group child care centers, etc.). The OCCS Web site also gives families helpful information about the different types of child care, questions to ask any prospective child care providers, and other helpful information so families can choose the child care providers that best meet their needs. The Web site contains an "eligibility wizard" that permits families to estimate whether they are eligible to access a child care subsidy. The Web site also contains OCCS' child care regulations, policies, procedures, and helpful forms, as well as information about special programs and some technical assistance.

### **Length of Eligibility Period**

In most States, once initial eligibility has been determined, families continue to receive child care assistance as long as they continue to meet the State's eligibility criteria. However, subsidy *payments* typically are *authorized* for six or 12 months, after which time the Lead Agency or its designee reviews the family's circumstances to ensure that they continue to meet all eligibility criteria. The process in **Minnesota** is fairly typical:

The application process for TANF recipients and non-TANF recipients for child care assistance is the same. Families apply for child care assistance in their county of residence. Each county must have at least two methods for applying for child care assistance. If the applicant is a TANF recipient, or a non-TANF recipient and funds are available at the time of inquiry, then an application is completed, the county determines if the applicant is eligible and, if eligible, services begin. If the applicant is a non-TANF recipient and funds are not currently available, the family's name is put on a waiting list for assistance. As additional funds become available, families on waiting lists are notified and requested to complete applications. Eligibility determinations are made by the local social services agency within 30 days. Families continue to receive child care assistance until no longer eligible. Eligibility is redetermined when the family reports a change in income, residence, family size, family status, employment, education, or training status, or at least every six months.

- Twenty-six States (AL, AK, AR, CO, CT, DE, DC, ID, IL, IN, IA, ME, MA, MN, MT, NE, NV, NH, NM, PA, SD, UT, WA, WV, WI, WY) and two Territories (AS and GU) generally authorize payments for six months.

Families are required to recertify eligibility every six months in **Indiana**. Families must report any address, income, or service need changes within 10 days. If a family's circumstances are uncertain or unstable, less than six months of eligibility may be certified.

In **Montana**, child care resource and referral agencies prospect a family's eligibility and issue a child care certification plan for up to six months. Certification plans may be shorter if prospective eligibility determination predicts a change in the family's circumstances that affects their basic eligibility. Families are eligible for non-TANF child care services for the entire six-month period, until one of the following occurs:

- A family enters the TANF program.
  - Household composition changes, eliminating the need for child care.
  - Earnings exceed the limits of the sliding fee scale, when the family recertifies.
  - Work hours decrease and cause a family to fall below the minimum work requirement (120 hours/month for two-parent family, 60 hours/month for single-parent family, or 40 hours/month for a single parent attending school full time).
  - A teen student/parent leaves high school.
  - Unemployment continues past the grace period.
- Twenty-one States (AZ, CA<sup>22</sup>, FL, GA, HI, KS, KY, LA, MD, MI, MS, MO, NJ, NY, NC, OH, OK, RI<sup>23</sup>, SC, TN, VA) and two Territories (CNMI and VI) generally authorize payments for 12 months.

---

<sup>22</sup> Eligibility is redetermined at least every 6 months for families receiving services because they are at risk of or have experienced actual abuse, neglect, or exploitation; for all other families, at least once each contract period and at intervals not to exceed 12 months.

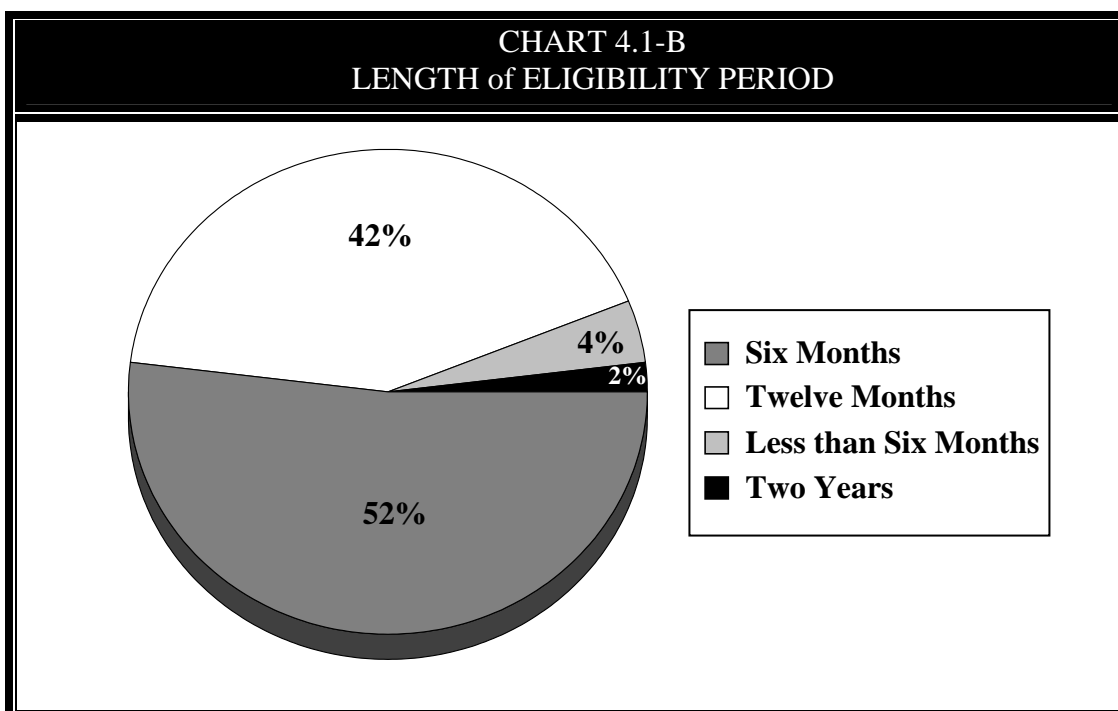
<sup>23</sup> Family Independence Program staff determine eligibility based on established criteria and may authorize certification periods from 3–12 months; generally 6–12 months are approved for working families receiving cash assistance and shorter time frames coordinated with the length of training or education activities are authorized for nonworking families.

**Florida** school readiness legislation states: “a child who meets the eligibility requirements upon initial registration for the program shall be considered eligible until the child reaches kindergarten,” subject to additional required family contributions in accordance with the sliding fee scale. Eligibility predetermination must, at a minimum, be conducted at least annually for every family that receives financially-assisted school readiness services. Predetermination for an additional 50 percent of a local coalition’s enrollment must be conducted during the same fiscal year, through a statistically random sample.

Applicants in the **Virgin Islands** are certified for one year; however, at six months all information is reviewed and verified.

In **Virginia**, eligibility is determined every 12 months, unless the recipient reports a change in circumstances that may affect eligibility (i.e., a change in income, a change in employment status, a change in household composition, etc.).

- Eligibility is determined monthly in **North Dakota**.<sup>24</sup>
- Eligibility is determined every three to six months in **Oregon**.
- The length of eligibility is two years in **Puerto Rico**.
- Two States (CO and TX) reported that the length of eligibility varies by county or other local jurisdiction.



*Source:* Information compiled from State CCDF Plans, FY 2004-2005.

<sup>24</sup> Eligibility is extended to 12 months, based on the client’s circumstances, in three pilot counties.



- Ten States (CO, DC, IL, KS, MD, NV, OR, PR, SD, VA) and one Territory (GU) reported extending the eligibility period for families whose children also are enrolled in a collaborative Head Start–child care program.

**Colorado** counties with Head Start programs may accept the Head Start application in lieu of the low-income child care application for those children enrolled in the Head Start program. In addition, Head Start eligibility and redetermination criteria may be applied to dually eligible Head Start/low-income child care families. There is no limit to the length of eligibility; however, eligibility is redetermined every six months. In some communities eligibility may be redetermined every 12 months where children are enrolled in Head Start and the county has informed the State as part of their county plan.

In most cases in **Illinois**, eligibility is determined for six months when a client applies, and thereafter at the end of each six-month period, eligibility is redetermined. For families enrolled in the Head Start/pre-K/child care collaborations, eligibility is determined once a year at the beginning of the program year.

The maximum eligibility period is 12 months in **Maryland**. However, the case manager may set the eligibility period for less than 12 months if the parent will be in a training- or work-related activity of shorter duration. The eligibility period can be extended beyond 12 months if the Head Start program’s school year extends beyond the family’s eligibility period.

The Early Head Start programs determine a family’s eligibility when the child enters the program in **Nevada**. The child care program providing wrap-around funding accepts that determination. A family’s eligibility is not redetermined until that child enters Head Start. Once the child leaves Head Start and enters regular child care through the subsidy program, the family’s eligibility is redetermined every six months minimum.

In **Oregon**, the length of client eligibility varies depending on the benefit program and stability of family income. Redetermination of client eligibility is required periodically, generally every three to six months. If the child is enrolled in a contracted Head Start Collaboration Program, eligibility may extend to the end of the Head Start program year.

In **Puerto Rico**, eligibility for Head Start families that also receive child care services through CCDF is for the duration of the child care services in Head Start through collaboration agreements with Head Start.

Lead Agency caseworkers in **South Dakota** establish a case record and assign a six-month certification period for non-TANF applicants. The eligibility level is locked in for a period of six months as long as all program requirements are maintained. Eligibility is locked in for a period of one year for applicants utilizing programs offering full-day/full-year Head Start as part of a collaboration effort between the child care provider, Head Start, and child care services. Families in transition off TANF who meet program work requirements benefit from certificates that are locked in for one year of continuous eligibility.

## Reducing Barriers to Initial or Continuing Eligibility

States reported on measures they have planned or implemented in an effort to reduce barriers to families applying for and continuing to remain eligible for child care assistance. These efforts include coordinating eligibility policies across programs, simplifying application procedures, extending office hours and establishing more convenient office locations, advancing payments to providers while eligibility is being finalized, and using automation to address barriers. States make special effort to ensure that eligible families who leave TANF cash assistance continue to receive child care assistance. Several States described wide-ranging efforts to address barriers to initial and continuing eligibility:

After reviewing a multi-State study on the topic, the Lead Agency in **Alaska** encourages local administrators to increase access to subsidy services by:

- Maximizing access and entry through supporting telephone, mail-in, fax, and other methods of intake and eligibility processing;
- Making program applications available at multiple sites throughout the service area;
- Providing extended office hours;
- Generally not requiring in-person office visits; and by
- Promoting respectful, helpful, and responsive interactions with parents.

**Michigan** took the following steps to reduce barriers to initial and continuing eligibility for child care subsidies:

- A toll-free number is available for resource and referral.
- On-site Child Care Coordinators in the local Family Independence Agency offices provide resource and referral services.
- Minimum verifications are required before authorizing initial payments.
- Redeterminations are required once in a 12-month period.
- Up-to-date publications are available in English and Spanish.

**Montana** uses the following policies to reduce barriers and maintain eligibility for families:

- Presumptive Eligibility – If funding is available and a family’s initial application indicates the family is eligible, the family may receive child care for up to 30 days, while eligibility is verified. This ensures payment to the provider while the family’s eligibility is being confirmed.
- Certified Enrollment – A child with a full-time certification plan has 150 hours to use when the provider requires payment during the child’s absence.
- Extending Child Care Hours – Child care resource and referral agencies have the ability to issue additional benefits to cover the parent’s unanticipated work or school hours, when the need is verified.
- Fill-the-Gap – Child care resource and referral agencies have the ability to issue child care benefits while a family is in transition from one assistance program to another.
- Grace Period – A family who loses employment may continue to receive benefits for 30 days, if they agree to use the time to gain employment. This grace period allows families to maintain eligibility while providing children with continuity of care.

- Hold-the Slot – A family may pre-arrange to temporarily maintain a child’s enrollment for an absence of not more than 30 days.
- Holidays – Some child care providers charge families for holidays, when children are not in attendance. Montana helps parents meet this obligation by allowing providers to claim holidays when billing for services.
- Medical Appointments – A parent who meets activity/work requirements may use child care benefits to attend medical appointments.
- Medical Emergency – When work is interrupted by a medical emergency involving the parent or a child, the parent may be able to maintain needed child care during the emergency.
- Suspending a Case – A family who temporarily loses eligibility may remain in the program for 30 days.

The **Pennsylvania** Department of Public Welfare has or is taking the following steps to reduce the barriers for parents to access subsidized child care:

- Revising the subsidized child care application by using less technical terms to make the application easier to understand;
- Requiring that the Child Care Information Services (CCIS) agencies distribute the application within their communities so that parents have more opportunities to apply for subsidized child care;
- Working with the CCIS agencies to expand their hours to evenings and weekend hours to assist working parents; and
- Assisting the CCIS agencies to have the resources to meet families at locations in the community to accommodate working parents.

A child care eligibility study is in process in **Utah**, with the purpose of simplifying the child care eligibility process while maintaining program integrity. Work groups have been organized to study three main segments of the child care eligibility process: determining the need for child care, reporting changes, and kith/kin care. The National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) has provided technical assistance to the study team. The project recommendations are being organized into short-, mid-, and long-term recommendations. It is anticipated that the short-term recommendations will be implemented in January 2004; long-term recommendations are contingent on the further development and implementation of an inter-agency case management computer system.

- Ten States (CO, MI, MN, NV, NY, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN) reported efforts to coordinate eligibility policies across programs were taken to address barriers to subsidy eligibility.

**Colorado** has taken steps to reduce barriers to initial and continuing eligibility for child care subsidies through giving its counties the ability to continue assistance for six months for families who exceed the county’s eligibility limits; by not requiring a low income application in the transition from Colorado Works (TANF); and by accepting the Head Start application in substitution for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program application.

In the case where a certain number of slots are purchased through a contract, as in before-and-after-school programs, a **Nevada** family's eligibility is determined upon entering the program and annually thereafter.

**New York** has taken steps to reduce barriers to initial and continuing eligibility for child care subsidies. Recognizing the need for a continuity of support to enable parents to work, New York passed legislation to require local departments of social services to determine a family's eligibility for transitional child care benefits concurrently with closing the Public Assistance case. The recipient is not required to complete a new application for child care benefits.

**Rhode Island** has procedures in place that support seamless transitions for families in the Child Care Assistance Program when they move off of or back into the cash assistance program.

- Simplifying eligibility policies and procedures is a step that 14 States (AK, AZ, DE, KY, MD, MI, MS, NH, NY, OH, PA, RI, SD, VA) reported taking to address barriers to initial or continuing eligibility. Six States (AK, AZ, MD, MS, OH, RI) specified that they do not require, or minimize the number of, in-person visits necessary to determine eligibility.

In order to facilitate access to child care services and reduce barriers, **Arizona** families are not required to appear at a child care office for redeterminations of eligibility. Eligibility redeterminations and other changes (e.g., provider changes) are handled through the mail and families can submit any necessary paperwork without having to disrupt their activity (e.g., employment or training) schedule. Additionally, many initial applications for child care services do not require an office visit. This would typically be the case when a family was referred for services by a JOBS or Child Protective Services Specialist. In these situations it may only be necessary for the eligible family to make a telephone contact with a child care specialist in order to provide information on the provider the family has selected.

In an effort to reduce barriers to initial and continuing eligibility for child care subsidies, the **Kentucky** Cabinet for Families and Children does not require families to reverify information that has already been verified by a referring agency. In addition, reauthorization may be done via mail, telephone, or fax.

**Maryland** assembled workgroups to study access and outreach in local departments of social services (LDSS). Some steps that have been implemented as a result of the workgroups include: encouraging LDSS to accept mailed or faxed applications to limit the need for a face-to-face visit to the local office, and encouraging LDSS to obtain verifications for customers active in other programs from the case manager rather than requesting the same documentation twice from the customer. Some LDSS offer evening hours and have local transportation available to customers.

The Lead Agency in **Mississippi** has implemented a simplified initial and continuing eligibility process by allowing applications to be received and/or completed and mailed back to the appropriate entity as opposed to requiring a face-to-face application process. Additionally, parents may obtain toll-free telephone numbers of designated agents in the respective county to request child care applications from the child care provider.

For families using noncontract licensed providers, or providers, a visit to the **New Hampshire** Department of Health and Human Services District Office is still required to determine eligibility. However, a pilot program has been launched to assist child care providers through the enrollment process and the “link” procedure. Within the computer system that drives the State of New Hampshire’s billing and payment system, a “link” must be made between care provider and child in order for the payment system to recognize and pay invoices submitted for care of that child. Without this link, no payment will be made. Previously, the link paperwork had to be returned to the District Office and the Family Service Specialist working with the family had to go into the computer system and make the link in order to ensure payment to the provider. In the Child Care Link Pilot Project, the Child Development Bureau is able to link providers in three district offices with appropriate documentation to a family’s case. This can remove 10–14 days in wait time for child care providers to receive verification that they can bill for child care services, making the overall turnaround for payment for services shortened as well. This is intended to assist providers in maintaining better financial viability and therefore reducing turnover of care providers in a child’s life.

The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has approved the use of a child care only application developed by a local department of social services in **New York**. This application is designed for families that are applying only for child care benefits. Local departments of social services must obtain OCFS approval to use this application.

Some local departments of social services are supporting demonstration efforts around facilitated enrollment. This is being done in three sites: the Bronx, Yonkers, and the Liberty Zone in New York City. Contracted agencies assist applicants by providing applications, information, and assistance. They review completed applications and gather supportive documentation prior to passing the information on to the local department of social services for expeditious determination of eligibility.

**Rhode Island** allows families to apply for the Child Care Assistance Program and to apply for continuing certification by mail so that parents do not need to miss work to arrange for child care assistance.

Child care outreach workers are actually located on three of the larger reservation areas in **South Dakota** to assist families and providers in completing required paperwork for greater access to the program. Outreach workers assist families with completing applications, securing proper verifications, and assisting the child care provider in submitting appropriate information for payment and eligibility determination. The reservation areas staffed with outreach workers are Oglala, Cheyenne River, and Rosebud.

The Lead Agency in **Virginia** uses a simple, one-page application and a 12-month eligibility period.

- Five States (AK, AR, PA, VA, WA) reported extending office hours to ease families’ access to child care subsidies.

Some local departments of social services have extended hours of operation to accommodate working parents in **Virginia**.

- Three States (AK, NH, WA) reported establishing multiple locations as a strategy to reduce barriers to subsidy eligibility.
- In one State (IN), the Lead Agency selects local intake agents, it evaluates the degree of customer service proposed, such as evening and weekend hours, convenience of intake locations, and accommodations for working parents.
- Two States (PA and MT) indicated that they have established policies or procedures that advance initial payment to providers prior to final verification of applicant information and eligibility determination.

In **Montana**, if funding is available and a family's initial application indicates the family is eligible, the family may receive child care for up to 30 days, while eligibility is verified. This ensures payment to the provider while the family's eligibility is being confirmed.

When required by the provider, child care benefits in **Pennsylvania** may be issued in advance to ensure initial access. Thereafter, benefits may be issued monthly as a reimbursement of expenses incurred to the provider, through the Child Care Vendor Payment System, or to the client as a direct payment. All providers must meet State requirements for regulation. Regulation-exempt providers must sign a department form attesting to compliance with minimal health and safety standards.

- Three States (GA, MA, WA) reported using automation to reduce barriers to eligibility for parents.

A re-engineering priority in **Georgia** is reducing barriers for families who need subsidized child care. The Statewide system has a customer service focus, such as offering an online application process, replacing annual face-to-face interviews with periodic reviews of eligibility, expediting the case transfer process, and generating multi-lingual correspondence.

The **Massachusetts'** Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) administers a new technology system called the "Electronic Child Care Information Management System" (eCCIMS). The Web-based eCCIMS streamlines the intake process for child care subsidies by creating a single process for the entire subsidized child care system. Using eCCIMS, professional counselors and providers can quickly and easily determine whether a family qualifies for a subsidy. The system allows for billing and payment to be electronically downloaded into the State's bill processing system for more accurate and faster payment to providers. Also, on a daily basis, the system will download the information on child care placements and vacancies that were entered into eCCIMS by child care resource and referral agencies, which will allow the Lead Agency to fine tune its use of resources and to more efficiently move children off of waiting lists for subsidized child care. This system was made available for all the contracted providers during FY 2003 with enhancements being added in FY 2003-2004. To be sure that all contracted providers are able to use eCCIMS, OCCS added funding to the contracts so providers could buy suitable computers and software in FY 2001.

## **Section 4.2 – State Records of Substantiated Complaints by Parents**

*The following is a detailed description of how the State maintains a record of substantiated parental complaints and how it makes the information regarding such parental complaints available to the public on request. (658E(c)(2)(C), §98.32)*

*Every Lead Agency has established a procedure for maintaining records of substantiated parental complaints. In most States, records of substantiated complaints are maintained by the Lead Agency's licensing unit and are available to the public upon request at the agency's main office or county/local offices of the agency or its designee, usually in accordance with the State's open records law. Some States have developed automated systems to maintain these records and a few have made select information concerning substantiated complaints or licensure status available via the Internet. Many States have established toll-free numbers through which information can be requested or complaints filed.*

- Thirteen States (AZ, DC, GA, IL, MS, NE, NC, SC, SD, VT, VA, WA, WI) reported that parents or others can request substantiated complaint information by toll-free telephone.
- Five States (FL, GA, IN, MI, NC) reported allowing parents to request or receive complaint information via the Internet.

The **Georgia** Office of Regulatory Services began posting reports of the most recent monitoring visits to child care programs in August 2002 on the Web at <http://www2.state.ga.us/Departments/DHR/ORS/>. Families can access the site, enter the name of the child care program and other identifying information, and view the most recent inspection. Information about rules violations and adverse actions are also posted on this Web site.

The **Indiana** Lead Agency maintains substantiated parental complaints on providers at local Offices of Family and Children, and at the Central Office in Indianapolis at the Licensing Section, Bureau of Child Development. The information is available upon request or through the Indiana Family and Social Services Web site at <http://www.childcarefinder.IN.gov>. The public can access information on the site concerning the status of a child care provider's license and read about the latest inspections and any problems uncovered. Complaints filed by parents also are listed, along with whether the complaint was substantiated, and what action was taken.

Certain documents regarding the investigation and the conclusion information are considered public information and are available to the public in the Division's office. Also, copies of this information are sent to the local agency and may be shared with parents.

In addition to information on complaints that are investigated, **North Carolina** parents can gain access to information on any child care provider's compliance with licensing requirements. Files are maintained in the Division's office on each regulated center and home. Parents may view the records by visiting the office or may request a copy via e-mail or toll-free phone. Parents also can access some information from the records online through the Division of Child Development's Web site at <http://www.ncchildcare.net>. This Web site also is available in Spanish.

- Three States (KS, MD, TX) specified that requests for information about substantiated complaints must be made in writing.
- Seven States (CO, NE, NY, TX, WA, WV, WY) reported using an automated system to track complaint information.

Complaints on **Colorado's** licensed providers are retained in the Division of Child Care imaging system, which contains the files of all licensed child care facilities. The public has access to this information in the electronic licensing histories maintained for all facilities, which can be distributed to local child care resource and referral agencies. These histories contain information on all licensing functions. Complaints concerning legally exempt providers (those not required to be licensed) are completed by county Departments of Human Services in coordination with the Division of Child Care where complaints are made available to the public and counties upon request.

An automated tracking and information system provides **Texas** consumers with ready access to providers' compliance histories. The Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (PRS) requires all licensed child care facilities to post the compliance evaluation of the most recent licensing inspection. PRS also monitors compliance of this posting requirement.

- In one State (CA), if a parent has a complaint regarding program operations not covered by licensing requirements in programs operated by school districts, the parent must utilize the Uniform Complaint Procedure established by the school.

### **Section 4.3 – Affording Parents Unlimited Access to Their Children in Care**

*The following is a detailed description of the procedures in effect in the State for affording parents unlimited access to their children whenever their children are in the care of a provider who receives CCDF funds. (658E(c)(2)(B), §98.31)*

As required, each Lead Agency has taken steps to ensure that parents have unlimited access to their children while they are in the care of a provider who receives funds through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). In most States, parents' unlimited access also is a condition for obtaining a child care license. Many Lead Agencies specify as part of their agreements with providers to participate in the subsidy program that they include parents' unlimited access as part of the consumer education information they distribute. Often parents are informed of this right through consumer education materials or when applying for assistance.

- Fifteen States (AL, AR, DC, IL, IN, MD, MN, MT, NH, NJ, ND, PA, SC, TX, VA) reported that parents are informed when applying for child care assistance that they have the right to unlimited access to their children while in care subsidized through CCDF.

Information about parental right of access is contained in a consumer education booklet issued by the **Maryland** Department of Human Resources. Under licensing regulations, providers are required to distribute the booklet to parents of children in care.

- Forty-one States (AL, AK, CA, CT, DE, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MN, MS, MO, MT, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NY, NC, ND, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, UT,



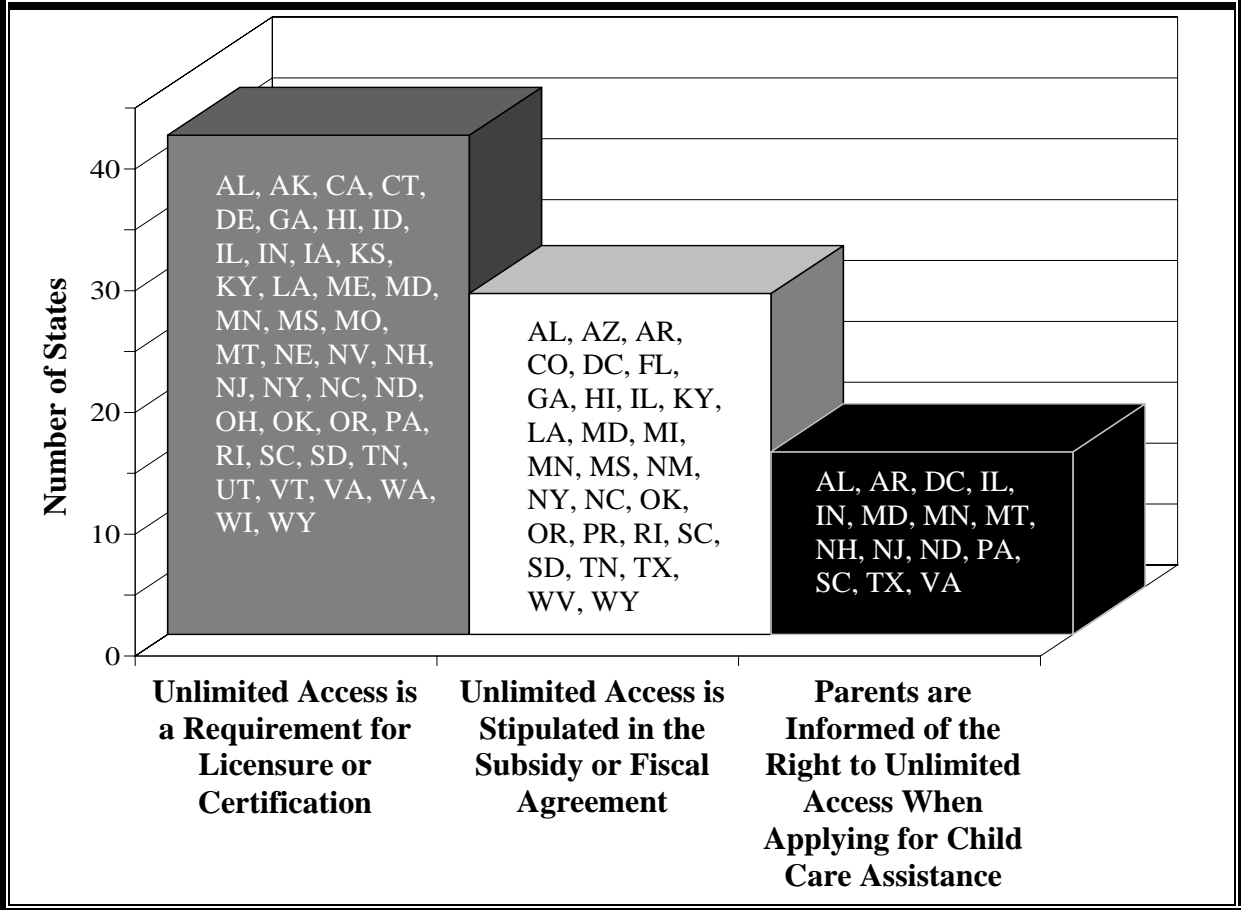
VT, VA, WA, WI, WY) reported that providing parents with unlimited access to children in care is a requirement for licensure or certification.

For licensed care in **Alabama**, the appropriate Minimum Standards require such access for parents for *all*, not just CCDF-funded care. Verification of this is a part of the regulatory visits made by licensing consultants of the Lead Agency.

The Provider Registration Form contains this requirement for CCDF-funded care. Additional written materials are made available to these providers by the Child Care Management Agency (CMA) whenever they are to be used for the first time by a subsidized family, and at other appropriate times. In addition, CCDF-funded families are informed of their rights in this respect during consumer education at the CMA and whenever they change providers. Families are encouraged to visit at various times while their child is in care.

**Connecticut** law guarantees unlimited access for parents at all licensed child care settings, including those parents eligible for CCDF financial assistance. Child care providers that are exempt from licensing requirements are also informed that they must allow parents unlimited access to their children.

**CHART 4.3**  
**STATE POLICIES REGARDING UNLIMITED PARENTAL ACCESS to CHILDREN**  
**in CHILD CARE**



*Source:* Information compiled from State CCDF Plans, FY 2004-2005.

Licensed providers must allow parental access as a part of **Delaware’s** licensing standards. Complaints against licensed providers who fail to provide parental access are addressed to the Office of Child Care Licensing. Exempt providers must agree to allow parental access as a part of the certificate process. Those providers who do not certify to allow access can be denied authorization to provide service.

**Georgia** licensing and registration rules require unlimited access by parents to their children while in care. Rules require that a sign be posted in a public place stating that parents have access to all child care areas. Informal providers who are not required to be licensed or registered also are required to allow parents unlimited access to their children. The Lead Agency notifies informal providers of this requirement during enrollment.

The **Nebraska** Family Child Care Home Rules and Regulations and Child Care Center Rules and Regulations provide for parental access to their children at all times that children are in care. Denial of immediate and unrestricted access to the licensed premises to parents will be basis for suspension or revocation of the license. License-exempt regulations provide for parental access to their children at all times that children are in care.

- In 28 States (AL, AZ, AR, CO, DC, FL, GA, HI, IL, KY, LA, MD, MI, MN, MS, NM, NY, NC, OK, OR, PR, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, WV, WY), parents’ unlimited access to children while in care is stipulated in the subsidy or fiscal agreement between the Lead Agency and the provider. Often States use this strategy to ensure that the unlimited access requirement applies to license-exempt providers as well as those subject to licensing regulations.

The **District of Columbia** Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD), has a stated policy of “unlimited parental access.” OECD also has taken the following steps to make “unlimited access” a mandated requirement for all early care and education providers receiving DHS funds:

- Dissemination of Program Issuances to all licensed child care providers stating that all parents are entitled to and shall be granted unlimited access to their children while in the child care setting;
- Inclusion of a statement in all DHS Provider Agreements (contracts) regarding unlimited access;
- Inclusion of a statement on unlimited access in the parental agreement form, which must be signed during the intake process, and in all parent information brochures and materials;
- Distribution of the *Parental Rights and Responsibilities* brochure at all intake sites; and
- Inclusion of an item related to unlimited access in the parent evaluation form, which is completed by parents on an annual basis to assess the child care service provided.

Local school readiness coalitions in **Florida** must ensure, as noted in their local coalition plans, that providers who receive funding through CCDF are required by funding agreement to allow custodial parent or guardian unlimited access to the facility.

Parents have unlimited access to their children enrolled in all types of care in **Tennessee**. For regulated providers, this access is documented in Tennessee State Law. The *Certificate Program Unregulated Provider Policy Guidebook* states that unregulated providers are required to “allow the parent or caretaker to see their children any time while they are in your care” and an agreement must be signed by the providers who wish to receive subsidy payments.

#### **Section 4.4 – TANF Terminology**

*The regulations at §98.33(b) require the Lead Agency to inform parents who receive TANF benefits about the exception to the individual penalties associated with the work requirement for any single custodial parent who has a demonstrated inability to obtain needed child care for a child under 6 years of age.*

*In fulfilling this requirement, the following criteria or definitions are applied by the TANF agency to determine whether the parent has a demonstrated inability to obtain needed child care:*

- *“appropriate child care”*
- *“reasonable distance”*
- *“unsuitability of informal child care”*
- *“affordable child care arrangements”*

The TANF terminology submitted as part of each CCDF Plan is available from the NCCIC at 800-616-2242 and on the Web at <http://nccic.org/pubs/stateplan/stateplan-intro.html>.