

L.A. Health

March 2002

Child Care Among Young Children in Los Angeles County

The need for quality child care in the United States has increased dramatically over the past several decades, fueled in large part by the growing number of working parents in both single- and two-parent households. In 2000, 65% of women with children under age six were in the workforce compared to 39% in 1975.¹ Recent welfare reform legislation (the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996) has further increased the need for child care among low income families by requiring that welfare recipients find employment within a specified time period.^{2,3} Growth in the number of licensed child care providers has not kept pace with the increased need for services. In Los Angeles County, a recent study projected an estimated shortfall of 100,000 child care spaces for children six weeks to two years of age, and 200,000 spaces for children three to five years of age.⁴ The study also found that, even when child care was available, many families could not afford the services.

In addition to enabling parents to work, quality child care is important for the health and development of young children. There are several components to high-quality care, including safe settings, nurturing and well-trained providers, and favorable adult-to-child ratios (see Sidebar on page 4 of this report). Such care has been shown to support a child's intellectual, emotional, and social development.⁵ Improved developmental outcomes are especially pronounced among low income and other disadvantaged children.⁶ Higher-quality childcare also protects the health of young children through practices shown to reduce the risk of injury and spread of communicable diseases among children.^{7,8}

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COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
Public Health

The Los Angeles County Health Survey is a periodic, population-based telephone survey that collects information on sociodemographic characteristics, health status, health behaviors, and access to health services among adults and children in the county. The most recent survey was conducted for the Department of Health Services (DHS) between September 1999 and April 2000 by Field Research Corporation.

The 1999–2000 survey collected information on a random sample of 8,354 adults and 6,016 children. Interviews were offered in English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese. Among households contacted and eligible for participation, the response rate was 55%. To adjust for differential rates of participation, results were weighted by selected demographic variables using 1998 census projections for the Los Angeles County population.

The findings in this report are subject to several limitations. In any survey that includes sampling, some degree of error (referred to as “sampling error”) is introduced by chance alone, even when the sample is chosen randomly. In the present survey, if 50% of the overall sample of adults answered “yes” to a specific question, the sampling error would be plus or minus 1.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. This means that if all adults in the population were asked the above question, there is a 95% chance that the result would be between 48.8% and 51.2%. Because the sample sizes of subgroups are smaller than the overall sample, results for these subgroups have larger sampling errors and wider confidence levels. For all results presented in this report, confidence levels are available.

There are a number of other possible sources of error in any survey. For example, questions may be misunderstood, respondents may not provide accurate information, and errors may occur in the processing of data. In addition, surveys administered by telephone miss those who are homeless and others without telephone service. The survey professionals working on this study made every effort to minimize these sources of error.

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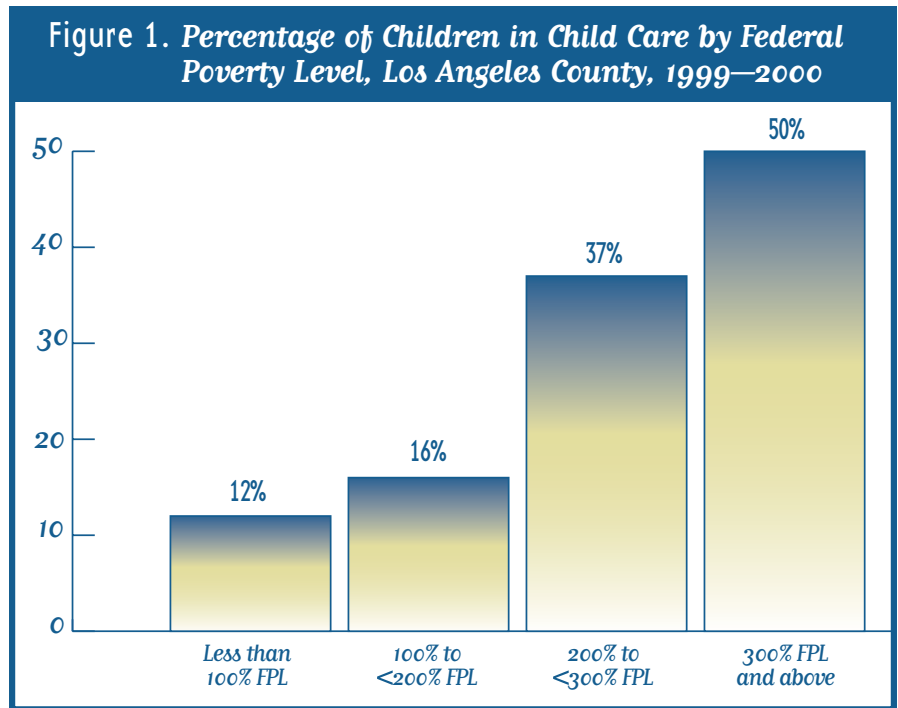
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This report presents findings on the use of and the need for child care services in the county from the 1999–2000 Los Angeles County Health Survey. The results are based on information provided by parents (or legal guardians) of a random sample of 2,174 children birth through five years of age countywide. The data were collected between September 1999 and April 2000. Child care was defined as any kind of arrangement where someone not in the household took care of the child more than ten hours per week on a regular basis. This included preschool and nursery school but did not include kindergarten.

One in Four Children Birth through Five Years in Los Angeles County, or 261,000 Children, are in Child Care.

- An estimated 24% of children age five and younger in the county (or 261,000 children) are in child care for at least ten hours per week or longer.
- The percentage of young children in child care was highest among African-Americans (47%), followed by Whites (40%), Asians/Pacific Islanders (30%), and Latinos (15%).



Source: Los Angeles County Health Survey

- The percentage in child care increased with increasing household income, from 12% in families living below the federal poverty level to 50% in families at or above 300% of the federal poverty level (Figure 1).
- Among mothers who were employed, 43% of their children were in child care compared to 10% of children with mothers who were not employed. Among mothers employed full-time, 47% of their children were in child care.
- Rates of childcare use varied by parent’s marital/partnership status: 31% of children of single mothers (divorced, separated, widowed, or never married) were in child care compared to 22% of children with mothers who were married, or, not married but living with a partner.

Table 1. Children (Birth Through Five Years) in Child Care by Service Planning Area, Los Angeles County, 1999–2000

Service Planning Area	Percentage	Margin of Error	Estimated Number
SPA 1 - Antelope Valley	23.4%	±8.1	9,000
SPA 2 - San Fernando	28.2%	±4.2	57,000
SPA 3 - San Gabriel	25.4%	±4.5	48,000
SPA 4 - Metro	18.6%	±4.9	24,000
SPA 5 - West	28.0%	±7.9	12,000
SPA 6 - South	13.6%	±4.1	20,000
SPA 7 - East	22.4%	±4.5	36,000
SPA 8 - South Bay	33.4%	±5.2	54,000
County Total	24.3%	±1.8	261,000

Source: Los Angeles County Health Survey

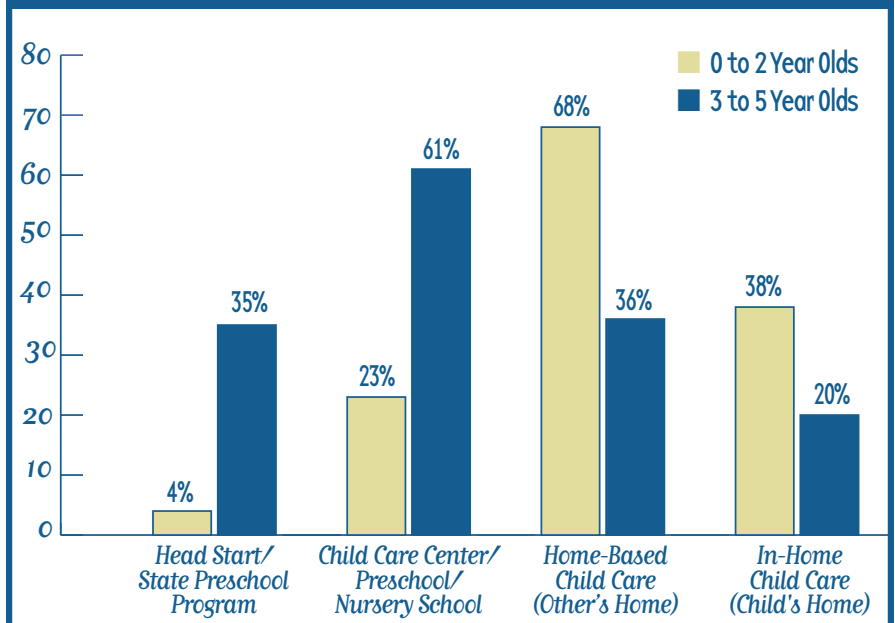
- The percentage in child care was highest in the South Bay Service Planning Area (SPA 8) (33%) and lowest in the South (SPA 6) (14%) (Table 1).
- Among children in child care, 47% were in care more than 30 hours per week, 23% 21 to 30 hours per week, and 30% 11 to 20 hours per week.

Types of Child Care

Among those in child care, 22% (or 58,000 children) were in Head Start or a State Preschool Program, 45% (or 118,000 children) were in another type of center-based care, 49% (or 128,000 children) were cared for in someone else's home, and 27% (or 71,000 children) were cared for in their own home. These percentages add to more than 100% because many parents (nearly 40%) rely on more than one type of child care.

- 35% of children ages three to five years in child care were in Head Start or a State Preschool Program (Figure 2).
- The percentage of children in other center-based programs was higher among those three to five years (61%) than those birth to two years (23%) (Figure 2).
- Conversely, the percentage cared for in someone else's home or in their own home was higher among those birth to two years (68% and 38%, respectively) than among those three to five years of age (36% and 20%, respectively).
- Among children cared for in someone else's home, 63% of parents reported that the provider was not licensed.

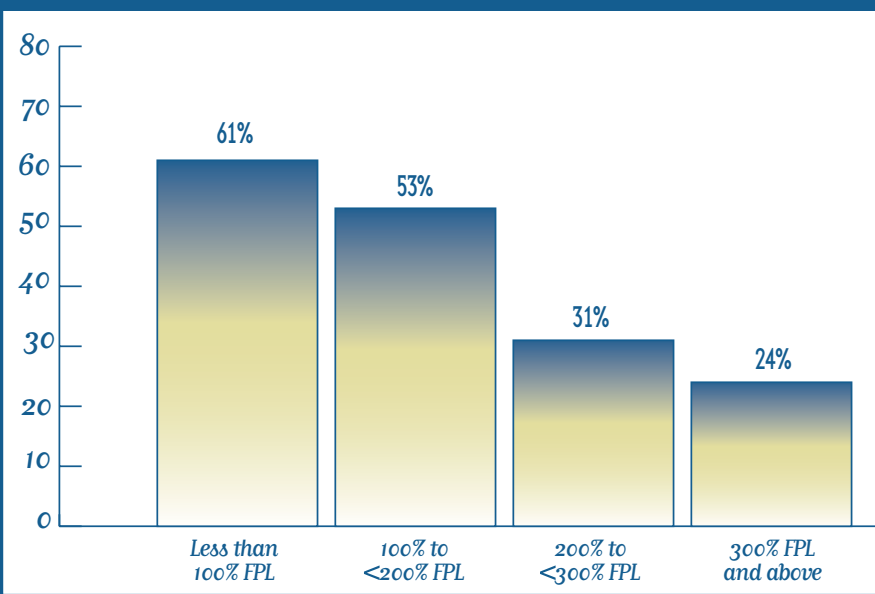
Figure 2. Type of Care Among Children in Child Care by Age Group, Los Angeles County, 1999–2000



Note: Percentages add to more than 100% because some parents reported more than one type of child care.

Source: Los Angeles County Health Survey

Figure 3. Percentage of Parents Who Found It Very/Somewhat Difficult to Obtain Childcare by Federal Poverty Level, Los Angeles County 1999–2000



Source: Los Angeles County Health Survey

Many Have Difficulty Getting Child Care

Approximately 15% of parents with children birth through age five reported that they didn't need child care on a regular basis. Among parents who reported a need for child care:

- 46% reported that it was somewhat to very difficult to get needed child care on a regular basis.
- Latino parents were more likely to report that it was difficult to get needed child care (56%) than were Asians/Pacific Islanders (42%), African-Americans (39%), or Whites (26%).
- Families with lower incomes were more likely to report having difficulty finding child care: 61% of families below the federal poverty level reported difficulty getting needed child care compared to 24% of families living at or above 300% of the federal poverty level (Figure 3).

Characteristics of A Quality Child Care Environment

- Settings that are safe, provide small group sizes, and have adult-to-child ratios that encourage the best opportunities for development;
- Caregivers or teachers who have experience and are trained in early childhood development;
- Settings that offer opportunities for meaningful parent involvement;
- Learning materials and teaching styles that are age-appropriate and respectful of children's cultural and ethnic heritages; and,
- Learning opportunities that promote children's success in school.

Adapted from What are the Benefits of High Quality Programs? Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996.

- One-half of single mothers (51%) reported difficulty getting needed child care.
- Among employed mothers, 37% reported difficulty getting needed child care.
- The percentage of parents who reported difficulty getting needed child care ranged from a high of 61% in the Metro SPA (SPA 4) to a low of 38% in the South Bay (SPA 8) (Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of Parents Who Reported it was Very to Somewhat Difficult to Obtain Child Care by Service Planning Area, Los Angeles County, 1999–2000

Service Planning Area	Percentage	Margin of Error	Estimated Number
SPA 1 - Antelope Valley	39.8%	±10.1	13,000
SPA 2 - San Fernando	43.9%	±5.1	75,000
SPA 3 - San Gabriel	40.8%	±5.6	64,000
SPA 4 - Metro	60.9%	±6.7	68,000
SPA 5 - West	46.6%	±9.5	18,000
SPA 6 - South	53.9%	±6.9	61,000
SPA 7 - East	46.2%	±6.0	60,000
SPA 8 - South Bay	38.0%	±5.8	51,000
County Total	46.2%	±2.3	411,000

Source: Los Angeles County Health Survey

Barriers to Finding Child Care

- 16% of parents reported that they had been unable to find child care for a week or longer.
- The following reasons were reported among those who had been unable to find child care: 53% reported that they could not afford it, 45% that the hours and locations did not fit their needs, 41% could not find a provider with space available, and 39% that the quality of child care was not satisfactory (percentages add to more than 100% because many parents listed more than one reason) (Figure 4).

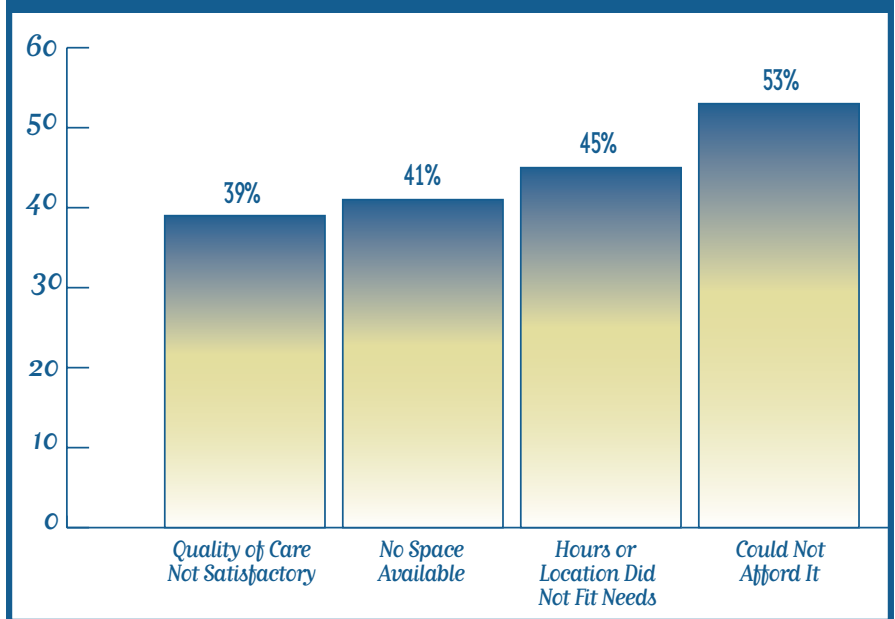
Discussion

Our findings show that one-quarter of children birth through five years are cared for by someone other than their parents on a regular basis. Most children age two years and younger receive care in their own or another person's home, while most children ages three to five years receive care in Head Start or other center-based settings. The percentage of children of employed mothers in child care (43%) in the county is lower than both state (66%) and national (76%) estimates.⁴ Our survey defined "regular" child care as using at least ten hours per week on a regular basis while state and national estimates allowed for any use of care. In addition, the survey may have underestimated the reliance upon outside family members for care, particularly when that care is provided in the child's own home.

Our survey highlights the need to expand the availability of high-quality and affordable child care in the County, in particular for low-income families who may benefit most from access to high-quality services. The survey found significant barriers to finding and keeping child care for many families in Los Angeles County, but in particular for low-income and Latino families. Over half of parents reported cost as a major barrier to finding or keeping child care. These results are consistent with a recent assessment showing the lack of affordable child care services throughout Los Angeles County, especially for children age two years and younger.

Lack of affordable and available child care can result in many children being cared for in sub-optimal settings. Over half (63%) of parents who reported that their children were being cared for in another person's home reported that these providers were unlicensed. State licensure assures a minimum level of safety for children in home-based settings, and provides a basis for accountability and means of addressing complaints. Expanding the number of licensed providers would be an important start to assuring the well-being of children in care, although it is by no means a guarantee of quality.

Figure 4. Reasons for Not Being Able to Find Child Care, Los Angeles County, 1999–2000



Source: Los Angeles County Health Survey

Improving and Expanding the Supply of Child Development and Child Care Services: The Los Angeles County Child Care Planning Committee

The Los Angeles County Child Care Planning Committee is appointed by the Board of Supervisors and the County Superintendent of Schools. It is equally represented by parents who are using child care services, child care providers, community representatives, public agency representatives and discretionary appointees. The Child Care Planning Committee's mandate includes conducting a countywide child care needs assessment at least once every five years, developing a countywide plan to address identified needs, designing a system to consolidate local subsidized child care program waiting lists, coordinating part-day programs to increase the supply of full-day child development services, and enlisting a broad range of community stakeholders.

The following two projects highlight new efforts by the Committee:

- **The Centralized Eligibility List Pilot Project:** An Internet-based, countywide listing of children and families who are income-eligible for subsidized child care services. This centralized list will increase access by income-eligible families to needed services, while also providing unduplicated counts of families in need of services.
- **The Investing in Early Educators Program:** This program pays stipends to qualified teaching staff who are working directly with children in California Department of Education-funded child development centers. In addition, the program will provide intensive management training to administrators of California Department of Education-funded centers. This program will help improve the quality of child development programs by promoting the retention of qualified staff.

The Committee meets on a monthly basis and welcomes input and participation from interested persons. For updated information on meeting locations, agendas and minutes, please check the website at or call (213) 974-4103.

In addition to State licensure, accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) is another, more rigorous means of assuring the quality of child care. Unfortunately, fewer than 1% of home-based providers and 6% of licensed early care and education centers are accredited in Los Angeles County.³

Local efforts to improve the accessibility and quality of child care include training child care providers, assisting child care programs with improving the quality of their services, linking parents to high-quality programs, and targeting state child care subsidies to communities in need. In addition, early literacy programs are being expanded with the implementation of Early Head Start, a federally funded program for children ages birth to three (see Sidebars on pages 6 and 7).

An important limitation of the survey is that quality of child care was not assessed. While critical to ensuring positive outcomes for children in care, quality of care is difficult to measure, particularly in a survey of parents who may not consistently assess the quality of care received by their children. On-site surveys among a random sample of child care centers may be a better way to assess the quality of services available in the County. However, perceived poor quality was a barrier to finding child care in our survey: 39% of parents who could not find care reported dissatisfaction with quality as a reason. Thus, perceptions of quality may be indicative of conditions in the marketplace of child care services.

The survey results highlight the need to expand the supply of high-quality and affordable child care in Los Angeles County, particularly for low-income families. Limited options for care impacts the overall well-being of children as well as the family. Future surveys will be valuable for tracking changes in child care accessibility over time when combined with studies that evaluate the quality of child care services in the county. Such information will be important for evaluating the impact of current efforts to expand and improve the quality of child care services in the county.

Acknowledgments

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For more information or to obtain additional copies of this report, call 213-240-7785 or visit our web site at www.lapublichealth.org.

A Resource for Children and Families: The Los Angeles County Children and Families First Proposition 10 Commission

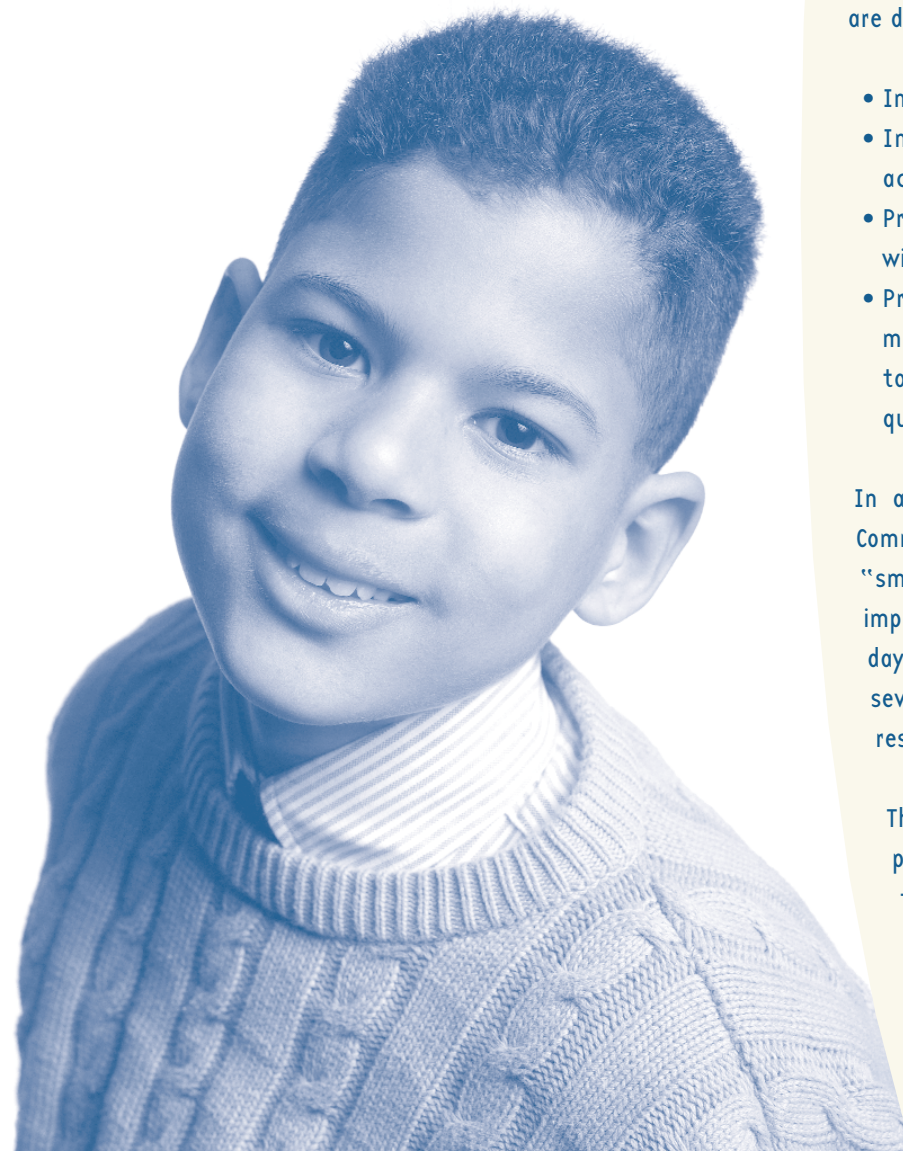
The Los Angeles County Children and Families First Proposition 10 Commission was established by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors following the passage of the California Children and Families First Act in November of 1998. This Act provides funds for the Los Angeles County Proposition 10 Commission to invest in the health and development of children from the prenatal stage up to age five.

To date, the Los Angeles County Proposition 10 Commission has allocated over \$70 million in grants to programs and agencies to improve the quality and availability of child care in Los Angeles County. These grants fund a variety of services that are designed to:

- Improve provider skills through training;
- Improve the quality of child care through accreditation or measurement;
- Provide supplemental health services in and within child care settings; and
- Provide technical assistance, small grants, mentoring programs and educational materials to help child care facilities meet specific quality goals.

In addition to large, agency based grants, the Commission has released more than \$2 million to “small grantees” to make specific quality improvements. These grants are to licensed family day care homes that serve fewer than 50 families; several unlicensed facilities became licensed as a result of the grants.

The Commission supports a wide variety of programs that improve the lives of children and families throughout Los Angeles County. For more information on the Los Angeles County Proposition 10 Commission, and for guidelines to submitting proposals, please visit or call (213) 482-5902.

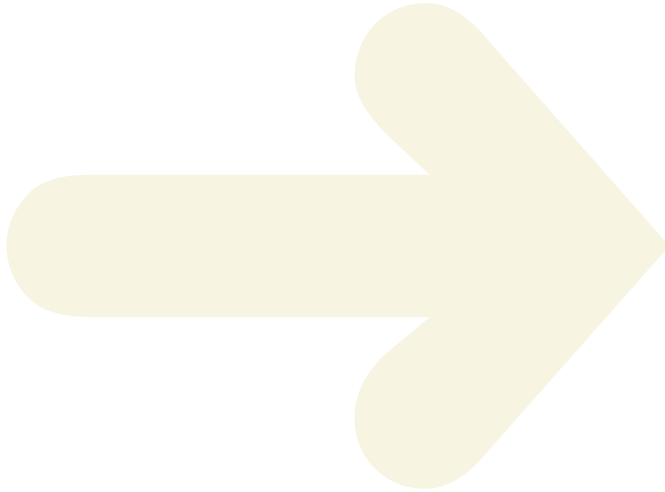




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Summary:

LOS ANGELES COUNTY HEALTH SURVEY

Issue 9

- An estimated 24% of children age five and younger in the county (or 261,000 children) are in child care for at least ten hours per week on a regular basis (This estimate includes nursery school and preschool but not kindergarten).
- The percentage in child care increased with increasing income, from 12% in families living below the federal poverty level to 50% among families above 300% of poverty level.
- Among families with children age five and younger, 61% with incomes at or below 100% of poverty reported difficulty finding needed child care compared to 24% of families living at or above 300% of poverty.
- Among children age three to five years in child care for at least ten hours per week, 35% were in Head Start or a State Preschool Program, 61% were in other center-based programs, 36% were in home-based care (not in their home), and 20% received care in their own home.
- Among children age two years and under in child care, 68% were in home-based care (not in their home), 38% received care in their own home, and 23% were in center-based care.
- The survey found significant barriers to finding and keeping child care for many families in Los Angeles County, and in particular for low income and Latino families.