



# COVID-19 Response: DHHS Establishes Emergency Child Care Collaborative

March 26, 2020 - The State of New Hampshire considers child care an essential two-generation approach; helping parents work and children thrive. We are incredibly thankful for child care professionals, never more so than in an emergency such as we are facing today. That said, we recognize COVID-19 is *a public health matter; and in order to meet the goals of flattening the curve to save lives*, the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) must be prepared, if needed, *to prioritize child care for essential emergency workers needed to combat the crisis*.

Last week, DHHS and our partner, Child Care Aware of New Hampshire – a service funded by DHHS and provided through Southern New Hampshire Services - stood up an emergency child care response telephone line and website to determine current and future capacity of child care professionals to provide emergency child care services and match child care needs of employers and parents. As many parents already know, we learned hundreds of child care businesses have made the decision to temporarily close, and for those that remain open, enrollment has decreased by up to fifty percent.

## What is the plan?

The DHHS, with input from Department of Education, is standing up an *Emergency Child Care Collaborative*, a **public-private partnership** among child care professionals, parents, regional leaders, advocates and the philanthropic and business communities, to establish a system of emergency child care for New Hampshire's most essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The success of the collaborative, co-led in partnership with New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, depends on significant and focused action from state government and other public partners to identify specific actions state agencies should take and public resources needed to ensure the system of emergency child care is robust and effective. The Collaborative will focus on three key areas — **safety, funding and infrastructure**.

DHHS has committed \$4M in discretionary dollars from the federal Child Care Development Fund for additional costs associated with operationalizing an Emergency

Child Care System – including continued Child Care Scholarship for currently enrolled children of low-wage workers and extended absences or program closure. Additional federal waivers are being sought and private funds and resources are being leveraged to support an emergency child care system.

Finally, to help support the financial stability of Child Care businesses, the department will coordinate a webinar for professionals with the Community Development Finance Authority and the NH Departments of Business and Economic Affairs and Employment Security and members of the business and philanthropic community. This webinar will be recorded and will be available on the ChildCare Aware of NH's website at <http://nh.childcareaware.org>.

## Why do we need this plan and what is the benefit to the public?

Helping child care programs continue to operate when they can safely do so **not only helps** the Granite State **address urgent child care needs** of New Hampshire's essential workforce during this public health crisis, it helps to **ensure stability** for child care programs to **continue operating long after** – a critical lever required for New Hampshire families to return to work. Given the trends across the country, we know we must prepare in every way possible to:

- **Ensure the safety** of the providers, children, and the community through heightened protocols and making sure every program has the cleaning supplies, protective equipment and support they need to maintain a safe environment.
- **Provide financial support** to cover increased cost for centers to stay open – or reopen – and retain and recruit staff by recognizing their crucial role in responding to the COVID-19 crisis in NH.
- **Support the emergency child care system infrastructure** that is needed to efficiently coordinate employee, employer needs with childcare center openings and locations across the state.

## What is the eligibility for child care programs?

DHHS is expecting that between 125-150 providers will operate as Emergency Child Care Partners. Through an easy application, DHHS will prioritize and select providers based on regional employer/employee needs, age of children, hours of availability, access for vulnerable children and families, and order of application. Should it become necessary to prioritize emergency and essential workers during the COVID19 pandemic, this will become the primary reason for selection.

The application will be finalized and published by March 27, 2020. Applications will only be accepted electronically at [ECCP@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:ECCP@dhhs.nh.gov). For application questions, contact [Marti.Ilg@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:Marti.Ilg@dhhs.nh.gov).

A waitlist of interested programs will be established to allow for changes in provider availability or employer need. Once approved, programs will be able to bill for dates of service effective Monday, April 6, 2020.

## What is the eligibility for the child/family? Just essential workers or everyone?

At this time, there is no order to close child care businesses. That said, we must have a plan in place should it become necessary to prioritize emergency and essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## If only for emergency and essential workers, how is that defined?

The Emergency Child Care Collaborative will finalize a definition by March 27, 2020.

## Do we have regional access?

At this time, regional access is secured in all counties.

## What do employers need to know about emergency child care?

Organizations that have obtained emergency child care or need emergency child care for their employees may contact the DHHS Bureau of Child Development and Head Start Collaboration with questions on funding and other types of support. Contact Dianne Chase at [dianne.chase@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:dianne.chase@dhhs.nh.gov) or 603-271-7190.

## What are the safety measures?

First and foremost, NH must ensure the safety of the providers, children, and community through heightened protocols. To do this, we will ensure that Emergency Child Care programs have the cleaning supplies and support they need to maintain a safe environment. At present, open child care programs have been instructed to use a DHHS checklist to screen all children and parents prior to entering the program. On March 25, 2020, NH State Epidemiologist Dr. Benjamin Chan and Chief of Infectious Disease Control Beth Daly from the Division of Public Health Services hosted a webinar nearly 300 child care providers and stakeholders to discuss safety protocols with child care programs across New Hampshire. In addition, a COVID 19 resource page has been developed and updated on the Child Care Aware of New Hampshire website. DHHS will also partner with Early Learning New Hampshire (ELNH) through their State Early Learning Alliance (SELA) to take the burden off of child care programs. SELA will deploy a shared service approach, particularly with locating, purchasing, and distributing cleaning and emergency supplies for child care programs and professionals. For information, please contact [info@earlylearningnh.org](mailto:info@earlylearningnh.org), or call (603) 226-7600.

We've engaged the right people, looked at the data, considered our options and come to the conclusion that supporting our childcare centers to stay open to support our state's essential community workers is critical to NH's ability to flatten the curve on COVID-19. These immediate actions are designed to help the State of New Hampshire now and in the future. We owe a debt of gratitude to our child care workers. They too are heroes – taking care of our children everyday - and helping on the frontline of this crisis.