



Quality early childhood programs can change the trajectory of a child’s health and well-being, and help families experiencing homelessness regain stability. Early childhood programs are particularly important in the context of homelessness: the younger and longer a child experiences homelessness, the greater the cumulative toll of negative outcomes, which can have lifelong effects.

Local educational agency (LEA) McKinney-Vento liaisons and homeless service providers funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are required by law to connect families experiencing homelessness to early childhood programs. This guide is designed to help LEA liaisons and homeless service providers develop a basic understanding of, and build partnerships with, five early childhood programs that have specific requirements to serve children and families experiencing homelessness. All five programs use the same definition of “homeless” as the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act.ⁱ

1. Child Care Services (Child Care and Development Fund)		
How to Find Child Care Partners in Your Community:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Care Aware/Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies • CCDF State/Territory Contacts 		
What services are provided?	Who is eligible?	What are the federal requirements for serving homeless families and children?
<p>The federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is a block grant to states that supports a range of child care services.</p> <p><i>Subsidized child care centers and family child care homes</i> receive grants or contracts to provide early education and child care, often on a sliding fee scale, for infants, toddlers, preschoolers.</p> <p><i>Child care subsidies</i> are vouchers for child care that parents can use with the provider of their choice, including public and private child care centers, family child care homes, and relatives or friends.</p> <p><i>Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)</i> agencies coordinate early care and education resources; link families with early care and education in their communities; help build the supply of child care in communities; and improve the overall quality of care. CCR&Rs may be statewide, or more regionally or locally based. They often sponsor training services to child care providers and consumer education for parents on identifying and accessing quality child care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCDF serves children under the age of 13, or up to the age 19 for children with disabilities. • Children must be citizens or qualified aliens. • Family income must be below 85% of state medium income. • Parents must be working or participating in education or training activities. • Other eligibility criteria are determined by individual states. While some states have chosen to make homeless families categorically eligible for child care, most do not. • There may be a waiting list for subsidized child care slots and child care vouchers. 	<p>Federal regulations require states to provide outreach to and prioritize the enrollment of children experiencing homelessness and to establish grace periods for homeless families to comply with immunization and other health and safety requirements.</p> <p>States and local communities may establish other procedures to promote access to children experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>See SchoolHouse Connection’s Federal Child Care Regulations and Homelessness for more information on the homelessness requirements in CCDF.</p>

2. Early Head Start and Head Start

How to Find Early Head Start and Head Start Partners in Your Community:

- [Head Start & Early Head Start Program Locator](#)
- [Head Start State Collaboration Offices](#)

What services are provided?	Who is eligible?	What are the federal requirements for serving homeless families and children?
<p>Early Head Start and Head Start are federally-funded comprehensive child development programs. These programs may be administered by local educational agencies or by community agencies.</p> <p>Early Head Start and Head Start programs provide intensive comprehensive child development and family support services. They deliver services to children and families in core areas of early learning, health, and family well-being. Many Early Head Start and Head Start programs provide full-day early care and education services, while others offer part-day or school-day services. Some Early Head Start programs use an evidence-based home visiting model. Both Early Head Start and Head Start programs use a two-generation approach and engage parents as key partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Head Start programs serve infants and toddlers under the age of 3, and pregnant women. • Head Start programs serve 3- and 4-year-old children and their families. • Children with incomes below federal poverty guidelines are eligible. • Children who meet the definition of homeless in the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act are categorically eligible for Early Head Start and Head Start. 	<p>Federal law requires that Early Head Start and Head Start programs prioritize the enrollment of homeless children and remove barriers to their enrollment and participation. Federal regulations allow programs to reserve slots for children experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>See SchoolHouse Connection’s Head Start Program Performance Standards and Homelessness for more information on homelessness requirements.</p>

3. Preschool

How to Find Preschool Partners in Your State:

- [Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes \(CEELO\)](#)

What services are provided?	Who is eligible?	What are the federal requirements for serving homeless families and children?
<p>State and local educational agency preschool programs offer education-focused half-day and full-day programs in schools or through community partnerships. Some programs provide referrals for health and developmental screenings, supportive services to families, and opportunities for parent involvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public preschool eligibility criteria varies, and programs may serve 4-year-olds, or 3- and 4-year olds. 	<p>Federal law (the McKinney-Vento Act) includes specific requirements for preschool programs administered by state and local educational agencies to comply with provision regarding serving children experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>See Preschool to Prevent Homelessness for information about preschool and homelessness, and links to resources to help implement policies.</p> <p>In addition, state preschool programs may contain state-specific eligibility and other requirements on homelessness.</p>

4. Special Education Preschool for Children with Disabilities

How to Find Preschool Special Education Partners in Your State:

- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)

What services are provided?	Who is eligible?	What are the federal requirements for serving homeless families and children?
<p>Section 619 of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that requires states to identify and provide appropriate special education and related services to children with disabilities ages 3 to 5.</p> <p>Children receive an Individualized Education Program that specifies the services they will be provided. Education and related services may be provided in a classroom setting in the schools or integrated into community programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with disabilities, ages 3 to 5. 	<p>IDEA contains several specific requirements designed to promote timely evaluations and uninterrupted education and related services to children who change schools during the school year, including those experiencing homelessness. The law also requires states to ensure that children with disabilities experiencing homelessness are identified, located and evaluated.</p> <p>More information can be found at the National Center for Homeless Education.</p>

5. Early Intervention Services for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities

How to Find Early Intervention Partners in Your State:

- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)

What services are provided?	Who is eligible?	What are the federal requirements for serving homeless families and children?
<p>Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that requires states to identify and provide appropriate early intervention services to eligible children and their families.</p> <p>Children receive an Individualized Family Service Plan that specifies the early intervention services that will be provided to the child and family to help them reach determined outcomes. Services must be provided by qualified personnel, in natural environments and at no cost to the families (except where states provide for a system of payment, such as a sliding scale).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infants and toddlers birth through age 2, with developmental delays or with diagnosed physical or mental conditions with high probabilities of resulting in developmental delays, and their families. • States set additional eligibility criteria, which can restrict interventions to a narrow target population, or address broader preventative service needs, including providing services to children at-risk of a developmental delay. 	<p>IDEA contains several provisions specific to children experiencing homelessness, including a specific requirement that states ensure that children with disabilities experiencing homelessness are identified, located and evaluated.</p> <p>States must ensure the meaningful involvement of homeless families in the planning and implementation of the Part C program.</p> <p>More information can be found at the National Center for Homeless Education.</p>

ⁱ 42 U.S.C. §11434A(2): “The term ‘homeless children and youths’--

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); and

(B) includes--

(i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitalsⁱ;

(ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).”