# 1.4 Early Care And Education

*Percentage of infants, toddlers, and preschool age children with access to early childhood care and education services*

## Purpose

This measure looks at the ability of families to access early childhood care and education (ECE) for their children across a variety of options. Communities may choose to focus specifically on underserved children as defined locally, income-eligible children, infants and toddlers, or children of working parents. The goal of this measure is not to have capacity for 100 percent of children to be served or for all children to attend formal, high-quality childcare centers, but rather it is to have the capacity throughout the system to meet families' needs and preferences.

## Definition

This measure looks at the overall capacity of the early childhood care and education system to serve children birth through five years old or kindergarten entry. The numerator is the ECE system capacity, which can be calculated as the total number of licensed spaces in a community. The denominator is the number of children birth through age five in the community, which can be determined using population-level census data or live births from vital statistics data.

Communities may choose to focus on specific populations or areas of interest, including:

▸ **Infant/toddler capacity vs. preschool capacity:** Data can be broken down by age, such as the number of infant licensed slots divided by the number of live births in one year, or the number infant/toddler slots divided by the number of live births over three years.

▸ **Child care subsidy capacity:** This can be measured by the number of families receiving a child care subsidy divided either by the number of families falling within local income guidelines (often 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level) or by the number of families on a waiting list for a subsidized slot.

▸ **ECE capacity for working families:** This would use overall ECE capacity as the numerator and the number of families with working parents (one or two depending on family structure) as the denominator.

▸ **High-quality capacity:** In addition to overall capacity, communities may choose to assess the availability of high-quality childcare by only including quality-rated slots in the numerator.

Most communities will not be able to include unlicensed/unregulated providers such as family, friends, neighbors, and nannies in their calculation, though some may have data from other sources about how many families are using this type of care. The extent to which ECE providers are unlicensed/unregulated varies based on child care statutes, regulations, and policies. In some states, this may comprise over half the ECE delivery system capacity.

Communities may also be interested in looking at use of ECE versus the capacity of the system. One approach to calculating this for low-income children is to calculate the gap between the number of children using child care subsidies compared to the number of income eligible children. If looking at care use or waiting lists across the mixed delivery system, program-level data may include duplication when children receive care in multiple settings, unless using unique identifiers. Some states have developed ECE data systems, use evaluators to de-duplicate data, or use K-12 longitudinal data systems to track children attending child care.

## Opportunities

Additional opportunities include the following:

▸ Movements toward unique child identifiers by state departments of education and ECE databases could provide the opportunity for individual-level data in the future.

▸ Correlating data associated with ECE access, the quality of the ECE providers, and children's outcomes as measured in kindergarten transition domains can help to show the relationship of interventions to child outcomes.