



Child Care Assistance

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) offers financial assistance to eligible parents to help them with child care costs while they engage in work, education or job training. In addition, ODJFS and county agencies are responsible for licensing and inspecting all child care settings in Ohio, from large child care centers to family child care homes. Every day in Ohio, an estimated 320,000 children are cared for in settings outside the home that are licensed by the state of Ohio.

Of those children, more than 116,000 receive financial assistance for child care each month. This assistance allows low-income parents to find and keep jobs, and it ensures that their children have access to an early care and education experience they need to succeed in school. Ohio's 88 county departments of job and family services determine families' eligibility for publicly funded child care services. ODJFS then makes payments to programs for the costs of that care, based on a local market rate survey.

Who can get child care assistance?

To become eligible for publicly funded child care, a family's income must be below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). After that, families may remain eligible unless their income becomes greater than 300 percent of the FPL. Families can be eligible for all or part of their monthly child care expenses. The program serves children of all ages, from infants to preschoolers to school-age children who need care before and after school.

How often is eligibility determined?

The county agencies review cases every 12 months to decide whether income or other changes affect eligibility.

How is child care assistance paid?

Ohio uses a swipe card system to record the time and attendance of children receiving publicly funded child care. Parents or guardians simply swipe the Electronic Child Care card when dropping off their children and swipe it again when picking them up. ODJFS then issues direct deposit payments to programs to reimburse them for the time they spend caring for children in the program. The card is easy to use, reduces fraud and greatly increases payment accuracy.

How often are child care programs inspected?

Child care centers are inspected three times in their first year, at least once annually after that, and any time ODJFS receives a complaint. Family child care homes are inspected at least twice a year and any time the county agency receives a complaint. All inspections are unannounced.

All child care programs and staff are subject to criminal background checks, including staff who have no direct contact with children, such as cooks and custodians. For in-home programs, all residents of the home 18 years and older must complete background checks. In addition, ODJFS sends a list of all child care programs to the Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association so county sheriffs can cross-check that list with their local sex offender registries.

Does ODJFS have suggestions for parents who are choosing child care programs?

Yes. Families searching for child care in Ohio should visit jfs.ohio.gov/CDC/childcare.stm. This website allows families to search for child care by county, city, zip code, program type and Step UpTo Quality rating. Families also can search for specific programs and view their past inspection reports.

Step UpTo Quality is Ohio's quality rating system for child care programs. ODJFS and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) now use a comprehensive, one- to five-star rating system to assess ODJFS- and ODE-licensed early childhood programs that choose to exceed minimum health and safety standards. Starting in 2020, all child care programs that receive state funding will be required to participate in Step UpTo Quality. Ratings are posted online, and parents can use them to choose the program that is best for their child. Highly rated programs require continuing education for teachers and staff, use child assessments to guide learning and development, and take additional steps to help prepare children for kindergarten.