

In Connecticut and across the country, child care providers are closing their doors, unable to survive the COVID-19 shut down. The state recently announced continued financial support for this industry through the summer, but capacity remains a significant concern, and many stakeholders fear a crisis is looming. <https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-news-coronavirus-child-care-help-20200615-jmydnhbveevi74tmgnvp5pni-story.html>

A shortage of licensed, affordable, quality child care affects the health and safety of thousands of Connecticut children. OCA previously reported that a significant decrease in Connecticut child care subsidies in 2016 and 2017 coincided with an increase in preventable child fatalities in unregulated care. See OCA report

(https://www.ct.gov/oca/lib/oca/Office_of_the_Child_Advocate_Report_on_Child_Care_Fatalities.pdf).

Please see the attached new position statement below from a coalition of advocates and providers, including the OCA, also pasted below.

Position Statement from A Coalition of Connecticut Stakeholders: Ensuring Access to Affordable Day Care And Home Visitation Services Is An Essential Child Wellbeing and Maltreatment Prevention Strategy 6.24.20

Federal funding for childcare is desperately needed not only to help families return to work but also to ensure the physical and emotional safety of vulnerable infants and toddlers.

We know that childcare is critical with almost ten million children typically receiving non-parental childcare in the United States. Several studies confirm that childcare subsidies in particular have a positive impact on employment and on children's healthy development.¹¹¹

But access to reliable childcare is also a critical child safety strategy. When children, particularly our youngest children, are not visible in the community and are dependent on changing and over-stressed caregivers, they are more vulnerable to child abuse and neglect and to having any harms go undetected until they are seriously injured. Furthermore, when caregivers do not have access to safe and affordable options and must work, they may feel forced to leave children in unsupervised or risky environments.

Only a few years ago, Connecticut saw an increase in preventable child deaths when child care subsidies were less available.

Connecticut's Office of the Child Advocate reported in 2018 that during a dramatic downturn in the availability of day care subsidies in the state during 2016 and 2017, six infants and toddlers died from preventable causes in unregulated, illegal day cares. Such arrangements may unfortunately be made by parents who need to work and who struggle to find affordable and reliable childcare. Connecticut's child care subsidies have since been restored.

Additionally, a decade ago the economic recession also led to an increase in serious infant injuries, including deaths from abusive head trauma, with research showing that the increase in abusive head trauma lingered long after the economy began to recover.^[12]

Child abuse prevention experts also learned that economic strain combined with unaddressed domestic violence, substance abuse and/or a mental health disorders increased the risk of child abuse and neglect even further, and the COVID pandemic and the associated isolation for families and children, are now increasing these risks once again.^[13]

The Washington Post recently reported that while calls to child protective services around the country are dramatically down during the COVID shut down, severe injuries to young child have increased in some places, with "the cases surfacing [in hospitals] often involve[ing] children so severely injured they end up in the emergency rooms and the intensive care unit."^[14] Most of these children have been younger than 3 years old, and their injuries were due to abuse, neglect and accidents.

Children's National Hospital in Washington DC, for example, reported that from March 15 through April 20 of last year, about 50 percent of the children had injuries serious enough to be hospitalized. This year, doctors reported, that rate rose to 86 percent for the same time period.^[15] At Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford, the child abuse team reports an increase in inpatient consults since the start of the pandemic. From April 1-May 31, 2020 they have performed 50% more inpatient consults than they did in the corresponding time frame last year. Some of these children have been determined to have accidental injuries, but many were abused, including some with severe head and abdominal injuries requiring intensive care admission and leaving some children disabled.

Doctors with expertise in child abuse, injury prevention and emergency care along with child welfare professionals and advocates around the state are again calling for action.

The invisibility of children, the economic and emotional strain for families and lack of access to reliable and affordable childcare now and in the coming months is again creating dangerous conditions for our most at-risk children in Connecticut. High-quality childcare helps prevent child abuse and neglect by reducing parental stress and isolation and providing a safe and consistent environment for children that fosters healthy development.^[16]

Trained childcare workers are also mandated reporters and can play a crucial role in identifying and reporting suspected child abuse or neglect.

In addition to child care, home visiting services for pregnant women and parents of infants and young children are an essential, low cost, and evidence-based support for increasing parenting knowledge and capacity, promoting healthy child development, and reducing risk for child abuse and neglect.

As a group of concerned providers, we ask that as we move forward from the COVID pandemic, policy makers prioritize these critical supports for all children and families. Funding to support these services must also be included in any upcoming stimulus package from Congress to ensure the physical and emotional safety of our children.

Center for Children's Advocacy

Clifford Beers

Connecticut Children's Alliance

Connecticut Children's Medical Center

Office of the Child Advocate

Prevent Child Abuse Connecticut

The Village for Families and Children

Yale Programs for Safety, Advocacy & Healing

^[11] Adams, Gina; Henly, J, "Child Care Subsidies: Supporting Work And Child Development For Healthy Families," *Health Affairs*, Apr. 13, 2020, available on the web at: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20200327.116465/full/>.

^[12] Joanne N Wood, Benjamin French, et al "Pediatric Abusive Head Trauma Rates With Macroeconomic Indicators". *Acad Pediatr* 2016 Apr;16(3):224-32. (In the period after the recession, AHT rate was lower than during the recession period yet higher than the level before the recession, suggesting a lingering effect of the economic stress of the recession on maltreatment risk.)

^[13] Agrawal, Nina. "The Coronavirus Could Cause a Child Abuse Epidemic," *The New York Times*, April 7, 2020.

^[14] Schmidt, Samantha; Natanson, Hannah, "With kids stuck at home, ER doctors see more severe cases of child abuse," *Washington Post*, April 30, 2020.

^[15] Id.

^[16] Child Care and its Role in Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention – Resolution, *Prevent Child Abuse America*, found on the web at: <https://preventchildabuse.org/resource/child-care-and-its-role-in-prevention/>