

INEQUITABLE ACCESS TO CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA IN 2020

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The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) serves as the primary source of federal funding for states to help families with low incomes afford child care and to support broader child care quality.¹ However, limited federal investments, state funding constraints, and restrictive policies mean subsidy access is out of reach for far too many children and families. Finding affordable care can be particularly burdensome for families with low incomes and even more so for those who experience compounding racial inequities, including Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American/Alaska Native, and other communities of color.^{2,3}

In 2020, CCDF subsidies only reached 7 percent of all potentially eligible children in Washington, D.C. based on state income eligibility, or 1,600 children.^{4,5,6} Overall subsidy receipt in D.C. was lower than the national rate based on state income eligibility of 14 percent.⁷

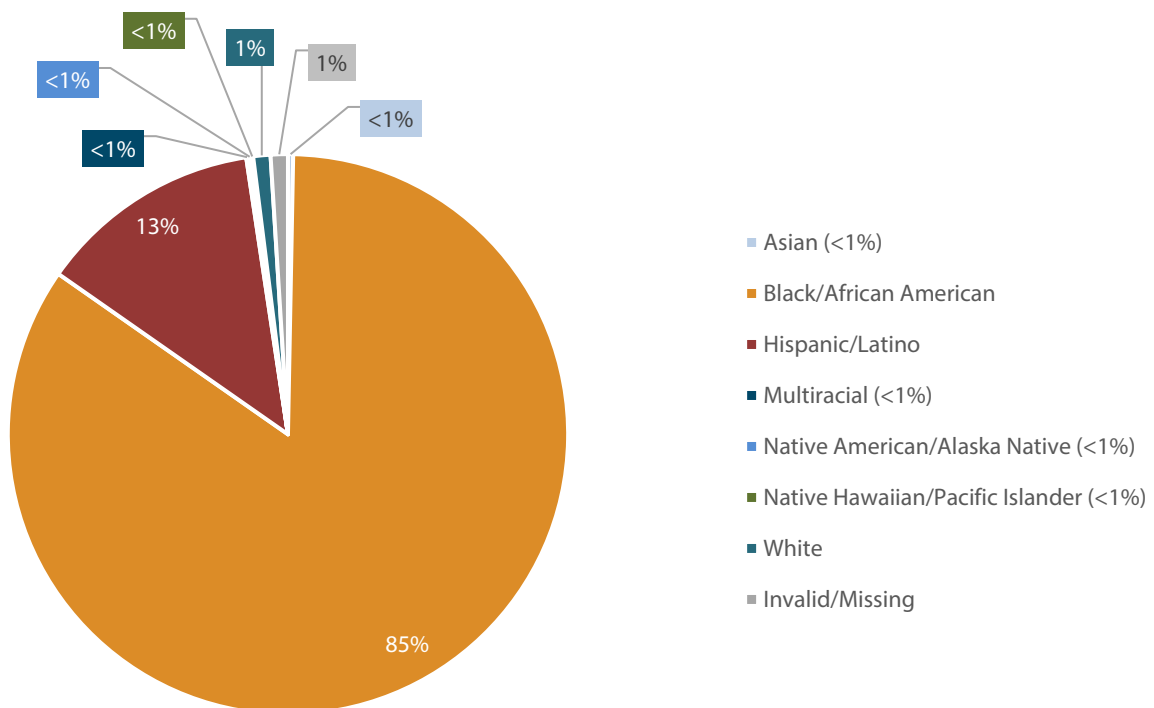
WASHINGTON D.C. CHILDREN POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE A CCDF SUBSIDY⁸

CLASP estimates that 98,319 children ages 0-13 lived in Washington, D.C. during 2020, and 23 percent of these children (22,854) were potentially eligible to receive a subsidy through CCDF based on “state” income eligibility limits.^{9,10} Like many other states, D.C. sets its initial state income eligibility limit, for families newly applying for a subsidy, lower than the federal maximum income limit allowed by federal rules. D.C.’s maximum allowable family income limit (246 percent FPL) is only 71 percent of the federal limit (346 percent FPL).¹¹ An increase to the state initial income threshold to match the federal maximum would mean an estimated 8,495 additional children could have been eligible, a 37 percent increase.¹² Child care access is a critical support for economic stability and growth, especially for families with low incomes. With nearly a quarter of children in D.C. potentially eligible for CCDF, expanding subsidy access is critical to supporting those families as well as broader state economic growth.

WASHINGTON D.C. CHILDREN SERVED THROUGH CCDF¹³

In 2020, of the estimated 22,854 potentially eligible children in D.C., 7 percent were served through CCDF, for a total of 1,600 children served. This subsidy access rate is lower than the national average rate of 14 percent of potentially eligible children served based on state income limits. Asian, multiracial, Native American/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and white children accounted for less than 2 percent of all children served through CCDF, and Hispanic/Latino children accounted for 13 percent.¹⁴ CLASP analyses of Administration for Children and Families (ACF) data show that 85 percent of children served through CCDF were Black/African American, with analysis of American Community Survey data showing that 79 percent of potentially eligible children and 50 percent of all children were Black/African American.¹⁵ This shows that while Black/African American children had the highest rate of access to a CCDF subsidy, they also accounted for more than three-quarters of potentially eligible children—despite representing only half of the overall population. This data points to broader intersecting racial and economic inequities for these families. Due to data limitations, including sample size limitations in the American Community Survey and/or missing and/or invalid CCDF data from the Administration for Children and Families, we were not able to conduct analyses on potential eligibility and CCDBG access for children by race and ethnicity in Washington D.C.

Washington D.C. Children Served Through CCDF by Race/Ethnicity



Source: CLASP analysis of American Community Survey 5-year (2017-2021), 1-year (2019), and 1-year (2021) data. <https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/> Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding; exclusions of racial/ethnic categories that are too small to meet sample size requirements; and/or racial/ethnic categories that do not align with ACF categories.

CONNECTING DATA AND POLICY, IMPROVING POLICIES, AND INCREASING INVESTMENTS TO CENTER EQUITY

These analyses show that overall access to CCDF was low in Washington, D.C., with only 7 percent of potentially eligible children receiving a subsidy—despite nearly a quarter of all children under age 13 being potentially eligible based on the D.C. family income limit. Due to data limitations, we could not conduct further analyses by race and ethnicity. However, well-documented broader systemic inequities rooted in racism and compounded by economic inequality have created increased need and additional access barriers for families of color. **When coupled with low overall access, this demonstrates a clear and immediate need for significant and sustained increases in federal funding to states, as well as policies that intentionally address compounding racial and economic inequities.** Both are essential to addressing the historic underfunding, present inequities, and ongoing recovery from COVID-19 that have created rippling instability and exacerbated need.¹⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ “Fundamentals of CCDF Administration: CCDF Funding Overview,” Administration for Children and Families, Child Care Technical Assistance Network, <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ccdf-fundamentals/ccdf-funding-overview>.

² Maura Baldiga, Pamela Joshi, Erin Hardy, et. al., “Data-for-Equity Research Brief: Child Care Affordability for Working Parents,” Diversitydatakids.org, 2018, https://www.diversitydatakids.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/child-care_update.pdf.

³ Due to data limitations, including sample size limitations in the American Community Survey and/or missing and/or invalid CCDF data from the Administration for Children and Families, we were unable to conduct analyses on potential eligibility and CCDBG access for all racial and ethnic groups in Washington D.C. Instead, this fact sheet outlines overall potential CCDF subsidy eligibility and receipt for children ages 0-13 in D.C. For more information, please see the data limitations and methodology document <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/inequitable-access-2024/>.

⁴ In 2020, D.C. set state income eligibility limits at 246 percent of the federal poverty limit (FPL). This income threshold represents initial eligibility limits—the maximum income families can have when they apply for child care assistance. Karen Schulman, “On the precipice: state child care policies 2020,” National Women’s Law Center, 2021, <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/NWLC-State-Child-Care-Assistance-Policies-2020.pdf>.

⁵ “FY 2020 Preliminary Data Table 1 – Average Monthly Adjusted Number of Families and Children Served,” Administration for Children and Families: Office of Child Care, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, May 2022, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/data/fy-2020-preliminary-data-table-1>.

⁶ The number of potentially eligible children is based on CLASP analysis of ACS 5-year (2017-2021), 1-year (2019), and 1-year (2021) data. Estimates are based on children under age 13, whose available parent(s) was working, with household incomes at or below 246 percent FPL.

⁷ Based on CLASP analysis of the total number of potentially eligible children, according to each state’s income eligibility limit, and the total number of children served through CCDF in 2020.

⁸ The number of potentially eligible children is based on CLASP analysis of ACS 5-year (2017-2021), 1-year (2019), and 1-year (2021) data. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

⁹ CLASP estimates are based on analysis of ACS 5-year (2017-2021), 1-year (2019), and 1-year (2021) data on children under age 13 and the proportion of those children whose available parent(s) was working, with household incomes at or below 246 percent FPL.

¹⁰ Although the District of Columbia is a district and not a state, for the purposes of this fact sheet it will be referenced as such.

¹¹ CCDF law sets the maximum allowable income to 85 percent of the state median income (SMI). CLASP calculations are based on “2020 Poverty Guidelines” Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines/prior-hhs-poverty-guidelines-federal-register-references/2020-poverty-guidelines>; “SMI by Household Size for Mandatory Use in LIHEAP for FFY 2020,” Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program; and Schulman, “On the precipice: state child care policies 2020.” <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/NWLC-State-Child-Care-Assistance-Policies-2020.pdf>.

¹² CLASP calculations based on state income limits published in Schulman, “On the precipice: state child care policies 2020” National Women’s Law Center; estimates derived from analysis of ACS 5-year (2017-2021), 1-year (2019), and 1-year (2021) data on children under age 13; and the proportion of those children whose available parent(s) was working, with household incomes at or below the state income limit of 246 percent FPL and the federal income limit of 346 percent FPL.

¹³ For the purposes of this analysis, children whose ethnicity was identified as Hispanic/Latino are analyzed together, regardless of their race (including children whose race was labeled as “some other race”). All non-Hispanic/Latino children are identified by their racial group (Asian, Black/African American, multiracial, Native American/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and white).

¹⁴ CLASP estimates of the number of children served by racial/ethnic category are based on “FY 2020 Preliminary Data Table 1 - Average Monthly Adjusted Number of Families and Children Served,” <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/data/fy-2020-preliminary-data-table-1>, and “FY 2020 Preliminary Data Table 12a - Average Monthly Percent of Children In Care By Race and Ethnicity,” Administration for Children and Families: Office of Child Care, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/data/fy-2020-preliminary-data-table-12a>.

¹⁵ CLASP estimated the percentage of children served based on our analysis of ACS 5-year (2017-2021), 1-year (2019),

and 1-year (2021) data of children under age 13 whose available parent(s) was working and whose household incomes were at or below 246 percent FPL; and “FY 2020 Preliminary Data Table 1 - Average Monthly Adjusted Number of Families and Children Served,” <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/data/fy-2020-preliminary-data-table-1>. The number of potentially eligible children is based on CLASP analysis of ACS 5-year (2017-2021), 1-year (2019), and 1-year (2021) data.

¹⁶Pamela Winston, “COVID-19 and Economic Opportunity: Unequal Effects on Economic Need and Program Response,” Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/private/pdf/265391/covid-19-human-service-response-brief.pdf>.