



POLICY BRIEF: STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR CALIFORNIA'S FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR PROVIDERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Care is a crucial, but often overlooked, component of California's Early Learning and Care system. This policy brief aims to raise awareness of the important role of FFN caregivers, provide an overview of the common challenges they face, and highlight potential policy solutions and opportunities to better support this critical segment of the child care workforce. This brief was developed in partnership with Early Edge California's FFN Workgroup, which consists of representatives of organizations that provide resources to FFN providers and has, since its launch in February 2021, provided critical insight on the needs and experiences of FFN providers. The recommendations in this brief were also informed by the personal experiences of representatives from Early Edge's FFN Advisory Groups, which are made up of FFN caregivers that provide care to families from across the state. This brief builds upon previous research by Early Edge which focused on supporting FFNs during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

OVERVIEW OF FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR (FFN) CARE



Do you remember who took care of you as a child? Maybe your grandmother cared for you while your parents were working. Or perhaps it was a neighbor who cared for you after school while you waited for your parents to finish up their day at work. Do you now have your own children that you entrust to a family friend while you balance work hours and errands? Or have you, at one point or another, played a critical role in providing child care for a loved one or community member? These are all child care scenarios that describe the diverse types of care commonly known as [Family, Friend, and Neighbor \(FFN\) care](#).

FFN care plays a critical role in California's Early Learning and Care mixed-delivery system and helps

meet the unique needs of each family. As summarized by their name, FFN caregivers consist of grandparents, aunts, uncles, extended family, caring neighbors, and friends who provide care for babies and young children in informal settings, typically in their own home. Similar to the broader child care workforce, FFNs are predominantly women of color.² Many of California's FFNs serve and belong to the same communities that most benefit from their services such as immigrant parents.³ A survey by the National Women's Law Center also found that FFNs were primarily Hispanic/Latinx and Black women nationally.⁴ In Los Angeles, "FFN providers served by First 5 LA grantee agencies are largely female and Latina."⁵

FFN caregivers, and the families they serve, often speak languages other than English at home. Many FFNs are often excluded from economic opportunities, such as access to training and adequate compensation, due to their race or immigration status.⁶ Some FFNs are lower wage, shift-based, and hourly workers who trade child care with other parents so they can continue working to provide for their families while their children receive care. Typically, FFN caregivers are personally connected to the families they support. Therefore, they tend to reflect the demographics of the communities they serve and have a deeper understanding of the families' logistical, socioemotional, cultural, and linguistic needs and how to meet them.

It is estimated that more than 23 percent of California children, 0–5 years old, and 39 percent of children ages 3 and under, receive FFN care.⁷ FFNs have diverse needs and unique motivations for providing care. Many FFNs are grandparents or relatives who are motivated to provide care in order to help support their family and because of their desire to develop a strong bond with their grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or niblings. Others

"It's great having a group of people that you can depend on and feel like they're part of your extended family, to answer questions and just be helpful in this whole process that we're all involved in: raising kids to be healthy and happy and good adults when they grow up."

—Shelley, FFN Provider supported by San José Public Library's FFN Caregiver Support Network, funded by First 5 Santa Clara County

may be neighbors or friends exchanging child care, looking to support families in their community, and/or potentially providing care as a means to financially support themselves. FFN care is very personalized and helps meet each family's individual circumstances, including the ability to accommodate shifting work schedules, extended hours, and overnight care. As the pandemic continues to greatly impact child care and preschool options, many families are relying on FFN care in order to mitigate COVID-19 exposure and closures.

FFNs play a critical role in meeting the unique needs of each individual child with specialized care and attention. As they often serve smaller numbers of children and children they have personal relationships with, FFNs provide a nurturing environment and give each child a loving adult that takes special care of them. This helps improve self-regulation in children at a young age and sets them up for success and a healthy start.⁸ FFNs are often bilingual and speak the home language of the family they support, and sometimes they have community and family ties with the children. Children benefit from having this continuity in their home language and family relationships.⁹ For many children, FFNs are one of their earliest teachers: they provide learning experiences in the first years of life and fill in any gaps that children may face before attending Pre-Kindergarten or another formal setting of Early Education and Care.

The vast majority of FFNs are license-exempt. In the state of California, a caregiver is exempt from licensure if they are providing care to their own children or a relative, plus children from one other family.¹⁰ Those that provide care to non-relative children from more than one family in their home for periods of less than 24 hours typically need a license.¹¹ License-exempt caregiving limits the number of families and children FFNs can provide care for, which means making a sustainable living is difficult to achieve. Therefore, some FFNs choose to become licensed.

FFNs face a variety of challenges in obtaining licensure. These can include financial barriers to meeting licensure requirements, such as higher rental costs to meet the requirements for adequate space and outdoor areas. Immigration status is another barrier to becoming licensed; FFN providers are often afraid to register for trainings for licensure. They may also fear exposure of their status through filing taxes as a part of receiving subsidies or stipends. In addition, finding resources in their preferred language can stall FFNs' pursuit of

licensure because they cannot obtain the information they need to move forward with the process. Therefore, even if FFNs want to increase their compensation or business capacity through licensure, they often confront roadblocks. Without licensure, FFNs are not in the formal child care pipeline, which results in a lack of acknowledgement and support that other child care providers receive.

As FFN providers are so heavily relied upon to care for California's babies and young children, investing in these caregivers is a critical way for California to support its Early Learning and Care mixed-delivery system and the families it serves. Accordingly, two major areas of necessary investment in FFNs are in improving wages and compensation, and improving access to training and resources. This policy brief summarizes some of the major challenges and potential solutions to improving FFN supports in these areas. Ultimately, this brief underscores the need for increased investment in FFN care to support millions of California children and families who choose it.



NEED FOR PROVIDING JUST COMPENSATION TO FFN PROVIDERS

Compensation for FFN providers varies greatly and is often dependent on the individual arrangement with the family they are serving. Some FFNs are paid by families directly, others provide care for free to help support their families, and some, in lieu of pay, may receive supplies and funds from the family to cover the cost of care. Some FFNs receive state subsidies through the family they provide care for, but most FFNs do not. FFNs are only able to receive subsidies if they are serving families who are eligible for subsidized care and are actively receiving vouchers for child care. This requires the family they serve to not only be eligible for subsidies, but to have gone through the process to receive them from the state.

Many FFNs are unaware that they could receive these funds from families they serve and oftentimes the families they serve are unaware that they might be eligible for subsidies in the first place. In fact, when asked about their knowledge of subsidies, many parents who participate in [Early Edge's Parent Advisory Group](#) shared that they had never heard about subsidies for child care before. One parent knew of a friend who received this financial support; however, they did not know how to access it for themselves. Parents have also shared during group sessions that they are afraid to accept government aid due to myths that are shared in the community; for example, some believed they would be forced to pay back in the future any financial support they received for their child or themselves and have refused aid they qualified for in the past due to this fear.

This system makes it challenging for FFNs to navigate and leads to them often missing out on the opportunity to receive state subsidies. The limit on the number of families a license-exempt FFN can serve also hinders their ability to make a liveable income from providing care. Additionally, a common issue that is often reported by FFNs is that those who live with family in a multi-generational household face unique barriers to getting paid and only qualify under very specific circumstances.¹²

Even FFNs who do receive state subsidies are vastly underpaid. Historically, FFN providers receiving subsidies are eligible to receive a maximum reimbursement rate that is up to 70 percent of the family child care provider rate, but due to the limited availability of funding, they typically receive 30 percent or less, or about \$3 an hour

"I am truly thankful for First 5. They give outstanding learning activities and free learning and reading supplies for children. First 5 is a program that helps the community in a big way...the pay is very little but these children are worth the effort. I love working with children and I have learned so much from the children I care for."

—Barbara, FFN Provider supported by First 5 Yuba County

nationally.¹³ In 2019, the Child Care Providers United (CCPU) passed state legislation to allow for collective bargaining in California, which has allowed both Family Child Care providers and FFN caregivers to negotiate with the state on reimbursement rates. In 2021, CCPU finalized their first collective bargaining agreement with the state, which increased reimbursement rates for licensed and license-exempt family child care providers in California which will benefit FFNs that provide subsidized care.¹⁴ The recent increase in reimbursement rates will help FFN providers working with families who receive a state subsidy receive between \$7 to \$14 an hour, depending on their region.

CCPU will be working on their second collective bargaining contract beginning in 2023 with the hope of continuing to secure rate increases for both licensed and license-exempt providers. While these efforts are an improvement, FFNs need further support to achieve just wages as they provide a critical service to California families, and thereby promote the state's economy.



POTENTIAL WAYS TO IMPROVE FFN WAGES AND COMPENSATION

- **Increase FFN and family awareness of child care subsidies and reduce family barriers to accessing subsidies.** The state should consider allocating resources to support outreach to families and FFN providers about subsidies as well as supporting access to these funds.
- **Set the floor of FFN wages to minimum wage or the per-child rate—whichever is higher.** The floor of the subsidies should be tied to minimum wage to ensure that FFN providers receive at least minimum wage. However, if the per-child rate is higher than minimum wage, then the FFN provider should receive the per-child rate instead.
- **Ensure that increases in wages do not negatively impact FFN eligibility for means-tested state benefits.** Since FFN caregivers are often underpaid and low-income, many qualify for, and rely on, other state-sponsored, means-tested benefits, such as Medi-Cal and CalFresh. While



FFNs deserve a livable and just wage, many express concerns about how an increase in compensation could impact their eligibility for benefits they rely on, especially if the increase in wages is not enough to make up for the value of the benefits lost. Increases in FFN wages should not lead to a drastic cut of these benefits.

NEED FOR INCREASING FFNS' ACCESS TO SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES: LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES, PEER NETWORKING, AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

As with all other segments of the Early Learning and Care workforce, FFNs benefit from training, resources, and connecting with their peers. Support such as nutrition, health, and safety classes, learning opportunities, play groups, and mental health resources and support (for both providers and the children in their care) help FFNs as they care for young children. FFN caregivers that participate in [Early Edge's FFN Advisory Group](#) often share that they are interested in more opportunities to hone their expertise and connect with other FFNs.

However, these caregivers face many barriers to accessing services and resources that support their well-being and continuous growth in expertise as a child care provider. As the majority of FFN caregivers are license-exempt, they are not tapped into networks, such as Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies, that provide

caregivers with support services. As a result, most FFNs are unaware of, and do not have access to, resources that would support them in their caregiving.

Even for FFNs who are already engaged with these networks and organizations, resources and trainings can still be difficult to access due to cost, schedules, transportation, immigration status, or general lack of awareness that these resources exist. Furthermore, many FFNs do not think they qualify for these resources. Also, as many FFNs speak languages other than English, lack of language accessibility is another common barrier they experience when attempting to access these opportunities. While many organizations across the state now provide FFNs with support in Spanish, more language translation services and resources need to be adapted and created to support California's diverse populations.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVING FFNS' ACCESS TO SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES



- **Provide funding to support free and accessible resources, as well as learning and support opportunities for FFNs and increase the capacity of organizations that already serve and support FFNs.** The state should consider providing funds to local public, nonprofit, and community organizations that already work with FFNs to increase their capacity to make learning opportunities, resources, trainings, and other opportunities free and accessible to these providers. While California currently has the Child Care Initiative Project (CCIP), a training fund that aims to improve quality of care provided to young children in family care homes, CCIP is generally focused on increasing the number of licensed family child care providers. This is a great resource for FFNs who have an interest in pursuing licensure, but is limiting to FFN providers who would like to

participate in trainings and learning opportunities, but not necessarily achieve a license. To truly make these resources accessible to all FFNs, funds should be available to all types of FFN providers and be allowed to be used to: provide these caregivers with incentives and stipends to help compensate them for their participation and help cover the cost of transportation and child care, which are also barriers to participation. Funds should also help support language accessibility to ensure FFN caregivers of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds can participate in a language they understand and are comfortable speaking.

- **Provide funding to conduct outreach to FFNs who are not currently engaged with organizations that provide resources and support to FFNs, such as R&Rs, First 5 agencies, public libraries, and family resource centers.** Most FFNs are unaware of learning opportunities and resources that are available to support them and do not know where to find them. To increase the number of FFNs accessing these critical opportunities, it is necessary to invest in the organizational capacity of R&Rs and other organizations that provide FFN support services to increase outreach to these caregivers in their community.

There are multiple organizations currently doing this work successfully. Several First 5 agencies across California have funded opportunities for FFNs to receive coaching in quality Early Learning. Meanwhile, First 5 Yolo County has been successful in connecting

"As part of my participation I was connected and enrolled in other classes, something that I appreciate very much since sometimes I don't even realize that these programs exist. The Dual Language Learner (DLL) class was a very enriching experience for both me and my grandson's parents. We obtained a tablet where we have been able to download interactive, educational, and cultural games adapted to my grandson's age. We were also provided with a package of good and precious books...I never missed a class because for me it was something very valuable. There is always something new to learn and something to share; it helped me clear my doubts about the care I provide to my grandson."

—Maria, FFN Provider supported by First 5 Yolo County's IMPACT programming and DLL program

“A very important aspect of these workshops for me has been the participation of all the attendees, listening to their experiences, points of view, mistakes, ideas, it has helped me a lot. I have grown personally with all this, I have been able to evaluate myself and look at my strengths and weaknesses and work on them. One of my personal goals with all these workshops has been to be a better caregiver every day and to grow as a person.”

—Alejandra, FFN Provider supported by BANANAS

with a large number of FFNs through Family Resource Centers in the area. Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County provides no-cost training, resources, and 101 assistance for the FFNs in the community. First 5 Santa Clara County has uplifted the importance of FFN care as a funder of San José Public Library’s FFN Caregiver Support Network during its pilot year and continued expansion. In this program, FFNs get access to a range of services and become a part of the “QUALITY MATTERS...a STRONG START for kids” network, Santa Clara County’s local QRIS, high-quality Early Learning initiative. R&Rs like Oakland-based agency BANANAS and public libraries such as the San José, Santa Barbara, and Sacramento Public Libraries host regular play groups for FFNs.

Play groups are a critical channel for support organizations to conduct outreach and provide support services to FFNs. The FFNs that are engaged in support networks are often first connected through these groups. They bring the children they care for to a play group hosted by an R&R or public entity, such as a local library, which they likely heard about through word of mouth or local promotion via a flyer or social media. The play groups provide a great opportunity for FFNs to meet each other while they learn and practice strategies for supporting adult-child interaction and child development with the kids they care for in real time. The groups also often provide peer networking and mentoring opportunities for FFNs where participants can discuss challenges they may be facing with other caregivers in situations similar to theirs. As FFN caregivers are often isolated in their work, this is a huge opportunity for them to develop a support group they can turn to for advice and encouragement. The entities facilitating these play groups often use them as an

entry point for FFNs to come join other events and more formalized learning opportunities, as well as to help bring them into their networks in order to more consistently provide them with supportive resources as they are available.

- **Design a communications campaign that values the work of FFNs.** In connection with investing in the outreach efforts of existing support organizations, sharing the value of FFN care with the public and the providers themselves has the potential to impact the quality of care for children. A recognition campaign like this, which could be spearheaded by the state, CCPU, and organizations that support FFN providers, can improve the dynamic between FFNs and the children they care for by empowering these providers and making them feel valued in our society while raising awareness about the supports they need.
- **Provide different educational pathways that support and recognize the diversity of FFN care.** FFN caregivers are diverse, and therefore, so are their needs and desires for training and resources. It is important that, as the state begins to develop more training opportunities for FFNs, topics and modalities are informed directly by FFNs’ interests and needs. For example, First 5 agencies have noted FFNs’ interest in learning more about child development, such as positive behavior reinforcement and other trainings that look more like parenting education. A variety of opportunities should be available such as play groups, cafes, peer mentoring and networking sessions, online webinars, and training seminars. Another potential pathway for FFN care is licensure. Becoming licensed provides additional resources and supports for building business capacity for FFNs who are interested in pursuing that path.



“Briseyda is the youngest Associate Community Worker and she is a college student that volunteers with us. She has a younger sibling and neighborhood children that she cares for on occasion. She does not have children of her own but she is looking into a career working with children in some capacity. She wanted an opportunity to learn more about how she could be a better caregiver, but also she wanted to have more tools that she could use while she is volunteering with us during child supervision.”

–Sona Grover, Program Manager, Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County

CONCLUSION

Many California families rely on Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) providers to care for their children, including a significant number of families with infants and toddlers. The pandemic made it abundantly clear that FFNs are essential to a healthy child care system, as so many of these individuals stepped up for their communities to provide care to children of frontline workers.¹⁵ Now is the time to recognize and elevate the importance of this large group of providers for the essential work they do to support children and families. We must work with them to understand and better support their needs, so they can provide the best care to the next generation of Californians.

FFN providers currently need support on a number of levels in order to thrive in their work of supporting

our youngest learners. They need resources such as trainings, community groups, and mental health assistance. Fortunately, there are a number of programs which successfully support FFNs, and these should be scaled up to deliver resources to more providers. In addition, infrastructure must be built to make resource delivery successful, as FFNs currently face a number of barriers to access and participation. In addition to these forms of support, compensation must be addressed so providers make a sustainable living and children can continue to get the care they need. Implementing these recommendations is an opportunity for California to uplift FFNs in their daily work at a systemic level that supports this type of care, and to send a message that our state values the earliest years of learning and setting up our youngest Californians for success.

Since February 2021, Early Edge California’s Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Workgroup has brought together organizations that support FFNs across the state in order to propose policies to better support these providers in the critical work they do for California children and families. To achieve this, the FFN Workgroup set out to develop recommendations to implement elements of the State’s new Master Plan for Early Learning and Care (MPELC), focused on FFN providers. Early Edge thanks the workgroup members for their participation in this process. This policy brief was developed in collaboration with our co-authors Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, First 5 Santa Clara County, First 5 Yolo County, and the San José Public Library. Special thanks goes to BANANAS and First 5 Yuba County as well as Rita Baker, Buckley Bloom, Mikaela Chant, Gina Daleiden, Araceli Delgado, Sona Grover, Fawn Montagna, and Debra-lea Olazaba for their guidance on this brief’s recommendations. We also want to thank all the FFNs who provided first-hand accounts of their experiences through the Early Edge FFN Advisory Group and our collaborating agencies. Early Edge also thanks the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Heising-Simons Foundation for their continued support of our work to uplift California’s FFN providers.



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- ¹¹ <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/child-care-licensing/how-to-become-licensed/do-i-need-a-license>
- ¹² BANANAS (January 2022). "BANANAS Subsidized Child Care Program Provider Participation Manual."
- ¹³ National Women's Law Center (March 2018).
- ¹⁴ As stated in the [first CCPU contract](#), "Starting January 1, 2022, and through June 30, 2023, license-exempt family child care provider rates shall be increased from up to 70 percent of the licensed family daycare home rate established pursuant to the 75th percentile of the 2016 regional market rate survey, to 70 percent of the licensed family daycare home rate established pursuant to the 75th percentile of the 2018 regional market rate survey for that region or the regional market rate ceiling that existed in that region on December 31, 2017, whichever is greater, including hourly, daily, weekly, and monthly, for both full- and part-time reimbursement categories."
- ¹⁵ Early Edge California (October 2020).

Photos: San José Public Library (pages 1 and 5) and BANANAS (pages 3 and 6).

CONTACT US: info@earlyedgecalifornia.org

VISIT US: earlyedgecalifornia.org

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