

California Needs Caregivers: The Importance of Family, Friend, and Neighbor Child Care



What is Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care?

- FFN care is care provided by grandparents, aunts, uncles, extended family, neighbors, and friends which does not require a license. It is the predominant form of child care in California and the United States, especially for care of infants and toddlers. Grandmothers are the most common type of caregiver.
- FFN caregivers tend to reflect the demographics of the communities they serve and provide culturally and linguistically responsive, flexible, and more affordable care.
- FFN care may be either paid or unpaid. For parents providing pay, about two thirds have a fixed rate while others pay what they can.
- Care arrangements may fluctuate as a child ages, but many FFN caregivers remain active providers over the span of years. Among current users of grandparent care, for example, 60 percent of parents hoped the arrangement would last three or more additional years.

Who uses FFN care?

- It is estimated that a third to at least half of all children under 5, and nearly two out of every five children, ages 3 and under, are entrusted to the care of an FFN provider. FFN care is also used in combination with licensed arrangements.
- Black parents are most likely to use FFN care: 34 percent with children under age three, and 31 percent with children age three to five.
- Black and Latine parents with infants and toddlers were more likely to agree that their caregiver’s “cultural background” was very important in making their choice of child care.
- Parents who use FFN care have similar values when it comes to selecting care: for instance, three quarters of parents with a child, ages three to five, felt health and safety were “very important” in choosing child care. This was true of parents using FFN care and parents using licensed care.
- When parents don’t use FFN care, the most common reason is that it is not available to them (55 percent) and rarely because they prefer licensed care (22 percent).

How is California supporting FFN care?

- California's early care and education policy agenda focuses on licensed care. There is no statewide plan for supporting FFN caregivers. Due to its status as license-exempt, there can be a stigma that FFN care is not a high-quality or preferred form of care. By contrast, caregivers themselves are very confident in their abilities, provide more flexible wraparound support that exceeds what licensed caregivers can provide, and are often the preferred care for parents.
- Fortunately, California is one of the states that allows low-income families to use a child care subsidy to cover the cost of FFN care. In states like Wisconsin, meanwhile, parents are limited to licensed options. However, there are not enough subsidies available to support all low-income families who need them and it can be a challenging system, for families and providers alike, to navigate.
- FFN caregivers being paid with a subsidy are represented by Child Care Providers United, which bargains for better subsidy rates with the California Department of Social Services. Right now, subsidy rates for FFNs are very low, ranging around \$500 to \$1,000 per month for full-time care of one child.

Recommendations to Increase Support for FFN Care



Invest in community programs that FFN caregivers tend to frequent, such as playgroups, networking events, and training opportunities at public libraries and parks.



Adopt and train [community navigators](#) that can support FFN caregivers and families in being connective to supportive resources, such as training, subsidies, and licensing process support for those who are interested.



Ensure that new resources flow to all types of caregivers, not only school-based or only licensed ones. A key opportunity to do this is through subsidy rate reform.

This fact sheet was informed by the following research briefs by Early Edge California and the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment at the University of California, Berkeley.

- [2022 California Family, Friend, Neighbor \(FFN\), and Nanny Child Care Study](#) by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment
- [Increasing Access to Family, Friend, and Neighbor Caregiver Wages Through California's Child Care Subsidy System](#) by Early Edge California

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