

Early Childhood Stimulus Evaluation: *Spotlight on CCCAP Activities*

Background

Between 2021 and 2022, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) received over \$700 million in federal and state stimulus funding to strengthen and expand the early childhood (EC) sector in Colorado. CDEC is distributing stimulus funds between February 2022 and September 2024 based on feedback from over 2,300 child care providers, families, and other stakeholders.

CDEC is dedicated to evaluating the stimulus-funded activities to ensure the goals of the funds were met and to identify opportunities for ongoing learning, scalability, and sustainability. CDEC partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab) at the University of Denver to facilitate this complex work as the EC Evaluation Hub. The Colorado Lab is contracting with evaluation partners, as appropriate, to conduct high-quality evaluations of prioritized stimulus activities.

Evaluation of CCCAP Activities

Together with CDEC and EC experts, the Colorado Lab prioritized 18 activities - comprising about 90% of stimulus funds - that have significant potential for meaningful and actionable evaluation, including:

- **CCCAP Enrollment-Based Payments**
- **CCCAP Increased Absence Payments**
- **CCCAP Reimbursement Rate Increase**
- **CCCAP Reduced Co-Payments**
- **CCCAP Expanded Income Eligibility**

Absence and Enrollment-Based Payment and Reimbursement Rate activities target participating and eligible CCCAP providers to address revenue gaps so providers remain open for underserved families. Reduced Co-Payments and Expanded Income Eligibility activities target new and current CCCAP families to reduce financial hardship so families can better afford child care. Evaluation efforts include:

- Understanding county-level decisions and how programs were implemented, including outreach and participation.
- Tracking performance metrics such as trends in provider participation and satisfaction, provider and family financial outcomes, and CCCAP eligibility, availability, and enrollment.
- Unearthing challenges, success factors, and lessons learned to guide future investments.

The evaluation will include interviews with county administrators and families, surveys of CCCAP participating programs, and analyses of administrative data and CCCAP County Plans.

Evaluation Team

The Colorado Lab selected Brodsky Research & Consulting (BRC) to evaluate CCCAP-related stimulus-funded activities. BRC is founded by Dr. Andrew Brodsky, an EC policy researcher with a long history of working with the CCCAP and Universal Preschool Programs on market rate surveys and research to inform rate setting. He also leads the design and implementation of a cost-of-care calculator to inform policy, and the BRC team is well-positioned to ensure EC stimulus evaluation efforts are aligned and actionable with these broader efforts.

To ensure alignment, the Colorado Lab is also coordinating with BRC on their analysis related to the **CCCAP Alternative Methodology for Rate Setting** stimulus-funded activity.

This evaluation is being conducted on behalf of the State of Colorado Department of Early Childhood under the coordination of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab to build evidence for stimulus-funded early childhood activities.