Department of Public Welfare: Child Development

Under the program area of **Child Development**, the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) operates a variety of programs designed to provide quality, affordable child care services and other support intended to minimize developmental delay.

This program component represents approximately six percent of the department's General Fund budget, with funding for child care contributing as the largest cost driver.

Early Intervention Services

The department provides services and supports designed to help families with children up to age 3 years who have a developmental delay. Additional services for children age three through kindergarten are provided under the Department of Education. Under the **Early Intervention** appropriation in DPW, services include physical therapy, speech therapy, health services, family counseling, and family training. The department allocates funds to counties, which administer local early intervention programs, based on the prior year and special needs identified by counties for the current year. This program is an entitlement program, meaning that all children meeting the criteria must be served.

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the state also benefited from an increased federal medical assistance percentage match on eligible services. Also, under ARRA, additional money under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was made available to fund early intervention services. Due to the enhanced match and additional ARRA IDEA funds, the state appropriation for Early Intervention was able to be reduced in 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Child Care Programs

Pennsylvania provides funding assistance to eligible families who need **child care services** in order to hold sustainable employment. In addition, funding is provided to ensure quality early childhood programs in the commonwealth.

Child Care Assistance

Since 1996, the federal government has provided states with a block grant to operate welfare programs (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF). This is a flat dollar amount that is not adjusted for changes in caseload (the number of people receiving services) or inflation. Pennsylvania's TANF block grant amount of $719 million has not changed since TANF funds were first allocated to states in 1996. In order to receive TANF funds, states must spend some of their own funds on programs for needy families. This is known as the "maintenance of effort" (MOE) requirement. Also, as a result of the federal Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005, effective October 2006, states needed to meet more strict federal requirements regarding the work activities of families receiving TANF assistance.

Pennsylvania recognizes the importance of providing safe, affordable child care for families currently or recently enrolled in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, in order to help

families move from government dependence to self-sufficiency. Under the **Child Care Assistance** appropriation, the commonwealth uses state and federal funds to subsidize the cost of care for children whose parents are participating in employment, education or training activities.

The child care assistance appropriation traditionally has also included funding for the Early Learning Network (ELN). The ELN is Pennsylvania's electronic data system for gathering information on early childhood programs and children's development in those programs. The purpose of the ELN is to provide teachers with tools to improve children's progress and OCDEL with information for future program planning.

Funding for Child Care Assistance represents a little over two percent of DPW's General Fund budget.

Child Care Services

The **Child Care Services** appropriation provides subsidized child care to low-income working families on a sliding fee scale. Participation in the program is dependent on available funds. Since July 2006, the waiting list for subsidized child care has fluctuated between approximately 6,000 to 16,000 children.

Working families with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines could qualify for a subsidy. Families can remain in the program until their incomes reach 235 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.

A parent may choose any lawfully operating child care provider of his/her choice. This includes a center, a small family day care home, a group day care home or a relative or neighbor. Most families pay between $5 and $25 per week for child care, regardless of the number of children who receive care. In general, the family's annual co-payment cannot exceed 11 percent of annual income. However, families with incomes at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty guidelines pay no more than eight percent of annual income.

This appropriation also funds the Keystone STARS program; a comprehensive, voluntary, early learning quality improvement initiative that has received national recognition. This appropriation includes the T.E.A.C.H. initiative, a scholarship program to assist staff currently working in the early childhood field to attain a degree in early childhood education.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided additional funding through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDFBG) for states to supplement (not supplant) child care programming for low-income families. Under ARRA, Pennsylvania is set to receive nearly $60 million over three years (through 2011/12); to be divided throughout that span at the state's discretion. As part of this additional funding, ARRA specifically targeted some funds for child care quality improvement and infant/toddler quality improvement.

In order to receive the ARRA funds, state funding for child care services for low-income families must be equal to or greater than the amount of state funds appropriated at the time of ARRA's passage. This fulfills the non-supplantation requirement under ARRA.

Other Services for Children

Community Based Family Centers

The Community Based Family Centers appropriation in DPW funds 65 family centers in 29 counties. The centers are designed to offer a variety of community services to assist parents in improving their child rearing skills. Services provided may include: parental support and education programs; home visitation/home-based early childhood education; health care information; child development activities; accessibility to toy and resource libraries; and dissemination of information about related services in the community. Over the past several years, funding under this appropriation also has focused on a Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, Child Abuse Prevention Initiatives, and a Time-Limited Family Reunification Service Initiative. This program also includes the Parent-Child Home Program.

Nurse Family Partnership

Under the Nurse Family Partnership appropriation, funding is provided for an intensive and comprehensive home visitation program for first-time pregnant teens and young women, starting with prenatal care and continuing through the child's infancy. The program is designed to serve low-income, at-risk pregnant women expecting their first child. Long-term studies have found that such programs reduce child abuse, welfare use, arrests and substance abuse, while improving education and employment rates.

The federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-148) created a new program, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, and provided related funding. The law authorizes HHS to award grants to states for the purpose of establishing an early childhood home visitation program to promote the following: improvements in maternal and prenatal health; infant health; child health and development; parenting related to child development outcomes; and school readiness in child abuse, neglect and injuries. In addition, states must conduct the statewide needs assessment identifying at risk communities, to qualify as an eligible entity for this grant award.