

Module 1: Welcome to the Early Childhood Profession

Section A: State Agency Support and Regulation

Introduction

This module will provide an overview of the state agencies that are involved with early learning and child care centers in Arizona. State agencies have established authority and responsibilities that greatly impact the provision of child care. State agencies establish health and safety standards, inspect child care programs, administer federal and state programs, provide support services to child care centers, assist centers to improve the quality of care, and offer opportunities for professional development.

Employees of child care centers have a responsibility to understand what is required by each agency. In addition, child care professionals should have an understanding of the types of assistance and services that might be available to meet the needs of enrolled children and their families. It is important to be aware of the many ways to continuously improve the quality of care in your classroom and center. Finally, child care personnel are encouraged to understand the wide array of public programs and services that are available throughout the state and locally that support an individual's professional development.

Learning Objectives

After you complete this section you will be able to:

- Identify the state agency that regulates centers for health and safety.
- Name the department that provides assistance to vulnerable children and low income families and name some of their programs.
- Identify the agency that established the early learning standards and administers the child care food program.
- Name the state agency that provides funding to improve the quality of care in Arizona.

Guiding Your Learning

As you review this module, think about the wide variety of needs of children and families, particularly those that are disadvantaged or uniquely challenged. Consider the number of different agencies, varying eligibility requirements, and different types of programs and services and the challenges for families to navigate the system. Also, consider what might be helpful to improve the quality of care in your center.

Summary of State Agency Authority

The primary function of each state agency and the services they provide are contained in federal or state law, known as the statutes. These laws broadly define the agencies responsibilities and services. Each federal and state agency also has regulations that provide more specific information about how the programs work, who is eligible, and how to access services. Both the statutes and regulations are usually accessible online on each agency's web site. The state agency web sites also provide other valuable information on required forms, helpful checklists, available trainings, and other resources for centers, child care professionals, and parents.

State Agency Overview

There are four primary State agencies that are involved with child care centers. Two state agencies report to the Governor: The Department of Health Services (DHS) and the Department of Economic Security (DES). DHS is the regulatory agency and licenses centers and administers public health programs. DES operates numerous federal and state assistance programs. The Arizona Department of Education (ADE), administered by the elected Superintendent of Public Instruction, coordinates early childhood education programs and standards and operates the federal child care food program. These three agencies receive funding from the federal government and State Legislature. The fourth agency, First Things First (FTF) is overseen by the appointed Early Childhood Development and Health Board. FTF was established by a voter initiative and funding generated by a tax on tobacco products. The major roles and responsibilities of each agency as they relate to child care centers are summarized below.

Arizona Department of Health Services (DHS)

Bureau of Child Care Licensing – State law requires that anyone who cares for 5 or more children on a regular basis for payment of some kind must meet State licensing regulations. The two major categories of facilities that are licensed are child care centers (including public schools that provide child care) and group homes that care for children between the ages of 5-10. Licensing requirements help ensure that young children in formal early care and education programs experience safe, healthy, nurturing environments that foster their growth and development. DHS establishes the regulations and ensures that centers comply with a range of requirements including program administration, staffing, equipment, transportation, the physical plant, etc. Specific Bureau of Child Care licensing responsibilities include:

- Issues licenses
- Establishes and regularly reviews child care regulations and collects licensing fees
- Conducts unannounced inspections of child care facilities at least annually
- Posts inspection findings on the DHS web site
- Requires corrective action of deficiencies, enforces serious violations with potential of monetary fines
- May deny, suspend, or revoke licenses
- Takes complaints about unlicensed facilities and conducts investigations
- Provides assistance in becoming licensed and offers training

DHS EMPOWER – The fee for a three year child care center license is \$2,000 for centers with a capacity to serve 59 or fewer children and \$7,900 for centers that may serve 60 or more children. To help offset the cost of licensing and to promote best practices, DHS has established a voluntary program, EMPOWER, which reduces the licensing fee by 50%. Virtually all child care centers participate in EMPOWER. EMPOWER centers are expected to meet 10 standards that promote physical activity, sun safety, nutritious meals, oral health, and prevention of tobacco use. DHS provides materials and technical assistance to assist centers in meeting the standards.

Public Health and Mental Health – DHS also operates a wide of disease prevention, diagnostic, and treatment programs including the Immunization program, Newborn screening, the Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children (WIC), and a wide range of Behavioral Health and substance abuse treatment programs.

Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES)

Child Care Subsidy – For decades, Arizona has assisted eligible families with a portion of the cost of child care through the DES Child Care Subsidy. Assistance is provided to three categories of families:

- CPS and foster care related,
- Receiving TANF Cash Assistance (welfare) and those Transitioning to work
- Low income working families struggling to support their children and stay off welfare

For low income working families below 165% of the federal poverty level (e.g \$2,626 monthly for a family of three) who are eligible and receiving child care assistance, DES makes a partial monthly payment and the parents are required to make co-payments based on their ability to pay. DES payments are among the lowest in the country and eligible parents have to pay a significant portion of their income for co-payments.

In February 2009 the State began turning away all eligible low income working families by placing them on a “waiting list”. Many families have been on the DES waiting list for child care assistance for a long time. Nevertheless, it is important for all potentially eligible families to apply. CPS and welfare-related child care are considered mandatory and not subject to the waiting list.

Child Welfare Programs – DES operates the range of programs to protect children and provide stable and nurturing permanent families. These programs include Child Protective Services, family support, foster care, and adoption services.

Low Income Assistance and other programs - DES determines eligibility for the cash assistance program for families with children (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly known as Food Stamps), Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System or AHCCCS, and assists with child support enforcement. DES contracts for a number of other assistance programs (domestic violence, hunger, homeless, energy assistance, etc.). DES also administers the Division of Developmental Disabilities, Unemployment Insurance, and Workforce and Rehabilitation services.

Arizona Department of Education (ADE)

Food Program - ADE operates the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The CACFP provides funding for food that meets nutritional standards. Non-profit centers and centers with at least 25% of the children from low income families are eligible for food program payments that support nutritional meals.

Early Childhood - ADE has an Early Childhood unit that coordinates state funded preschool programs and establishes Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines, Early Learning Standards (preschool), and overall early childhood program guidelines. The Early Childhood Unit provides information on children's assessments and training for staff working in early childhood facilities.

First Things First (FTF)

FTF Structure – FTF operates programs statewide and locally. The Early Childhood Development and Health Board oversee FTF and its 31 regional councils that plan for the majority of FTF funds. The councils are made up of 11 volunteers representing a variety of interested groups (child care, health care, parents, community representatives, etc.) and meet regularly. The councils conduct needs assessments and determine spending priorities for the majority of FTF funds. Below are the major FTF programs that impact child care centers.

FTF Quality Improvement – Quality First is the FTF Quality Rating and Improvement System. Quality First is a voluntary quality improvement program that provides coaching, quality assessments using nationally recognized tools, financial incentives, and star ratings. 5 stars is considered by FTF to be the highest level of quality. Centers that participate in Quality First are eligible to receive scholarships that cover a portion of the cost of care for families with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level. The number of scholarships a center receives is based on the size of the center, number of stars, and the region. There are not sufficient funds to allow most centers to participate in Quality First and FTF maintains a waiting list.

FTF Professional Development TEACH and Professional REWARDS provide assistance with the cost of college and provide incentives and bonuses for educational attainment.

Parent Support and Health Programs - FTF funds programs that assist parents with children ages 0-5, including a help line and funds health care programs in many regions.

State Agency Summary

With four primary state agencies that interact with child care centers and hundreds of programs that are designed to assist families and serve children, a summary does not adequately describe all the options that are available. Child care personnel are encouraged to visit state agency web sites regularly, bookmark the most helpful sites, and provide parents with information about services and assistance on how they may explore the supports that may be available.

Applying Your Knowledge

How does the information presented in this module affect your work with young children?

59% of Arizona children under age 6 live in households in which a single parent works or both parents work. Just under 60% of all children live in low income households (with 24% below the federal poverty level). Many of these families struggle to make ends meet, experience the stress of contending with the demands of parenting, work, and paying the bills. Children's living environments have a profound effect on their behavior. As early childhood education professionals you will often come into contact with parents who need, or will ask for assistance. Understanding the complex and confusing array of state and local services, however limited they are, is an important part of your job. A referral to a public or community agency can provide needed services to a family, improve the child's home environment, and positively impact the child's health and development. By working as partners with families beyond the care provided to their children during the day, child care further supports children's optimal development.

Check Your Understanding and complete Worksheet Module 1: Section A

- ✓ Find and review your center's DHS Child Care facility license.
- ✓ If your center takes DES children, review the child care subsidy authorizations.
- ✓ If your center participates in the CACFP, review the program requirements with your Director.
- ✓ Is your center enrolled in Quality First or receiving any other First Things First funded services?

Resources

Printable Resources:

Empower: 10 Ways to Empower Children to Live Healthy Lives

<http://www.azdhs.gov/empowerpack/documents/10-ways-to-empower-children.pdf>

Websites:

Department of Health Services (DHS) www.azdhs.gov

Bureau of Child Care Licensing - <http://www.azdhs.gov/als/childcare/index.htm> this site also provides information on Empower, child care forms, training videos, and rules.

Public Health - <http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/index.htm>

Department of Economic Security (DES) – www.azdes.gov

Child Care Page - <https://www.azdes.gov/main.aspx?menu=128&id=2670> this page contains information and forms for parents and providers.

Arizona Department of Education (ADE) - www.azed.gov

Early Childhood Resources - <http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/2011/11/03/resources-and-publications>

Early Learning Standards - <http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/files/2012/02/earlylearningstandards.pdf>

Program Guidelines - <http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/files/2011/10/program-guidelines-complete.pdf>

Infant Toddler Guidelines –

http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/files/2012/10/az_infant_toddler_guidelines_complete-2.pdf

First Things First (FTF) –

www.azftf.gov Enter your zip code to find out what regional council you are in. From the regional council page you can find out when monthly meetings are scheduled.

Quality First, Child Care Scholarships and Pre-K Scholarships – Detailed information

<http://www.azftf.gov/Pages/WebMain.aspx?PageId=707AFAB1DD2A45799DAA2BD13F42D4C1&GoalArea=10>

T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship – <http://www.asccaz.org/teachaz.htm>

Professional REWARD\$ - <http://www.azftfwards.org/>

The Arizona Partnership for Immunization (TAPI) - <http://www.whylimmunize.org> Information on immunizations, schedules and where to go for shots.

Module 1-Section A Worksheet

Identify the state agency that regulates centers for health and safety:

Name the department that provides assistance to vulnerable children and low income families and name some of their programs:

Identify the agency that established the early learning standards and administers the child care food program. Name the state agency that provides funding to improve the quality of care in child care:

Name the state agency that provides funding to improve the quality of care in Arizona.
