



# Strengthening Coordinated Entry to End Family Homelessness: Partnering with Early Care and Education Providers

In *Home, Together*, the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, we focus on strategies to ensure that homelessness is a rare, brief, and one-time experience. To achieve that goal, national, state, and local partners must work across sectors to build a coordinated community response that addresses the strengths and needs of individuals and families.

This fact sheet, part of a series that focuses on recommendations from the [Policy Statement on Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing and At Risk of Homelessness](#), is designed to strengthen collaboration between housing and homelessness services providers and early care and education (ECE) providers including Head Start, Early Head Start, child care programs, and home visiting programs. It provides strategies for local Continuums of Care (CoC) to facilitate partnerships and coordination to ensure the expertise of ECE providers is incorporated into the design and implementation of local coordinated entry processes.

## How can housing and homelessness service providers engage ECE providers in coordinated entry processes?

Coordinated entry looks different in every community; therefore, the ways in which ECE programs and systems integrate with their local coordinated entry process will look different, as well. Effective [coordinated entry processes](#) are informed by a comprehensive view of community resources, operations, and protocols from all stakeholders. ECE and housing and homelessness service providers play an important role in system-level and community-wide discussions to build shared understanding of their systems and to promote collaboration and streamlined referral and coordination of quality services.

Specific strategies for the CoC to engage ECE partners include:

- Identifying, inviting, and encouraging ECE providers to become members of, and active participants in, the [local CoC](#).
- Briefing community partners on the overall purpose of coordinated entry and the types of referrals that a family experiencing homelessness might receive if they go through the process. This can include:
  - Staff from local hospitals and birthing centers, as well as obstetricians and pediatric primary care providers
  - Child care agencies and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] Part B and Part C programs that include early intervention specialists and early childhood special educators
  - ECE providers, [maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting programs](#), and McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons in schools

## What role can ECE providers play in coordinated entry screening and assessment processes?

CoCs should actively engage ECE providers in the design and implementation of coordinated entry screening, particularly to determine the most appropriate access points and screening and assessment tools for families with young children. Based on input from ECE providers and experts, CoCs may add or rephrase assessment questions tailored to families with pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and young children. This level of engagement can help strengthen the quality of information the community receives from families in order to more quickly connect them to permanent housing opportunities, as well as the services and supports available to meet their unique household needs.

CoCs can also work with ECE providers to develop direct referrals to partner agencies that can provide more detailed developmental evaluations and assessments later in the coordinated entry process.

Communities should consider further strengthening coordinated entry screening and assessment by:

- Integrating staff who are trained to screen for children’s health, developmental, social-emotional, and behavioral health needs into the coordinated entry process to quickly connect children to needed resources.
- Consulting and partnering with staff to design and implement family assessment processes that are trauma-informed to assure that parents’ and young children’s mental health needs are supported and that those who have experienced trauma are not re-traumatized during the screening and assessment process. For example: providing a physical space that is welcoming and family-friendly; developing local data-sharing agreements to reduce burden on families; and leveraging centralized intake to efficiently assess and refer families to a range of supports.

### A Note About Language

ECE providers use the term “**screening**” when referring to the process of testing children in basic health and developmental areas to identify factors (e.g., housing instability and homelessness) that may interfere with a child’s learning, growth, and development.

“**Assessment**” refers to processes that gather and provide educators, parents, and families with critical information over time about children’s learning, growth, and development. Assessments help inform a determination of what assistance and services might be needed to address child health and development.

## How can you invite ECE providers to inform local prioritization processes?

Coordinated entry aims to ensure that people experiencing homelessness with the highest service needs and highest vulnerability are prioritized for housing and services. CoCs should engage ECE providers to inform the prioritization process, particularly in relation to the developmental, health, and safety needs of infants and young children, and the impact of homelessness on their trajectory in those three areas. CoCs can do this by:

- Actively engaging ECE providers in the decision-making process concerning coordinated entry prioritization criteria, leveraging their expertise in the unique vulnerabilities and needs of pregnant women and families with infants, toddlers, and young children.
- Working with ECE providers to determine what factors are most important in prioritizing limited housing and service resource for families as part of the current community prioritization process.

## How can CoCs and ECE providers develop two-way referral processes?

Coordinated entry processes are designed to refer individuals and families to appropriate and available housing and service interventions as quickly as possible. Each early childhood program or system will connect differently with coordinated entry depending on local factors, but communities should clearly define how families with young children who attend ECE programs will connect to coordinated entry when appropriate and how families who present directly to a coordinated entry access point will be connected to early childhood supports when appropriate. Strategies to develop two-way referrals include:

- Collecting information about enrollment in ECE programs through a CoC's Homeless Management Information System and making referrals to ECE programs, including Head Start and child care supports, IDEA services if there is a developmental concern, and home visiting if appropriate and available. CoCs and ECE programs should collaborate to identify a process that ensures appropriate questions are asked early in the process, and that connections to ECE programs are made as quickly as possible when needed.
- Working with ECE providers to help CoC programs better understand eligibility requirements for early childhood programs and which of the programs prioritize children and families experiencing homelessness<sup>1</sup>, identifying processes for making referrals from coordinated entry when appropriate, and training local housing providers on eligibility requirements to enable referrals as needed.

## Where can CoCs learn more about ECE programs and local points of contact?

To learn more, visit:

- [Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center](#) to learn more about the federal Head Start program
- [Head Start Locator](#) to find Head Start and Early Head Start program locations in specific communities
- Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting [Program state fact sheets](#) to learn about state and territory home visiting programs
- Listing of [Tribal Home Visiting grantees](#)
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs' [IDEA website](#) for the [list of State Part C Coordinators](#) and [State Directors of Special Education](#)
- Local IDEA Child Find offices
- [Child Care Aware](#), an organization that partners with the Office of Child Care to provide resources and information to parents with children in child care or who are seeking child care

In addition, for information on public preschool and other school district services for young children experiencing homelessness, CoCs can contact their [McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth State Coordinators](#) and school district homeless liaisons.

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<sup>1</sup> Head Start, CCDF, Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, IDEA Part C and Part B, section 619; and Title I, Part A of the ESEA all prioritize children and families experiencing homelessness.