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**Early Childhood  
and Child Care  
Study**

**Profile of Participants  
in the CACFP:  
Final Report  
Volume I  
*Executive Summary***

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## *Executive Summary*

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This report presents findings from the Early Childhood and Child Care Study, a study carried out by Abt Associates Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, under contract to the Food and Consumer Service (FCS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The study describes the institutions and children that participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). It also describes the nutrient content of meals and snacks offered under the program and the contribution of CACFP meals and snacks to the daily energy and nutrient needs of participating children. Information for the study was collected from nationally representative samples of sponsoring agencies, participating child care sites, and children. Data for the study were collected between January and June, 1995.

This is the first of two volumes of the final study report. This volume provides a descriptive profile of child care sites participating in the CACFP and the children receiving care in those sites. Volume II (a separate document) focuses on the nutrient content of meals and snacks offered by participating child care sites and the meals and snacks consumed by children receiving child care in those sites.

### **THE CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM**

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a Federal program that provides meals and snacks in child and adult day care facilities. The child care component of the CACFP provides Federal funds for meals and snacks served to children in nonresidential day care facilities. These include family and group day care homes (homes), Head Start centers, and some child care centers. In fiscal year 1995, the program served an average of 2.3 million children daily at a cost of \$1.5 billion. Forty-two percent of these children were served through homes; 58 percent through centers.

## PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

### CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

- **Most of the children participating in the CACFP are preschoolers between the ages of three and five.** Virtually all children (99%) in Head Start centers are preschoolers. However, preschoolers account for 42 percent of the children enrolled in homes and 66 percent in child care centers.
- **The racial/ethnic makeup of children in homes is quite different from that of centers.** Children in homes are mostly white with minorities accounting for only 17 percent of the children enrolled. Blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities are more heavily represented in Head Start centers, where they account for 63 percent of children enrolled, and child care centers, where they account for approximately 50 percent of the children enrolled.
- **Children in homes tend to come from households with higher incomes than children in centers.** The median family income of children in homes is \$40,484, compared with \$10,433 in Head Start centers and \$24,022 in child care centers. Seventy-eight percent of the children in homes are from families with incomes above 185 percent of the poverty threshold. By contrast, only 8 percent of children in Head Start centers and 47 percent of children in child care centers are from families with incomes above this threshold.
- **Most children are in care at least five hours per day.** On average, children in homes and child care centers are in care about seven hours per day. As one would expect, given the part-day nature of the Head Start program, Head Start children are in care fewer hours—an average of five hours per day.
- **The amount of time children spend in care is reflected in the types of meals and snacks received while in care.** Nearly all children in care eight or more hours per day receive lunch while in care. In homes and child care centers, children in care less than eight hours per day are much less likely to get lunch in care. However, children in Head Start centers get lunch in care regardless of the amount of time spent in care each day.

Most children in care eight or more hours per day also receive breakfast while in care. Part-day children are considerably less likely to receive breakfast while in care. While fewer part-day than full-day Head Start children receive breakfast while in care, a large proportion (71%) of part-day Head Start children get breakfast in care.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMES AND CENTERS

### *Family Day Care Homes*

- **Homes enroll an average of eight children, including the providers' own children.** Adjusting for absenteeism, an average of seven enrolled children are in care on a daily basis.
- **The typical home provides care 11 hours per day, five days per week.**
- **Homes serve children of all ages.** Most homes serve toddlers and preschoolers, and about half serve school-age children (54%) and infants (43%).
- **Parent fees are a major source of funding for participating homes.** More than 90 percent of homes serve some children who are not receiving government subsidies, while less than half (44%) serve some children receiving child care subsidies. The average hourly fee to parents for full-time care is \$1.90.
- **The most commonly served meals in homes are breakfast (81%), lunch (88%), and afternoon snack (88%).** The most common meal combinations served in homes are breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack (31%) and breakfast, morning snack, lunch, and afternoon snack (29%).
- **Family day care providers receive some training from sponsoring agencies in a broad range of nutrition topics either in formal training sessions or as part of monitoring visits.** Nearly all providers (90%) receive training in menu planning and the types and amounts of food to serve. About four out of five receive training on the nutrient content of foods (84%) and nutrition education for children (78%).

Providers also receive training from their sponsors on a broad range of administrative topics. Most often, providers receive training from their sponsors on CACF meal-counting procedures (86%) and food safety and sanitation (82%).

- **Monitoring visits are an important source of training.** Relatively few homes receive training only during formal training sessions. For most topics, providers receive training only during monitoring visits, or during both training sessions and monitoring visits. While much training is received as part of monitoring visits, 75 percent of home providers attended one or more formal training sessions in the year prior to the study.

- **Many home providers are relatively low-income women for whom child care is a major source of household income.** Child care income accounts for 43 percent of the median provider's household income. However, the CACFP accounts for a relatively small proportion (14%) of the average provider's child care income.

Nearly 40 percent of home providers have household incomes that are less than or equal to 185 percent of the poverty level. For these low-income providers, child care accounts for a more substantial portion (55%) of total household income.

### *Head Start and Child Care Centers*

- **Head Start centers are on average somewhat smaller than child care centers.** The average Head Start center enrolls 60 children compared to an average of 70 for child care centers. However, after adjusting for absenteeism, Head Start centers and child care centers are about the same size. Average daily attendance is 53 for Head Start centers and 57 for child care centers.
- **Child care centers cater to parents' work schedules.** Child care centers are open an average of 10 hours per day, five days per week. Head Start centers are usually open fewer hours per day and fewer days per week than child care centers. The average Head Start center is open about eight hours a day. Nearly one third (31%) are open fewer than five days a week.
- **While Head Start programs serve only preschoolers, some Head Start centers serve toddlers in their day care or extended-day components.** Very few Head Start centers (2%) serve infants or school-age children. Child care centers serve children of all ages. Most child care centers serve preschoolers and toddlers, and half serve school-age children. One-third of child care centers serve infants.
- **Nearly three-quarters (71%) of child care centers serve both fee-paying and subsidized children.** Only 11 percent serve just fee-paying children, and only 18 percent serve just subsidized children. The average hourly fee for full-time unsubsidized care is \$1.98.
- **As in the case of homes, breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack are the most common meals served in centers.** The most common meal combination is breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack, present in 52 percent of Head Start centers and 40 percent of child care centers.

- **Food preparers/menu planners in centers often receive training on nutrition-related topics and/or topics related to the administration of the CACFP.** Nearly all Head Start center food preparers/menu planners (97%) and 82 percent of child care center food preparers/menu planners received some nutrition-related training during the last year. The most common topic was the type and amount of food to serve. Similarly, nearly all food preparers/menu planners in Head Start centers (97%) and child care centers (84%) received some training on administrative topics. The most common topic was CACFP meal-counting procedures.

#### **CHARACTERISTICS OF SPONSORING AGENCIES**

- **Family day care sponsors and center sponsors differ greatly in terms of the number of sites that operate under their aegis.** The median number of homes sponsored by FDCH sponsors is 54. By contrast, the median number of Head Start centers sponsored by Head Start sponsors is seven, and the median number of child care centers sponsored by child care center sponsors is only two. Sponsoring agencies, however, often sponsor more than one type of program.
- **There are many types of agencies that sponsor homes and centers for the CACFP.** Most often, however, the sponsoring institution is a public or private social service agency. More than half (55%) of FDCH sponsors, 43 percent of Head Start sponsors, and 33 percent of child care center sponsors are social service agencies.
- **CACFP administrative cost reimbursements are an important source of revenue for FDCH sponsors.** On average, FDCH sponsors derive 53 percent of their revenue from CACFP administrative cost reimbursements. Center sponsors do not receive separate reimbursements for their administrative costs.
- **Most sponsors provide in-service training to the homes and centers they sponsor.** Most (82%) FDCH sponsors provide such training to the homes they sponsor. Similarly, 81 percent of Head Start sponsors and 78 percent of child care center sponsors provide such training to food preparers/menu planners in the centers they sponsor. Center sponsors also provide in-service training to center staff and administrative staff.

- **Sponsoring agencies conduct more monitoring visits to homes and centers than called for in the CACFP regulations.** Sponsors are required to conduct at least three monitoring visits to each home and center annually. Family day care sponsors conduct an average of 10 visits each year to the homes they sponsor, with the average visit lasting about one hour. Head Start sponsors conduct an average of 11 visits per year to each of their centers, with each visit lasting about two hours. Child care center sponsors also conduct an average of 11 visits per year to each of their centers, with the average visit lasting about one hour.