

Invest in Early Care and Education to Build Delaware’s Healthcare Workforce of Today and Tomorrow

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As leaders behind a historic business-focused college with a 90% placement rate after graduation and a development company that has reshaped Delaware for generations—we know that the health of Delaware’s population is a critical factor for long-term success. We see the impacts of the workforce shortages on our students, colleagues, and clients. And, we know the health care workforce faces significant challenges, with more than a quarter of Delawareans living in a federally designated health professional shortage area.

One strategy we know is key to attracting and retaining this workforce is quality, affordable child care.

Without access to care, parents and caregivers can’t work or further their education and career. It’s as simple as that.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation found that 13 percent of Delaware’s children had a family member who quit, changed, or refused a job due to difficulty finding and affording child care.¹ Today in Delaware, child care costs more than the average mortgage payment and more than the cost of in-state college tuition. These factors hit our local workforce hard. It often makes more financial sense for a parent to stay home with their young child than to further their career. The resulting challenges to families and employers cost Delaware \$415 million in lost earnings, productivity, and tax revenue each year.

The Delaware Business Roundtable recently released the 2024 Investment Agenda, designed to set the direction for the state leaders elected this fall.² The Agenda recommends early care and education as a critical long-term investment for the state:

“Delaware must implement strategies to stabilize and expand access to and affordability of early childhood education.”

One immediate solution, as the Investment Agenda notes, would be to increase income thresholds so more families can benefit from state supported programs. Our neighboring states set family eligibility levels much higher than Delaware (for example, Pennsylvania covers families up to 300% of the federal poverty level, while Delaware only goes up to 200%).

The Agenda notes “a compelling need to invest in this space,” as six out of seven young children in Delaware are unable to access public early childhood education. It also recommends important investments in the early educator workforce and in quality improvement initiatives.

The long-term nature of this investment is critical to the future workforce. Without quality child care, students are less likely to enter kindergarten ready and then less likely to hit other important milestones such as third grade reading, eighth grade math, high school completion, and earning postsecondary credentials. This situation directly impacts the workforce as failure to meet critical milestones along the way to adulthood results in a less-capable workforce. Quality child care is a key pillar of Delaware’s economic future and long-term health.

Delaware is a small state that knows how to work together. If we can work together to solve child care for families, we will strengthen our economy, workforce, and our communities.

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References

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2. Roundtable, D. B. (2024). Delaware investment agenda. Retrieved from <https://www.dbrt.org/delaware-investment-agenda>

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