



# Early Care and Education Annual Report

Federal Fiscal Year 2025

October 2024-September 2025

Required by:

34-B §15011; PL 2021, c. 679

Submitted by:

Maine Department of Health and Human  
Services Office of Child and Family Services

## INTRODUCTION

The Office of Child and Family Services' (OCFS) Early Care and Education (ECE) Division is focused on ensuring quality early childhood services with an inclusive, equitable, and data-informed approach within this strategic framework:

- **Increasing Access to Quality Services, Care, and Education:** The Early Care and Education Division improves access to quality care, education, and preventative and early intervention services for young children and their families.
- **Supporting the Early Care and Education Workforce:** The Early Care and Education Division engages in workforce development through compensation initiatives, training, technical assistance, and access to post-secondary education to support a strong and stable ECE workforce.
- **Promoting Family Empowerment and Choice:** The Early Care and Education Division partners with parents and families in culturally and linguistically responsive ways, supporting their ability to choose from services and settings that best meet the needs of their children.
- **Enhancing Collaboration, Coordination, and Transparency:** The Early Care and Education Division coordinates policies, practices, and systems through collaboration with state offices and agencies, community organizations and groups, and early childhood professionals and families.

## INCREASING ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES, CARE, AND EDUCATION

### Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP)

A new online child care management system was rolled out to support the new payment practices on May 19, 2025. This online management system, called Baxter, moved the CCAP application online for both families and providers. Providers have access to their child care licensing information in the system.



CCAP staff developed and implemented a strategic change management plan to support both providers and families to understand the policy changes to the program, as well as the new online management system. Efforts included:

- Regular “Baxter Buzz” communications to stakeholders and providers to share updates, information and instruction on what to expect with the rollout of Baxter.
- Official memos detailing rule changes and rollout dates.
- Instructional Webinars.
- Public feedback sessions for families and providers to share thoughts and ideas on both the new CCAP rules as well as the new online management system.
- One-on-one technical assistance with the rollout of Baxter to support first-time users to successfully engage with the new system.

In 2025, there were several changes made to Maine’s Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) through the rulemaking process in order to come into compliance with Federal Rule changes implemented in April 2024. These changes were implemented through Emergency and then Final State Rulemaking on 5/19/2025 and 8/18/2025 respectively, and included:

- Paying providers prospectively, ahead of the week of service, as opposed to reimbursing for services already completed. This payment practice matches how families pay for child care.
- Paying providers by enrollment of children, as opposed to paying based on the daily attendance of each child in child care. This payment practice also matches how families pay for child care.
- Providers receiving payment at the state child care market rate, as opposed to paying whichever is

lower, the state rate or what the provider is charging private pay families.

- Parent co-payments that are capped at no more than 7 percent of household income for families at 85 percent or less of the State Median Income (SMI) and no more than 10 percent of household income for families between 85- and 125 percent SMI. Any family with an income under 30 percent SMI now has their co-payment waived.

While new policies and systems increased access and ease for providers and families, the State cost to provide child care subsidies increased as a result of some of these changes. Accordingly, the CCAP implemented a waitlist on November 30, 2025. New applicants were placed on the waitlist and organized into priority categories. The first families that come off the waitlist are in the highest priority category (Priority 1), which includes:

- Families with income under 30 percent of the State Median Income
- Children experiencing homelessness
- Children with special needs.

As of September 30, 2025, there were approximately 1200 children from about 846 families on the CCAP waitlist. CCAP staff contacted families of 166 Priority 1 children to move them off the waitlist between March and September 2025, and 105 of those children received CCAP awards. (61 of the children no longer needed care, were no longer eligible, or their family did not respond to outreach from CCAP staff). In August 2025, a team from the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care visited Maine and conducted an on-site monitoring visit to examine CCDF activities related to both the Child Care Affordability Program and Child Care Licensing. They monitored topics related to CCAP eligibility, Equal Access to Care for Families, Health and Safety and Program Integrity. Initial feedback from OCC officials was positive, and the final report confirms OCFS is in full compliance.

### Child Care Licensing

OCFS’ Child Care Licensing team continues to support the development of new programs, as well as conducting inspections and investigations with existing programs to ensure compliance with licensing requirements. To the right is data on the number of licensed child care providers statewide at the end of FFY25 (September 2025). There were 49 less child care facilities at the end of September 2025 than one year prior, in October 2024. Maine had the same number of family child care providers in September 2025 as October 2024. The national trend in family child care has been a net loss in programs each year for many years. Investments in Maine, like the Child Care Infrastructure Grants, have helped to stop this downward trend and we have retained family child care capacity this past year.

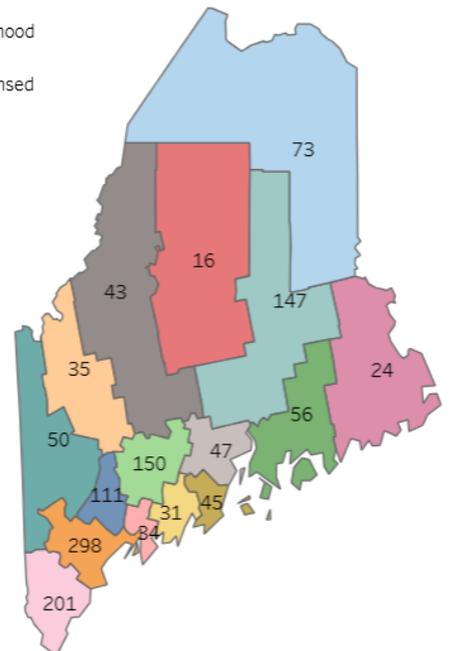
#### Licensed Providers

The goal of the Department is to provide early childhood education services in a safe, healthy and secure environment. This report shows the number of licensed providers by type, Rising Star rating and county.

#### Point in Time Data

#### State Totals

Star Rating	CHILD CARE FACILITY	FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDER
2 Stars	469	558
3 Stars	66	36
4 Stars	60	41
5 Stars	122	9
Grand Total	717	644



### Child Care Infrastructure Grants (CCIG)

Governor Mills designated \$15 million of federal funding in the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan to establish a program that provides Infrastructure Grants to current child care programs to expand capacity, as well as to individuals seeking to establish new child care programs. Examples of allowable uses of the funding included purchase or renovation of a building, construction or renovation of a space, purchasing educational materials and furniture, and creating outdoor learning spaces. During FFY25, CCIG staff at the Department have been authorizing final liquidation of the awards as programs meet final milestones for building and expanding child care capacity through this grant. Roughly \$3.4 million has been liquidated to programs in FFY25 as they reach award milestones. The licensed capacity for slots for children in licensed child care programs in Maine at the end of September 2025 was 49,159 slots compared to 49,238 slots at the end of September 2024. Due to child care program closures in 2025, the overall number of licensed child care slots remained relatively stable over the past year. CCIG is one of the resources that mitigated the possibility of more closures, supported the stability of the sector, and helped to keep child care available in Maine for families that need care.

### Support for Head Start

Head Start programs support children's growth from birth to age 5 through services centered on early learning and development, health, and family well-being. Head Start staff actively engage parents, recognizing family participation throughout the program as key to strong child outcomes.



Maine contracts with 10 Head Start grantees with state funds supporting increased access for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. OCFS oversees \$6.1 million in state Head Start funds and collaborates closely with the Head Start Collaboration Office at the Maine Department of Education. Over 700 children and families are supported by these funds. Maine Head Start Programs continue to exceed national Head Start Data related to the Preschool Classroom Scoring Assessment System (CLASS).

### ECCP® transitions to ECE Consultation for ME

Maine's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) program was established in Maine following the passage of Public Law 2019, Ch. 481, *An Act to Promote Social and Emotional Learning and Development for Young Children*. In 2021, Maine adopted ECCP®, an evidence-based model developed in Connecticut. Initial pilot sites launched in January 2021, expanding statewide by January 2023.



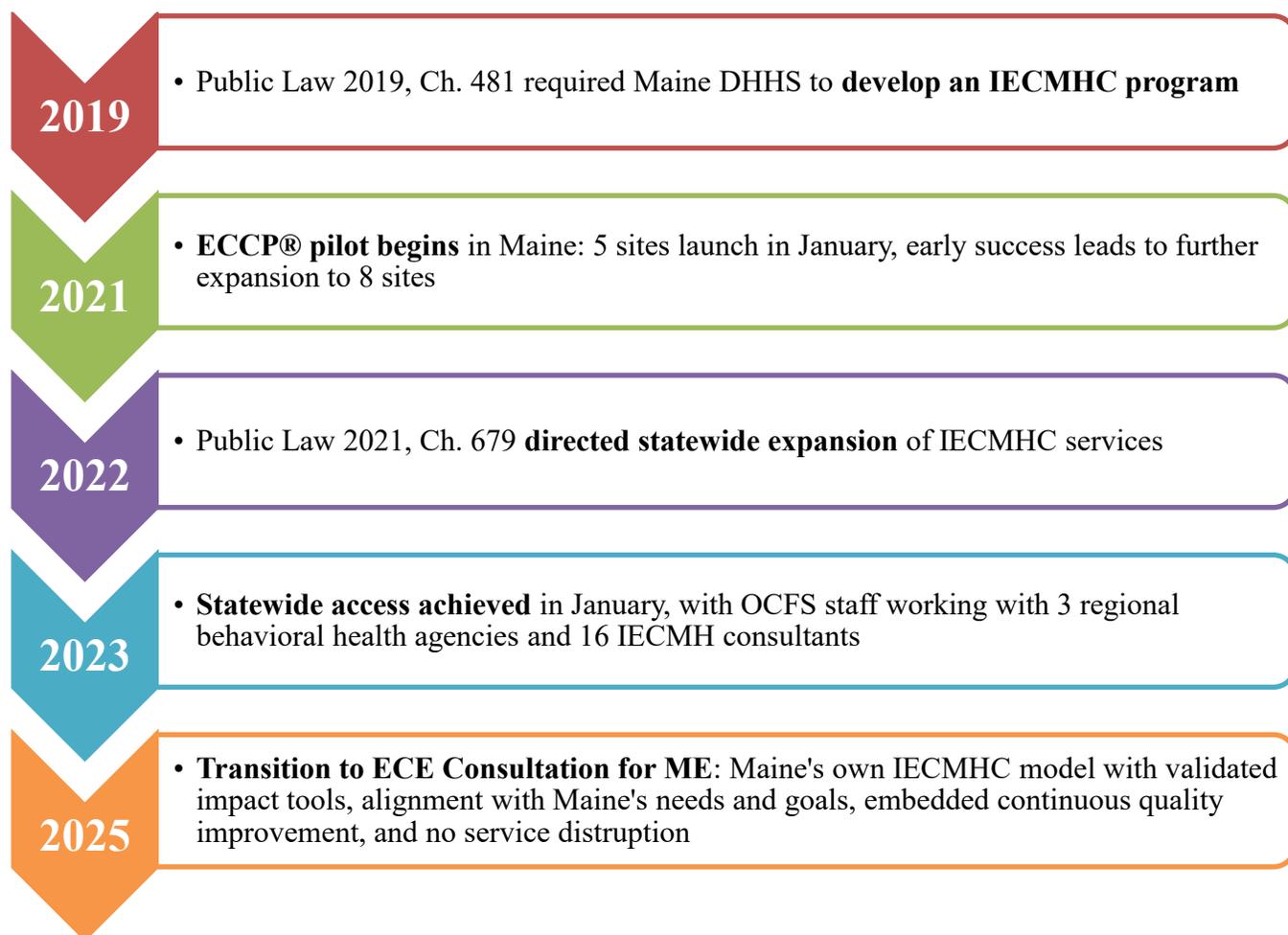
With a goal to build a sustainable and Maine-specific model, OCFS transitioned to ECE Consultation for ME in July 2025. The new model offers cost savings to the state and is designed to be culturally and contextually aligned with Maine's early childhood system. Grounded in evidence-based practices and supported by embedded continuous quality improvement processes, ECE Consultation for ME is positioned to sustain and enhance mental health supports for children ages 0–8 across licensed child care, Head Start, public Pre-K, and out-of-school programs.

### **Key elements of the 2025 transition included:**

- Retaining experienced consultants and maintaining partnerships with Maine mental health agencies
- Continued use of validated assessment tools to ensure data integrity
- Transferring service and outcome data to an interim data collection system

- Development, training, and orientation to the new model
- Service continuity protocols ensuring clear transition procedures and communication materials
- No disruption in services to providers, children, or families

### Development of Maine’s Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program:



### IECMHC Program Dashboard: Key Metrics

Reporting Period: Comparison of FFY 2024 & 2025: 10/1/23 to 9/30/25

CLASS – The Classroom Assessment Scoring System® is an observation tool that measures the quality of educator–child interactions.

CBCL - The Child Behavior Checklist is a standardized assessment tool designed to evaluate a broad spectrum of children’s emotional and behavioral challenges.

Category	Metric	FFY 24	FFY 25
<b>Child-Level Impact</b>	% improved on CBCL	58%	<b>56%</b>
<b>Classroom-Level Impact</b>	% improved in CLASS domains	77%	<b>82%</b>
<b>Program Reach</b>	# of centers served	130	<b>159</b>
	# of classrooms & family child cares served	103	<b>127</b>
	# of teachers & providers served	393	<b>495</b>
	# of unduplicated children served	1388	<b>1706</b>

	# child welfare involved children served	48	<b>54</b>
<b>Collaboration</b>	# of community collaboratives	30	<b>119</b>
<b>Training</b>	# of trainings	76	<b>111</b>
	# of individuals trained	775	<b>1305</b>

**Child-Level Impact:** At the child level, 56 percent of children showed improvement on the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). For a non-direct, relationship-based consultation model, this represents a significant and meaningful clinical indicator of progress. Improvements in CBCL scores reflect that consultation successfully supports caregivers and educators in understanding behavior through a developmental lens, responding more effectively to children’s needs, and promoting emotional regulation and resilience within the classroom and home environments.

**Classroom-Level Impact:** At the classroom level, 82 percent of classrooms demonstrated improvement in CLASS domains, an increase from 77 percent the previous year. This finding underscores the program’s continued success in enhancing educator practice, classroom climate, and the quality of adult–child interactions. IECMHC effectively strengthened classroom environments, demonstrating that reflective, capacity-building consultation can produce sustainable, measurable change at scale.

**Program Reach:** Program reach expanded significantly between FFY 2024 and FFY 2025. The number of centers served increased from 130 to 159, and unduplicated children served rose from 1,388 to 1,706. The number of teachers and providers supported grew by more than 25 percent, while the number of child welfare–involved children served also increased, highlighting the program’s ability to engage with higher need populations.

**Collaboration:** Collaboration and partnership were key drivers of program success. The number of community collaborations increased from 30 to 119, reflecting enhanced cross-sector coordination and shared problem-solving. The program is integrating best practices in supporting children’s social and emotional development across licensed child care, Head Start, public Pre-K, and community education and mental health partners.

**Training:** Professional development was a central component of the program’s strategy to strengthen statewide capacity in FFY 2025. The number of trainings increased from 76 to 111, and individuals trained grew from 775 to 1,305. This growth illustrates strong demand for IECMHC-informed professional learning and reflects the program’s commitment to building a skilled, reflective, and resilient early childhood workforce prepared to support children’s emotional health and well-being in all types of settings.

During FFY 2025, ECE Consultation for ME demonstrated strong, measurable outcomes across all levels of impact - child, classroom, community, and system. The data reflects a maturing program that continues to evolve in its responsiveness to Maine’s diverse early care and education settings while remaining grounded in its core mission - strengthening the capacity of adults to support the social and emotional well-being of young children.

## **SUPPORTING THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE**

### *ECE Workforce Salary Supplement System*

During the pandemic, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding was utilized to provide salary

supplements for the early childhood workforce in licensed child care programs. This took the form of \$200 monthly stipends for staff working directly with children provided through Child Care Stabilization Grants. In the Governor’s 2022- 2023 Supplemental Budget, \$12 million (annualized to \$15.9 million), was included to establish a state source of funding for the program as ARPA funding came to an end. With this funding, the Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplement Program was officially established. The biennial state budget, passed in 2023, increased the funding for the salary supplements to \$30 million annually and required the implementation of a tiered system for stipends with increased payments as staff ascend Maine’s early childhood career lattice, advancing their education and gaining experience.

Stipend Tier	ECE Workforce Registry Levels
Tier 1	Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4
Tier 2	Levels 5 and 6
Tier 3	Levels 7 and 8

The Rules for the tiered Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplements became effective in December 2023. Through the course of implementation, OCFS tracked utilization of the program at each tier, noting growth among those at higher registry levels, indicative of the program incentivizing those with higher registry levels to take child care jobs and those already in jobs to move up the career lattice through approved training opportunities. This growth led to an adjustment in the tiered payments beginning in July 2024 based on available funding.

**Tier Funding Levels**

- 11/1/2023 to 6/30/2024: Tier 1 - \$275, Tier 2 - \$415, and Tier 3 - \$625
- 7/1/2024 to Present: Tier 1 - \$240, Tier 2 - \$360, and Tier 3 - \$540

**October 2024 – September 2025 Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplements Data**

- \$30,546,936 distributed over 12 months in salary supplement payments
- Average number of staff receiving stipends per month: 7,755
- 73 percent of staff retained per Maine Department of Labor (DOL) report

The Center for Early Learning Funding Equity (CELFE) conducted [an evaluation of the Salary Supplement System](#) beginning on 7/1/2025. The evaluation included surveys from the field, focus group interviews, data analysis by the Maine DOL and CELFE, and culminated in a report that will drive system improvements through the rulemaking process.

The evaluation found that Maine’s Salary Supplement program has improved teacher and staff retention in child care programs, decreased financial stress for early childhood educators and child care program owners, and encouraged further education and credentialing for the early care and education workforce. The program supports the operating expenses of child care programs, which helps to keep child care more affordable for Maine families. Many family child care owners and center directors reported that the supplements allowed them to avoid raising parent fees.

**Decreased Financial Stress**

- The majority of survey respondents and focus group participants reported that the salary supplements are reducing the overall financial stress of the early childhood workforce. Focus group participants reported using the additional income for basic life expenses like child care, car payments, groceries, and utilities.

### **Encouraged Further Education & Credentialing**

- 86 percent of center-based staff, 54 percent of center-based directors, 88 percent of home-based staff, and 80 percent of home-based owners reported that the program encouraged them to complete further training.
- Young adults were most likely to report that the tiered qualification levels encouraged them to attain higher degrees.

### **Improved Retention**

- Over 80 percent of both center-based and home-based educators reported that the salary supplements have encouraged them to continue to work in early childhood, while 62 percent of center directors and 67 percent of home-based owners reported the same.

In addition, since the program began in 2021, Maine’s Department of Labor estimates that employment in the child care sector rose 13 percent, creating more stable jobs, a trained and qualified workforce, and better options for working families with young children.

### *Child Care Employment Award Pilot*

The Child Care Employment Award is a pilot program designed to provide a workplace benefit for staff working in licensed child care programs. The Child Care Employment Award works in tandem with the Child Care Affordability Program to support access to affordable child care. All staff in licensed child care programs are eligible to apply and receive financial assistance to cover the cost of child care for their children. The program is funded with \$2.5 million in state general funds. Starting July 1, 2024, when the pilot started, families applied to CCAP first and if eligible, the employment award covered their parent fee. If child care staff applied and were not eligible for CCAP, the award payment covers about half of their child care tuition. Awards were provided to help fund care for 512 children of 284 child care staff.

The Center for Early Learning Funding Equity (CELFE) conducted [an evaluation of the Child Care Employment Award](#) from July 2024 – October 2025. The evaluation included focus group interviews, surveys, and data analysis by the CELFE and Survey Lab at the University of Chicago. The evaluation found that the Child Care Employment Award Pilot demonstrates clear benefits for Maine’s ECE workforce, particularly in supporting retention and improving the quality of life for staff with young children. Focus group participants and program data indicate that the award has helped many educators remain in their roles by providing financial, quality of life, and psychological benefits. The program also shows promise as a tool for recruitment, as several focus group participants reported that friends or acquaintances were drawn to the field after learning about the award; however, this potential was constrained once the program reached capacity and transitioned to a waitlist.

At the same time, the pilot’s rollout revealed important implementation challenges. The program quickly reached capacity, creating a waitlist that limited access for eligible staff and generated tension within programs. CELFE estimates that the program is currently only serving 11 percent of those eligible. Financially, the award generally had positive or neutral effects on child care program budgets, although some directors reported difficulties in covering child care costs for staff on the waitlist. Scaling the program statewide would require substantial additional resources.

### Early Care and Education Training & Technical Assistance

Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) provides training, credentials, and technical assistance for early childhood and out-of-school time professionals as they seek to expand their expertise and ability to provide high-quality care and education.



**Training:** From July 2024 through June 2025, MRTQ offered 111 facilitated training courses. In addition, there were on demand trainings created for the Infant and Toddler and Preschool Maine Early Learning and Development Standards (MELDS). MRTQ PDN provides the CCDF-required health and safety training for early childhood professionals working in licensed child care programs. 834 participants enrolled in the Health and Safety Orientation with a 100 percent completion rate. 1,449 participants enrolled in the Health and Safety Renewal with a 100 percent completion rate.

**Technical Assistance:** Staff at MRTQ PDN provide onsite and virtual consultation for providers and facilitate peer-to-peer networks related to quality early childhood practices. From July 2024 through June 2025, there were a total of 528 onsite and virtual consultation sessions provided.

**Credentials:** MRTQ PDN also awards credentials to early care and education providers who complete specialized training programs in specific areas of practice. From July 2024 through June 2025, MRTQ PDN awarded 22 new credentials and 20 renewals: 17 Child Care Director credentials, 16 Infant and Toddler credentials, 1 Inclusion credential, and 8 Technical Assistance credentials.

### Rising Stars for ME

Rising Stars for ME is Maine's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). It is designed to increase awareness of the basic standards of early care and education, recognize and support early care and education programs in providing care above and beyond the basic standards, educate the community about the benefits of higher quality care, and provide the community with identifiable standards of quality among programs.



As part of federal Preschool Development Grant Birth-to-Age-5 (PDG B-5), OCFS contracted with MRTQ PDN to implement Quality Improvement Awards with licensed child care programs. In 2024 and 2025, 149 child care programs earned quality improvement awards. 50.3 percent were child care centers and 49.7 percent were family child care programs. 27 programs (18 percent) were able to sustain their quality rating with the award. 122 programs (82 percent) increased their star rating during the award period.

- 75 programs increased to Star 3
- 35 programs increased to Star 4 (including programs that moved from Star 2 to Star 4)
- 12 programs met or maintained national accreditation, a Star 5

In total, there were 152 star increases, with 92 programs successfully moving up one star, and 30 programs moving up two stars.

## PROMOTING FAMILY EMPOWERMENT AND CHOICE

### Parent Ambassadors Program

Maine State Parent Ambassadors (MSPA) is a 10-month intensive parent empowerment and advocacy training program provided through the Kennebec Valley Community Action Program (KVCAP) and Educare Central Maine.

Maine's federal Child Care Development Fund contributes to both the core ambassador training program as well as to strengthening the 145+ alumni network. This past year, increased participation in local, state and national professional development and advocacy opportunities brought forth positive experiences for the 18 trained ambassadors and several alumni. Cohort participants engaged in 162 hours of professional development, advocacy and parent partnership opportunities. In collaboration with St. Joseph's College of Maine, the 2025 cohort graduates were the first to obtain a Parent Ambassador micro-credential upon successful completion of the MSPA program.

### Help Me Grow Maine

Help Me Grow (HMG) Maine is a free informational service linking families and professionals to resources about child development, pregnancy, and community supports for children and families. HMG aims to increase

awareness of available services and build connections between families and service providers—as well as among providers themselves—to ensure an accessible and interconnected system. Using data collected over the past two years, HMG has strategically guided its FFY2025 initiatives to meet the evolving needs of Maine families.



Parents and caregivers consistently identify two primary areas of concern when contacting HMG - meeting their children's basic needs and supporting their developmental milestones. Basic needs commonly include access to diapers, formula, and car seats. Developmental concerns range from questions about specific developmental areas, such as speech, to requests for formal developmental screening or evaluation.

To address these needs, HMG has implemented several targeted initiatives. In partnership with the Maine Bureau of Highway Safety, five HMG staff members were trained and certified as Child Passenger Safety Technicians (CPS-T). This partnership provided HMG access to a statewide car seat inventory, enabling distribution of car seats to income-eligible families along with essential safety education. During this reporting period, a total of 150 car seats were distributed by HMG. Recognizing the critical service gap, HMG supported one staff member in obtaining certification as Maine's only Adaptive Car Seat Technician. Additionally, several counties were identified as lacking certified technicians. HMG has conducted outreach to community partners and identified 22 individuals who will complete Child Passenger Safety certification training with Safe Kids Maine by the end of 2025. This training is provided at no cost to the participants and expands CPS-T coverage in under-resourced regions and strengthen statewide capacity for safe car seat education and distribution.

Supporting children's developmental milestones is another leading reason families contact Help Me Grow Maine. HMG's Developmental Screening Specialist has worked diligently to assist child care providers statewide by implementing the Ages and Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ) within their programs and facilitating screening events across the state. Seventeen developmental screening events

took place during this reporting period. These events not only help parents better understand their child's developmental progress but also equip early childhood educators with tools and strategies to effectively support each child's growth. Building upon the success of these screenings, several participating programs have pursued additional training to conduct screenings independently within their own settings. This increased interest has expanded ASQ training efforts to include both individual providers and collaborative teams seeking to embed developmental screening into their ongoing practices. The initiative has also fostered meaningful collaboration with partners and statewide initiatives such as Zero to School, the Department of Education, the Office of Child and Family Services, and multiple New Mainer community health worker organizations. Together, these partnerships are advancing a coordinated approach to developmental monitoring and strengthening equitable access to screening resources across Maine's diverse communities.

The Help Me Grow National Center partnered with the Collective Impact Forum and Connecticut Children's Childhood Prosperity Lab to launch a Learning Community designed to strengthen system change and system leadership competencies among HMG affiliates nationwide. HMG Maine applied for and was selected to participate in this opportunity, which ran from September 2023 through August 2024. Building upon the strategies and tools gained through this Learning Community, HMG Maine broadened its impact by partnering with Maine's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program to encourage all WIC participants to complete an Ages and Stages Questionnaire® (ASQ) for their enrolled child. As a result of this collaboration, 127 children were screened using at least one ASQ.

The Help Me Grow Maine team traveled to the 2025 Help Me Grow National Conference in Connecticut in July, where they facilitated two workshops and presented posters highlighting HMG Maine's work to support families. The workshops focused on successful collaboration with the Department of Highway Safety to enhance child passenger seat distribution, as well as the efforts of the Community Leaders Taskforce. Affiliates actively engaged in discussion, exchanging ideas and strategies to strengthen their own initiatives. Many participants expressed appreciation for the insights and practical knowledge shared, noting that HMG Maine's experiences offered valuable guidance and inspiration for their local efforts.

Help Me Grow Maine was honored to be selected for the inaugural *Help Me Grow National Affiliate Advisory Board*, a distinction recognizing its leadership and innovation within the national network. This opportunity brought together a select group of affiliates to share insights and experiences directly with Help Me Grow National, helping to shape fidelity of the model and strengthen the support provided to affiliates across the country. In appreciation of their participation, HMG Maine received a modest stipend, which they plan to reinvest to support the basic needs of families served—extending the impact of this honor back into Maine communities.

HMG Maine continues to leverage collaborative partnerships to advance system-level change. For example, once gaps in early intervention services were identified, HMG partnered with the Office of Medicaid Services to inform the development of new early development support services. MaineCare anticipates including these services in a brand-new section of the MaineCare Benefits Manual next year after a rate study is completed. Recognizing that collective action enhances both the reach and sustainability of impact, HMG remains committed to pursuing strategic collaboration that ensure every family in Maine—especially those facing homelessness—can access the resources they need to thrive.

## FFY 2025 Help Me Grow Data



**2025 Update**

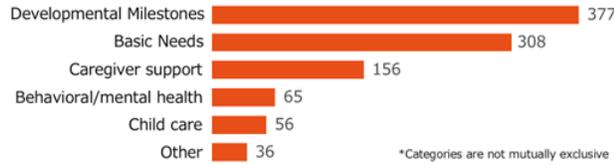
Data from 10/1/24 to 9/30/25



**974** unique children served



### Number of HMG Cases by Concern\*



### Resources Provided

**1,604**

total resources provided

**470**

different resources provided

6 resources represented  
32% of all resources provided

Resource	Count
Car seats	202
CAP agencies	74
DHHS	67
Child Development Services	60
Educational Advocacy	56
Case Management	51



### Developmental Screenings

**569**

total developmental screenings (among 326 unique children)

#### ASQ -3

- ▶ 323 screens
- ▶ 51% screens indicated a concern/need for monitoring

#### ASQ:SE-2

- ▶ 246 screens
- ▶ 32% screens indicated a concern/need for monitoring



### Connections



**80% connected**

For the 351 Help Me Grow intake cases that have closed in FY25 and have known outcomes, **80% of families have been connected to at least one service** with the support of a Help Me Grow Family Support Specialist.



### Barriers

**35 cases experienced barriers** (4% of all cases)

- ▶ 57% of cases with barriers were connected to at least one service
- ▶ Top barriers were eligibility, language barriers, and waitlists



### Outreach

▶ **150 car seats** have been distributed by Help Me Grow Maine.

▶ HMG Maine is partnering with HealthReach to provide training to all Federally Qualified Health Centers, ensuring staff are informed and up to date about the Ages and Stages Questionnaires®

## ENHANCING COLLABORATION, COORDINATION, AND TRANSPARENCY

### Preschool Development Grant (PDG)

From 2023-2025 Maine was the recipient of a \$24 million federal grant to improve early care and education and early childhood services, supporting the Children’s Cabinet goal that all Maine children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed. The State’s major goals under the grant included:

- Determining access to and the quality of the current state of early care and education programming for Maine families by conducting a comprehensive needs assessment.
- Developing a strategic plan to address gaps in the birth to age 5 mixed delivery system.
- Maximizing parental knowledge and choice.
- Sharing evidence-based practices.
- Improving the overall quality of programming for children birth to age five.

In 2025, an update to Maine’s PDG Strategic Plan was completed. PDG funded work also included evaluations of the ECE Workforce Salary Supplement System, the Child Care Employment Award, and First 10 Community Schools. The grant supported initiatives and projects in the Governor’s Office for Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) and the Maine Department of Education (MDOE). Together with OCFS, a cross-agency team strengthened the mixed delivery system of early care and education, engaging parents as partners, and supporting early educators teaching and caring for children from birth through early elementary school. An evaluation of Maine’s implementation of the PDG B-5 grant will be available in 2026.

Maine DOE applied and was granted for the 2026 Preschool Development Grant Birth-to-Age-5 (PDG B-5) systems-building grant in partnership with OCFS and the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation

and the Future. With these grant funds, Maine plans to develop a shared statewide ECE vision by updating our [2024 statewide needs assessment](#) to reflect current supply and demand for child care, including infant/toddler care, Head Start and Early Head Start (Head Start) and public Pre-K. We will also identify gaps by geography and program type. Findings will inform an updated strategic plan that articulates a shared vision for ECE, fully integrates Head Start, and establishes state governance and regional coordination structures. Stakeholder engagement will occur through local partnerships, statewide agency meetings, and Maine’s annual statewide early childhood conference, which will serve as a platform to test and refine the vision.

Maine will work to align fragmented policies and initiatives into a cohesive system. Key strategies include coordinating professional learning opportunities statewide, including emergent literacy and numeracy action plans, and supporting classroom practices for helping children and educators co-regulate behaviors. Maine will leverage the updated needs assessment, Help Me Grow expertise, regional mixed-delivery work, and quality stipends to schools and programs to expand access and options for families. This includes outlining strategies to build the infant/toddler care supply, strengthening family engagement through local work with child care programs and school districts, and partnership with Head Start family service professionals. These efforts will help families experience seamless ECE connections. Maine’s PDG B-5 work will ensure that by December 2026 we have an actionable shared vision and strategic plan, integrated governance structures, and measurable improvements in system alignment, workforce development, and family access.

### First4ME

The First4ME Early Care and Education Pilot project was established under the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Child and Family Services to provide funding to four pilot sites to improve social, emotional, educational, and health outcomes for children under 6 years of age and support their families. The pilot was conducted in four locations, with 21 participating child care providers and seven school districts. The pilot project concluded in September 2025. A third-party evaluation report with impact data and considerations for future programming will be available in early 2026.



## **CONCLUSION**

The healthy development and education of children in Maine is the responsibility of all stakeholders across Maine. OCFS will continue to collaborate with state and community partners to achieve the goals outlined in the OCFS Strategic Plan, the Children’s Cabinet Plan for Young Children and the Maine Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Strategic Plan, including improved access to early care and education services.

Early care and education programs serve a critical role in supporting children, families, businesses, and the Maine economy. The Department of Health and Human Services is committed to exploring new and innovative opportunities to support child care staff within available resources to ensure families have access to high quality care and learning. OCFS leadership and staff are grateful for the dedication of early childhood professionals who have committed their careers to this work.