

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

# Child Care NEWS BRIEF



## Child Care Services Newsletter

### Greetings from your partners at the TN Department of Human Services, Child Care Services Team!

Happy Spring! We hope that this newsletter finds you well as we take this opportunity to provide you with information on current activities and opportunities as the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) continues on our journey of transformation to strengthen our business processes and improve your customer experience. The focus of this Newsletter will be an update on activities related to transformation as well as new financial supports and resources to assist you in your work.

### 2021 COVID-19 Relief Grants

The Department is excited to announce that we are currently partnering with ChildcareTennessee to distribute grant awards through a simplified application process for COVID-19 Relief Grants, which are funded by the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA).

These grant awards will be based upon the licensed capacity of the agency and they will reimburse for eligible expenditures including but not limited to:

- Cleaning and sanitation.
- Increased operating expenses such as salaries, insurance, rent, and personal protective equipment.

Over the next four to six weeks, child care providers licensed with the state will be contacted directly by ChildcareTennessee and will be given instructions on how to apply for funds based on their capacity through this simplified process.

The link to the Press Release announcing these new grant opportunities [can be found here](#).

### Child Care 2020 Disaster Grant Survey

You have worked so hard to serve families and communities by continuing to deliver quality child care that is safe, healthy, and educationally rich. You may know that the federal government is in the process of issuing several rounds of funding to support families and child care providers in navigating the impacts of COVID-19. The first round of funding (CARES Act) allowed us to distribute more than \$52 million in 2020 Disaster/Emergency Response and Recovery Grants. We are currently partnering with ChildCareTennessee to distribute simplified applications for COVID-19 Relief Grants, which are funded by the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA).

In the coming months, there will be additional funding coming to Tennessee for child care under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP), which has a major focus on deploying funds to help stabilize the child care industry. We want to hear your perspective on strategies to deploy those funds to support child care providers. We hope you will take a few minutes to complete this survey and give us your ideas. **Please submit your responses by April 9.**

**Survey Link:**  
[https://stateoftennessee.formstack.com/forms/cares\\_act\\_covid\\_relief\\_grant\\_survey\\_2021](https://stateoftennessee.formstack.com/forms/cares_act_covid_relief_grant_survey_2021)

### QRIS Redesign Update

As a reminder, over the past 2 years, the TDHS Child Care Team has been working with you to make progress on our transformation journey, and in 2020 we gained significant momentum as we banded together to ensure child care continued during the pandemic. We remain on a steady course with all transformation activities.

Our transformation journey is grounded in our "WHY Statement" - *Every family should have access to QUALITY care for children and adults.* This basic statement guides all our work and reinforces our three primary goals for Tennessee's child care system: **Improve Quality, Increase Access, and Strengthen Business Efficiency.**

A big part of our transformation is based in redesigning our Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), which was launched 20 years ago. When launched in 2001, Tennessee's Star Quality Program was one of the first child care quality rating programs in the country. Over the years, this program has significantly helped to raise awareness about the importance of quality child care and has assisted many agencies in improving their programming. By redesigning the quality assessment and rating program, Tennessee will again be a pioneer in supporting quality early care and education. You have been a part of envisioning this future state through focus group sessions and information captured through routine engagements.

#### Customer Experience

With this program and staff reorganization, the most meaningful indicators of quality will be measured on a consistent basis by licensing staff. Providers will experience those staff members as partners in supporting quality care for children and families. Redesigning the QRIS, coupled with systems modernization *and* adjusting how we do business to better serve child care providers and families, guides us on our next steps in transformation, which is reorganizing the TDHS child care team to match the future state of child care services in Tennessee.

#### Staff Reorganization

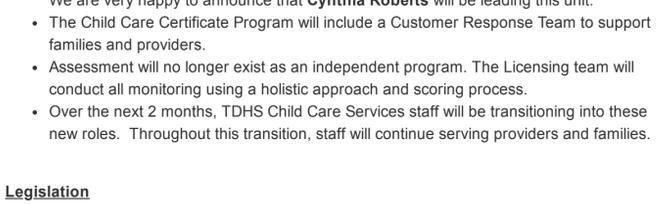
We have been heavily immersed in staff reorganization over the past two months. This restructure will be more customer-centered and supportive to child care providers. This focus on partnerships and continuous improvement not only impacts us internally but will have a great impact on the child care industry as a whole. We are shaping the future of the next generation.

#### What will be different?

*Our service delivery model is changing, which includes our organizational structure. This means you may see a change. We will be increasing the number of Licensing Consultants to provide more opportunity to engage with you as a partner.*

- We are reorganizing districts to match the Department's approach by aligning with the state's nine (9) workforce regions as shown below.

## Tennessee Workforce Regions



- We have added a Director of Field Operations in the Licensing program who will continue to promote consistency in practices. We are pleased to announce this position has been filled with the promotion of **Kim Whitehead** to serve in this role.
- There will be five (5) Regional Managers across the state who will directly support 20 Field Supervisors. We are very excited to announce the following staff who have assumed the roles of Regional Manager and their respective areas based on the District mapping.
  - **Anita Green** - Greater Memphis Area
  - **Eugenia London** - Northwest/Southwest/Southern Middle
  - **Sue Camplin** - Northern Middle
  - **John Sanders** - Southeast/Upper Cumberland
  - **Allison Miller** - East/Northeast
- Current Licensing and Assessment functions are merging into one larger Licensing program.
  - Licensing Consultants (formerly known as Program Evaluator) - This role will be responsible for the full scope of observation including compliance, quality evaluations and scoring. The Licensing Consultants will be a partner and support agencies by serving as a consultant and resource for individualized quality improvement.
- The Pre-Licensure Unit will work with programs seeking licensure to explain expectations, answer questions, identify resources, and helps applicants navigate the licensure process. We are very happy to announce that **Cynthia Roberts** will be leading this unit.
- The Child Care Certificate Program will include a Customer Response Team to support families and providers.
- Assessment will no longer exist as an independent program. The Licensing team will conduct all monitoring using a holistic approach and scoring process.
- Over the next 2 months, TDHS Child Care Services staff will be transitioning into these new roles. Throughout this transition, staff will continue serving providers and families.

#### Legislation

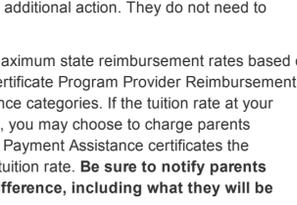
Legislation that supports this vision and the QRIS redesign is currently moving through this legislative session. We want to make you aware of some components of the bill currently routing through the Legislative process.

- The bill streamlines the process for providers and removes burdensome regulation such as an annual licensure fee.
- Supports a new framework that collects on-going data throughout the year instead of a one-time quality review.
- Provides targeted, relationship-based quality improvement coaching and connects to necessary resources.
- Provides financial supports to support quality improvement.
- Recognizes Early Childhood Education program quality that is defined by the strongest predictors of child outcomes.

Consistent with final legislation, TDHS will continue to engage providers through the rule making process and focus groups to inform this future state.

### 2021 Pandemic Child Care

#### Payment Assistance



The Department of Human Services will be receiving additional federal funds to support 2021 Pandemic/Essential Employee Child Care Payment Assistance. Because of this additional funding, the Department will be extending support for families currently receiving 2021 Pandemic/Essential Employee Child Care Payment Assistance through August 31, 2021. Families already approved for 2021 Pandemic/Essential Employee Child Care Payment Assistance are not required to take any action at this time for the child care payment assistance issued by the Department. The Department will continue to accept applications for 2021 Pandemic/Essential Employee Child Care Payment assistance through April 30, 2021 to allow a window of opportunity for potentially eligible families to apply. After this date, those who applied and were determined eligible as of April 30, 2021, and those who were already enrolled and participating will continue to receive support through August 31, 2021.

Please note that the Department will **NOT** issue new certificates but will simply change the end date from March 31, 2021 to August 31, 2021. Parents who are already approved for this payment assistance will not be required to take any additional action. They do not need to reapply.

The Department will continue to reimburse at the maximum state reimbursement rates based on the child's age level according to the Child Care Certificate Program Provider Reimbursement Rates found [here](#) for all child care payment assistance categories. If the provider rate at your agency is higher than the state reimbursement rate, you may choose to charge parents receiving Pandemic/Essential Employee Child Care Payment Assistance certificates the difference between the state rate and your regular tuition rate. **Be sure to notify parents receiving payment assistance about the cost difference, including what they will be expected to pay and when.**

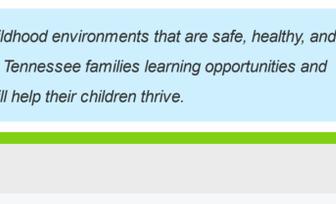
**Reminder: about Applications for 2021 Pandemic/ Essential Employee Child Care Payment Assistance: Note that as of January 1, 2021, for new applications, the eligibility period for Pandemic/Essential Employee Child Care Payment Assistance will begin on the date the completed application with all required verifications is received by the Department. This is the same policy utilized with all other Child Care Payment Assistance Programs administered by the Department. This Pandemic/Essential Employee Child Care Payment Assistance category of care continues to have no income limits and is designed to serve children 6 weeks to age 13 in TDHS licensed or Tennessee Department of Education approved care settings.**

**Please Note:** The Child Care Certificate Program will continue to waive all parent co-pay fees for all pay periods, for all categories of child care payment assistance, through August 31, 2021. We want to support families and child care providers during this time by paying up to the maximum Child Care Certificate Program Provider Reimbursement Rates established by the Department.

Additionally, TDHS will continue to make subsidy payments for all open, children enrolled in the certificate program as usual for participating providers who are all, even if the child is not attending, perhaps due to family impact. However, if you are aware that a child has been disenrolled with your agency, please indicate on your EAV the child has terminated with a "T" when submitting. This will allow the opportunity for another family who may be in need of child care to utilize the slot with your agency.

### TNPAL Update

The Tennessee Department of Human Services has launched the Tennessee Professional Archive of Learning (TNPAL), a free online resource to better support professional development for early childhood professionals working in TDHS-licensed child care agencies. Each month, we will provide an update on TNPAL to help child care educators and administrators familiarize themselves with this exciting new resource. The Department will be moving toward utilizing TNPAL as the system of record for child care educators and administrative staff. We encourage you to begin familiarization with the system as we transition fully with the launch of the new QRIS system.



Educators, directors, and other support staff working with early childhood education programs licensed by TDHS benefit from TNPAL as a single web-based location designed to collect and preserve completed trainings, accomplishments, credentials, education, certifications, and awards.

These features and functions empower not only early childhood professionals but also support verification by directors and TDHS. Child care agency directors are encouraged to support TNPAL registration for all program employees. Our partners at CCR&R and TECTA have started reaching out to each TDHS-licensed agency. Both the CCR&R and TECTA will continue to contact you over the next several months to provide guided registration support and assist directors with registering staff.

Trainings completed through TCCOTS, the CCR&R and TECTA, and trainings approved through TrainTN ([www.traintn.org](http://www.traintn.org)) are linked to your TNPAL registration profile.

Signing up is easy! Early childhood professionals may create a TNPAL account using a web browser on any computer, phone, or tablet by visiting [www.tnpal.org](http://www.tnpal.org). TNPAL requires use of a personal email to assure information security and portability of completed trainings and professional development. TNPAL tutorial videos can be found [here](#).

*TDHS is committed to promoting early childhood environments that are safe, healthy, and educationally rich. Thank you for offering Tennessee families learning opportunities and environments that will help their children thrive.*