

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Photo: iStock.com

Best Starts for Kids is a voter-approved initiative led by Executive Dow Constantine to help put every baby born and every child raised in King County on a path toward lifelong success. Best Starts Prenatal to Five investments reach children and families where they are from birth to 5 years—homes, child care settings, and communities—to support healthy child development and family well-being.

In 2018, Kindering was funded by King County Best Starts for Kids to partner with the community to identify needs and recommendations for establishing a cohesive and accessible countywide system of child care health consultation (CCHC) that alleviates race- and place-based inequities.

CCHC is a collaborative partnership between a trusted child care health consultant and families, caregivers, and child care providers to promote optimal physical and emotional health, safety, and development of children in their care. Child care providers and caregivers are critical to the health and well-being of children in our communities.

When Kindering began planning the CCHC Systems Development project, we knew that no recommendations could be made without input from those directly affected and the wider early learning community. All phases of the project relied

on extensive community engagement in a variety of formats to ensure that recommendations included voices representing the cultural, linguistic, and geographic diversity within King County. This process allowed us to develop inclusive conversations with the community that included child care providers, caregivers, families, child care health consultants, the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Child Care Resources, and other individuals and community-based organizations invested in King County’s early learning system.

Throughout community engagement activities, child care providers and caregivers reported experiencing many barriers within King County’s current system, including a shortage of available consultants due to lack of funding for CCHC, especially outside the City of Seattle; absence of a mechanism for finding a consultant; the cost of CCHC services to providers and caregivers; and a CCHC work force that does not adequately reflect the race, ethnicity, and primary languages of King County’s children, families, child care providers, and caregivers. Additionally, they report not having a designated community-based leadership entity to coordinate and support the development of the CCHC work force and other aspects of a cohesive and accessible countywide system of CCHC.

King County Best Starts for Kids is committed to investing in a system of CCHC to support the community of people caring for young children. CCHC furthers equity by increasing child care provider and caregiver confidence and abilities to improve health outcomes for children from traditionally marginalized backgrounds and to reduce suspensions and expulsions, which disproportionately affect young children of color and children with disabilities. CCHC services in King County are provided in a variety of ways, by both entities and individuals of varying health disciplines, qualifications, and experiences. Community stakeholders came together throughout 2019 to explore the existing and preferred scope of work of child care health consultants in King County. The following definition of child care health care consultation was created as a result of this process and was considered by stakeholders as foundational to the pursuit of an equitable CCHC system:



Photo: Kindering

Child care health consultants aspire to work from a multidisciplinary, healing-centered, and trauma-informed approach to support providers and families to identify, prevent, and reduce risks in child care settings for the purpose of strengthening the capacity of those caring for young children that are not their own. CCHC aims to be racially equitable and social justice focused, individualized, and culturally and linguistically responsive.

The core of this report is a **Road Map of Recommendations** to bridge the gaps in King County’s current CCHC system and build a community-preferred system of equitable CCHC across the county. The preferred system of CCHC includes four main goals/outcomes:

1. High-quality and culturally responsive CCHC services are **accessible** to caregivers and child care providers.
2. Child care health consultants are **well-prepared**.
3. Child care health consultants are **supported**.
4. Child care health consultants are **working cohesively** within King County’s larger early learning system.

This report includes:

- An **overview of the community and stakeholder engagement process** that resulted in this report, including the values that drove our efforts to (1) listen and learn, (2) decide and design, and (3) respond and recommend. Community and stakeholder engagement consisted of over 150 conversations with almost 1,500 individuals across King County.
- A summary of the four **key inputs** that will be needed to achieve these goals: funding, leadership, CCHC service providers, and a strong and healthy child care community.
- A report of **early actions** resulting from this process, which include defining the CCHC scope of work, creating education and outreach materials, and process improvement for a community of practice.
- A **logic model** that outlines the plan for an equitable system of CCHC in King County.



Photo: Kindering

African American boys account for only 18% of preschool enrollment, yet they account for 48% of preschool suspension.³

Children with disabilities represent just 13% of the nation’s preschoolers, but they account for 75% of all suspensions and expulsions.⁴

³ US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline)*, Issue Brief no. 1 (March 21, 2014). Available from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-discipline-snapshot.pdf>

⁴ Cristina Novoa and Rasheed Malik, “Suspensions Are Not Support: The Disciplining of Preschoolers With Disabilities” (Center for American Progress, January 12, 2018). Available from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/01/17/445041/suspensions-not-support/>

Impacts of COVID-19

Beginning in March 2020, King County experienced an outbreak of COVID-19, resulting in a countywide shutdown. At the time this report was written, Washington state's "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" order due to the COVID-19 pandemic was in effect. During this time, the Road Map of Recommendations in this report was formulated based on input from the community collected before the pandemic. Priority recommendations identified through community and stakeholder engagement that address the impact of COVID-19 on child care providers, caregivers, and child care health consultants are included in the Road Map of Recommendations.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on child care providers and caregivers in King County, and across Washington state, as they were deemed essential businesses and encouraged to continue providing care to children of first responders and other essential workers. Additionally, schools suddenly entered the marketplace, offering child care at no cost to essential workers, thus adding more complexity to the child care system. Despite being called upon to continue providing care, child care providers and caregivers faced significant barriers in accessing basic health and safety supplies needed to care for children, such as masks, gloves, disinfectant, thermometers, toilet paper, and paper towels. Social distancing, handwashing, and wearing masks posed additional challenges when caring for very young children. Many child care programs reported facing the difficult decision to close their businesses, some permanently, due to low enrollment and to protect the health and safety of staff and families.

At the end of August 2020, Child Care Aware of Washington reported that nearly half of Washington's licensed child care providers were at risk of closing permanently due to the impacts of the pandemic, while nearly 550,000 children under the age of 12 are without access to child care.⁵

The impact that COVID-19 has had on child care providers and caregivers highlights the urgent need for an equitable and coordinated system of CCHC. Systemic barriers created many challenges for providers and caregivers of young children in accessing the most current information and support necessary to keep children and adults in caregiving settings healthy and safe.

⁵ Child Care Aware of Washington, "Washington's Child Care Crisis Leaves Nearly 550,000 Children Without Child Care" (August 25, 2020). Available from <https://childcareawarewa.org/2020/08/25/washingtons-child-care-crisis-leaves-nearly-550000-children-without-child-care/>