



# Early Childhood Connector | Fall 2024

Your quarterly newsletter on child care and early education.

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## Welcome to the Early Childhood Connector

Thank you for signing up for the Early Childhood Connector Newsletter! The Minnesota Children’s Cabinet and the Departments of Education, Health, Human Services, and Children, Youth, and Families created this newsletter to streamline communications to child care providers and early educators in Minnesota. Child care providers and early educators can expect a quarterly newsletter and some additional email updates. Please fill out the survey linked at the bottom of this newsletter to let us know what you think of the content and how we can improve our communications.

## Early Childhood Connector Calls

On a quarterly basis, the state is hosting Connector Calls with child care providers and early educators to answer questions related to legislation, licensing, programs, grants and more. The purpose of the call is to answer clarifying questions that providers may have. Calls are hosted online on WebEx, [recorded, and available on the Early Childhood Connector webpage.](#)

Educators of all types are invited to these calls. We welcome questions from licensed programs, certified centers, exempt programs, legally nonlicensed providers, Family, Friend and Neighbor caregivers, and individuals interested in starting a child care business.

### Join us at the next Early Childhood Connector Call

- **Next call date:** Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2025, 7-8 p.m.
- **Where:** Hosted virtually on WebEx
- **Meeting link:**  
<https://minnesota.webex.com/minnesota/j.php?MTID=m6e0ec55c584187e55bea6e0620913eee>
- **Purpose:** For the state to answer clarifying questions for child care providers and early educators. The state will not address individual grievances during this time.
- Please [submit your questions here](#). Questions must be submitted before the event; we will not answer live questions. We will do our best to answer all questions as time allows. Please submit your questions two weeks before the call.

Please save the date and meeting link on your calendar; the state will not send a meeting invite. The call will be recorded and temporarily available to folks who cannot attend.

[Learn more about Early Childhood Connector Calls, including upcoming dates, and submit your questions here.](#)

We look forward to seeing you at the next call!

## WIC helps families eat healthy

Many Minnesota families are living in areas with a lack of fresh food and are facing food insecurity. What does hunger look like in Minnesota? One in 11, or about a half a million, Minnesotans face hunger, including 180,000 children.

Food insecurity is higher now than during the pandemic. Many of the additional nutrition and economic supports for families available during the pandemic have stopped and prices and costs for common consumer

goods such as groceries, gas, and housing have gone up. This puts more stress on household budgets, especially for those at the lower end of the income spectrum.

The federal special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children, known as WIC, supports a healthy start through nutrition education, nutritious foods, breastfeeding and chestfeeding support, and referrals to health and social services in a participant's community.

Families can [apply for WIC](#) online. Pregnant people and parents – including foster parents and guardians – with an infant or child younger than age 5 can apply. Families must be income eligible and live in Minnesota to apply. Families who are already participating in programs like Medical Assistance or SNAP are automatically income eligible. Visit the [Am I Eligible for WIC?](#) webpage for the current income guidelines.

The WIC food benefit includes milk, cheese, yogurt, eggs, whole grains, cereal, peanut butter, beans and more. It also includes \$26-\$52 monthly for participants to buy fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables. Plus, it's easier to use than ever before, thanks to the My MN WIC app and WIC electronic benefit transfer cards. Utilizing WIC's food benefits allows families to use more of their take-home pay for other critical household needs and will reduce food insecurity.

#### **Additional resources**

- Online WIC application: [Apply for WIC](#)
- Find your local WIC agency: [Minnesota WIC Agency Directory](#)
- Learn about WIC foods: [Shopping Guide Effective 2023 \(PDF\)](#)
- Videos: [Welcome to Minnesota WIC](#)

## **The importance of Early Childhood Screening**

In partnership with parents, Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening is one of the best things families can do to promote their child's health and learning.

Parents will check-in with screening providers on how a child is growing and learning, including how they move, play, talk, see, hear, and behave. Screening is recommended several times between birth and the start of kindergarten. The knowledge parents gain about their child during screening can help them find resources so their child may thrive.

The screening may take place in clinics, through local public health programs such as Follow Along or Family Home Visiting, or via local school district screening programs, which are required between age 3 and the start of kindergarten. [Find local district programs through Help Me Connect.](#)

## **Share your community's innovative child care solutions**

The Office of Child Care Community Partnerships presents "Innovative Practices," a series highlighting innovative approaches to child care across Minnesota.

Created in 2023 thanks to legislative support, this Office supports communities building capacity in child care

around Minnesota. Child care is critical for communities and businesses to thrive, and building capacity was recognized as essential in supporting workforce and economic development.

The Office collaborates with other state agencies and meets with communities to hear their needs and to learn about strategies and partnerships they use to support child care in their area. Through these discussions, it became clear that communities in Minnesota are finding creative solutions to support their child care systems.

By highlighting innovative stories of support and partnership, other early childhood programs and communities may find a practice that fits their needs and replicate that process in their community or program. The [practices highlighted thus far](#) are from rural Minnesota and demonstrate innovative ways that small communities are supporting their child care sector.

There are many more innovative, creative ideas that are happening around Minnesota to support child care. Do you have a story to share? The Office of Child Care Community Partnerships welcomes submissions of innovative practices. Please contact Tammy Wickstrom at [tammy.wickstrom@state.mn.us](mailto:tammy.wickstrom@state.mn.us) or 651-355-0386 to share an innovative practice or discuss child care in your community.

Please visit the Office of Child Care Community Partnerships [website](#) to learn more information.

## Updates for DHS licensed and certified child care programs

### Legislative implementation plans

Each year, after legislation is passed, the Department of Human Services (DHS) creates and sends out implementation plans for licensed and certified child care programs with details on legislation and how it impacts programs. For reference, current and archived implementation plans can be found on each license type or certification webpage.

- [Licensed Child Care Centers 2024 Implementation Plan](#)
- [Certified Child Care Centers 2024 Implementation Plan](#)
- [Family Child Care 2024 Implementation Plan](#)

### Child care revised licensing standards timeline update

In April 2024, the DHS [Child Care Regulation Modernization](#) team released a public draft of revised licensing standards. The team gathered feedback on the draft revised licensing standards from child care providers, licensors, parents and the public between May – July 2024.

Based on the feedback received, the Department [announced an extension](#) of the revised licensing standards timeline, to allow for further input and revisions.

### New timeline for revised licensing standards

DHS anticipates the new timeline for revised licensing standards will be:

- **October 2024:** Share summary of key themes from listening sessions and survey.
- **December 2024:** Share next draft of revised licensing standards based on feedback that was received.
- **January 2025:** Submit an interim report to the 2025 legislature with updates on all project components, including another draft of revised standards.

- **January – June 2025:** Conduct robust and collaborative engagement with the child care community and parents to inform another draft of revised licensing standards.
- **July – January 2026:** Incorporate feedback.
- **February 2026:** Bring final draft proposal to the 2026 legislature for consideration.

Ultimately, it will be up to the Minnesota Legislature to specify an effective date for any legislation that they pass. DHS is committed to a deliberate approach to implementing any new child care licensing standards.

## Provider Hub

The Provider Hub is a website for child care providers to manage their license or certification. Use the [Provider Hub: Getting started](#) website for resources you need to get started in the Provider Hub. Other resources can be found in the Help & Resources section in the Hub.

The next Hub licensing rollout will be for Family Child Care Providers and is currently anticipated for Summer 2025. We will gradually roll out the Provider Hub to a few counties at a time, until all Minnesota counties are actively using the system. We will let you know when your region will begin using the Provider Hub at least one month in advance. Meanwhile, to prepare, you can visit the Provider Hub: Getting started webpage for a tech skills self-assessment and tech resource guides to help prepare for using the Provider Hub.

To learn more general information or to sign up for more regular details about the project, visit the [Systems Transformation Initiative website](#).

## Background Studies Division

### Background study fees

DHS is currently covering the cost of child care background studies for all child care provider types. DHS will continue to cover child care background study and fingerprinting fees through 12/31/25. This includes household members, or anyone affiliated with a child care program. Visit the [child care background studies webpage](#) for more information on child care background studies.

### Expired studies

As a reminder, licensed or certified providers and individuals affiliated with those providers must complete a background study every five years. Do not submit study applications more than 90 days before the current expiration date. Information on [how to identify expiring studies](#) (PDF) is available.

## MDH changes to their immunization form

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) made changes to their immunization form. The changes went into effect August 2024. Effective immediately, please stop distributing the prior immunization form. Rather, provide access to the updated [Are Your Kids Ready? Child Care and Early Childhood Programs Immunization Law \(PDF\)](#). The [Immunization Records](#) link has been updated on MDH and DHS websites.

## Family child care transition to continuous licenses

Beginning January 1, 2025, all family child care licenses will be issued on a calendar year (January 1– December 31) cycle and will automatically renew after a licensing fee is invoiced and paid before year end rather than expiring after one or two years. DHS has prepared a [guidance document](#) to provide additional information about

how this change will impact family child care training requirements. Additional guidance will be communicated with family child care licensors and license holders as it is developed.

## Resources for families, children and providers

- [Additional resources for families, providers and communities](#)
- [Help Me Connect](#)
- [Office of the Ombuds for Family Child Care Providers](#)

## Have questions?

Email [ccs.communications.DHS@state.mn.us](mailto:ccs.communications.DHS@state.mn.us) with questions.

## Have feedback?

Let us know your thoughts on this newsletter [by taking a short survey](#). Your answers will help the state improve its communications with child care providers and early educators.