



Office of the Governor  
**MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM**



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**Contact:** Nora Meyers Sackett  
Press Secretary, Office of the Governor  
[nora.sackett@state.nm.us](mailto:nora.sackett@state.nm.us)  
(505) 690-7313

**Contact:** Micah McCoy  
Communications Director,  
Early Childhood Education and Care Department  
[micah.mccoy@state.nm.us](mailto:micah.mccoy@state.nm.us)  
(505) 629-9675

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## **New Mexico leads the nation as Governor Lujan Grisham makes childcare free for most families**

*Governor expands free child care to over 30,000 families, pledges \$10 million to expand child care supply, and announces stipend program for early childhood workers seeking advanced degrees*

ALBUQUERQUE – Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham on Thursday announced family-focused initiatives eliminating costs for child care for most New Mexico families, increase capacity for child care services in areas lacking access, and supporting early childhood professionals. This dramatic expansion of cost-free services builds on the administration’s prior work to deliver affordable child care to more New Mexico families, supporting tens of thousands more families across the state by previously doubling family eligibility for the state’s Child Care Assistance Program.

The centerpiece of this announcement is the expansion of free child care to qualifying families earning up to 400% of federal poverty level (FPL) — \$111,000 for a family of four. Beginning May 1, 2022, all families enrolled in the state’s Childcare Assistance Program will no longer owe copays for child care services, making child care cost-free.

Previously, only families at 200% FPL or below qualified for waived copayments. The New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) estimates that over 30,000 families statewide will now qualify for free child care.

“Families must be at the center of our efforts around early childcare,” said **Gov. Lujan Grisham**. “The announcements today support a universal early childhood education and care system that increases access, maximizes parent choice, and supports early childhood professionals.”

To date, no other state has enacted a child care support program that provides free early education and care to such a broad economic demographic. Coupled with the administration's investments in free college through the Opportunity Scholarship, the state is on the brink of providing a robust, cradle-to-career educational system that is cost-free to most New Mexicans.

“The co-pay waiver for my 4-year-old son’s child care has been a such great help financially for our family,” said **Irlanda Hernandez**, an Albuquerque educator and mother of four. “I want to thank Governor Lujan Grisham and her administration for making it easier for working parents to access and afford child care. As a dual-language second-grade teacher with a background in early childhood education, I know that a quality early education can have a tremendous impact on a child’s life, and this expansion of the child care copay waiver makes quality early education all the more accessible to families like mine.”

In addition to expanding no-cost child care to a majority of New Mexico families, Gov. Lujan Grisham also announced that the ECECD will dedicate \$10 million dollars toward grants specifically designed to expand the availability of child care in communities where it is needed most. This pilot round of supply-building grants will add capacity for up to 800 more children around the state. When ECECD launches this competitive grant in the coming weeks, child care providers, communities, and employers who want to create new or expand existing child care availability will be able to submit proposals for consideration.

Thirdly, on May 5, Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day, Gov. Lujan Grisham will open applications for a new stipend program that pays up to \$2,000 per semester to early childhood professionals who are currently enrolled in early childhood degree programs at one of New Mexico institutions of higher education. ECECD’s current scholarship program, which provides financial support to students pursuing early childhood degrees, will transition into the stipend program. Most of the 825 early childhood professionals who are currently enrolled in the ECECD scholarship program will benefit from the new stipend program moving forward.

“This administration is well on its way to building a universal, high-quality, and family-centered early childhood system in New Mexico,” said ECECD **Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky**. “We are focused on building access, supporting educators, and providing real choices for parents. Not only are we making child care free for most New Mexico families, we’re investing across the entire early childhood system – including building new supply in New Mexico’s child care deserts and supporting advanced credentials for the early childhood workforce.”

“With this announcement, New Mexico continues to demonstrate its strong commitment to children, families, and providers,” said **Mario Cardona**, Chief of Policy and Practice for Child Care Aware of America. “Building off of its efforts to dramatically expand eligibility for child care assistance, the state’s announcement to address affordability by waiving copayments for all eligible families is a game changer and a policy worth replicating. Additionally, New Mexico’s announcement to provide grants targeted to building supply in areas experiencing shortages is critical to help restore, and in some cases establish, care options for families living in child care deserts.”

Together with the recently passed Opportunity Scholarship, today’s announcement effectively means that the majority of New Mexicans have access to a free, cradle-to-career education.

Families interested in seeking assistance with child care tuition can determine their eligibility by taking the [“Am I Eligible?” survey](#) at the ECECD website or contacting the ECECD call center at **(800) 832-1321**.

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