

ACTION 2.6

Ensure affordable, accessible, dependable transportation to early care and education programs, schools, and health services, especially in rural communities.

ENSURE ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

to **EARLY CARE PROGRAMS,**
SCHOOLS and **HEALTH SERVICES**

Lack of access to reliable transportation is a significant barrier for many children and families and negatively impacts their ability to engage in early childhood services and learning opportunities, particularly for families who are homeless or living with low income. Most early care and education programs do not provide free transportation, and public transportation is limited, especially in rural areas. Increasing the availability of public transportation such as reducing the distance between stops and the frequency of buses supports family engagement in needed services.

WHAT WE KNOW

Though everyone relies on transportation with varying degrees based on geographic location, transportation access barriers tend to be greatest for members of economically marginalized communities and subgroups such as older adults and people with disabilities. Accessible, reliable, and safe transportation connects people to health care, work, and social activities, and is especially important in ensuring that young children can access care and early learning centers.

Relying on public transportation is most challenging for parents who work alternate schedules; they often have no safe or affordable way to get between work and home, or to drop off and pick up their children from care.

One survey of over 1200 parents found that **OVER 40% SAID THEIR CHILDREN MIGHT BE MISSING OUT** on important activities because of transportation challenges.

A diversity of transportation options can **improve access**, health, and environmental sustainability. Developing and maintaining trust in the reliability and safety of public transportation is a critical component to community health.

WHAT WE NEED

Well developed transportation infrastructure that supports the needs of a broad population and in particular, those with limited mobility access is crucial. In particular, investing in developing infrastructure for communities that remain underserved by transit services is a crucial step in working towards equity in this space. Though substantial regional differences have existed for a long time, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened variation in access and increased the urgency to direct sustained and robust infrastructure resources towards creating community prosperity through environmentally friendly transportation.

On-site workplace child care is an important consideration in meeting the needs of low-wage workers dependent on public transportation. This can be most feasible for large employers or done as a consortium among several employers located nearby. Whenever possible employers can subsidize the cost of care, but it can also be effective when employees pay the full cost for care and employers take on only the administrative role of contracting with child care providers.

HOW TO SUPPORT

There are general transportation challenges that city planners and transport agencies can play a large role in remedying by creating transportation systems and infrastructure that serve working parents and young children. Strategies that can be employed towards this aim include considering the needs of pregnant women and toddlers by shortening distances to early childhood services, designing child-friendly streets, and regulating cars in areas where small children spend the most time.

To reach resources and services, everyone needs access to quality transportation, but this access varies widely across different geographic areas, **adversely affecting young children of color and those who live in rural areas.**

There are also targeted early childhood transportation needs, such as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which requires local educational agencies to provide transportation so homeless children can remain in their preschool of origin if the family has to move, but questions about its implementation remain. Of all preschool-related calls to the National Center for Homeless Education helpline after the passage of ESSA, 42% concerned transportation challenges. State Coordinators for homeless education and local homeless education liaisons can help overcome barriers and increase participation in quality early care and education programs for children experiencing homelessness through strategic and collaborative action that targets children who would benefit greatest from the inclusion of transportation as a wraparound service in the early care setting.

INITIATIVES WORKING IN THIS AREA

This is a critical need for families because while some types of child care providers offer some form of transportation to families, such services are limited and transportation remains a barrier for many. The majority of before and after school young child transportation services are privately operated and consume too much of economically marginalized families' household budgets.

Visit the Pathways Action Map to learn more about these and other initiatives leading efforts in this area.

