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Family-Centered Solutions for Child Care Access: Insights from Families and System Leaders

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December 2025

Oklahoma families face long waits, high costs, and rigid policies that limit access to quality infant-toddler care. These barriers disrupt employment and child development. Our study identified family-centered strategies—navigation supports, flexible logistics, and policy alignment—that can reduce time-to-care and expand infant slots statewide:

Families Know What They Want—but Face Barriers

- Families prioritize safe, nurturing environments, strong caregiver relationships, and developmental supports.
- Barriers include limited availability, long waitlists, high costs, complex subsidy processes, and misalignment with work schedules.
- One-third of families reported waiting 4+ months to secure care; three-quarters experienced job disruptions due to child care issues.

System Design Makes Finding Care Hard

- Families rely on word-of-mouth and social media over formal tools like the DHS Child Care Locator.
- Leaders report low awareness of resources, confusing processes, and rigid policies (attendance rules, eligibility sequencing) that create unintended barriers.
- Safety regulations, while essential, increase costs and reduce infant slot availability.

Families Leverage Connections and Flexibility to Secure Care

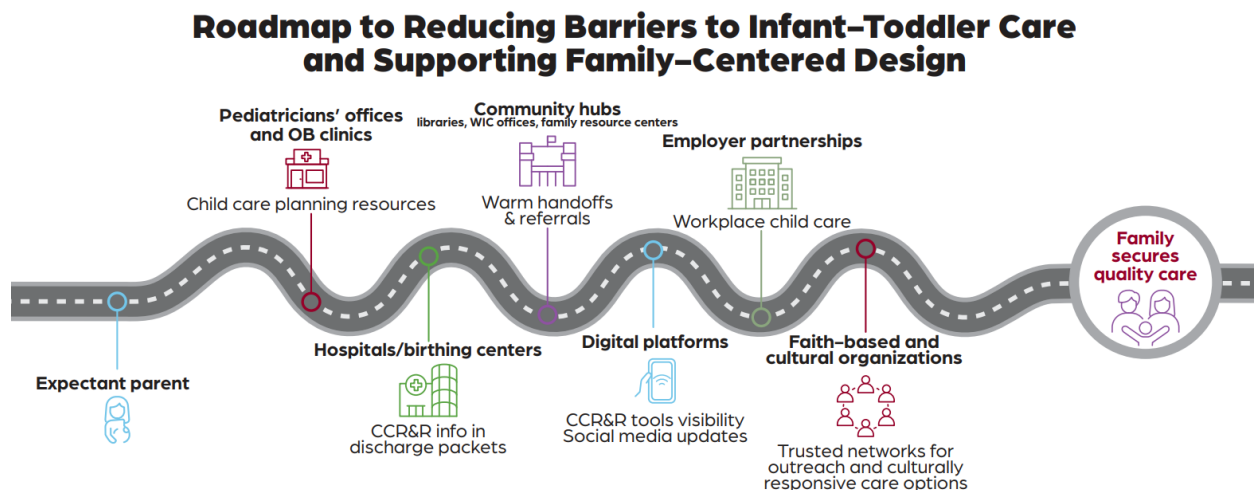
- Prior connections (home visitation programs, family advocates, employment in child care) streamline access.
- Convenience and flexibility (location, hours, employer support) sustain arrangements.
- Families want personalized guidance, not just lists—warm handoffs and navigators are critical.

Action Steps for Oklahoma

<i>Action Step</i>	<i>Focus</i>
Visibility and Information	Centralized portal and CCR&R in hubs
Navigation Supports	Expand navigators and warm handoffs
Flexible Logistics	Pilot extended hours and employer partnerships
Policy Alignment	Enrollment-based reimbursement and grace periods
Sustain Safety and Expand Infant Access	Adjust rates to reflect true costs

Family-Centered Roadmap

Implementation strategies across family touchpoints and enabling supports.



Why This Matters

Oklahoma can lead the nation in family-centered infant care.

By investing in navigation supports and flexible policies now, we strengthen families, employers, and the state economy.

This study was supported by Grant Number 90TP0094-01-00 from the Office of Early Childhood Development within the Administration for Children and Families, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness.