

Child Care

NEWS BRIEF



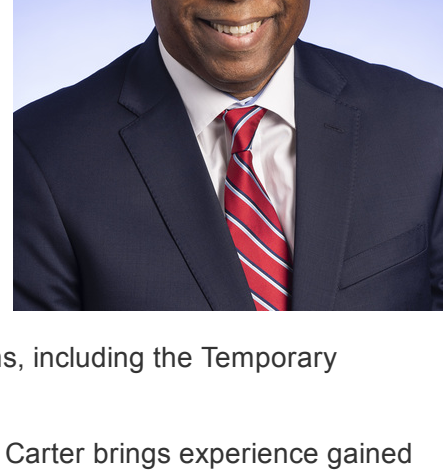
Child Care Services January Newsletter

Happy New Year From Your Partners at the Tennessee Department of Human Services Child Care Services Team!

As we begin this new year, we would like to start by wishing you and your team a safe, healthy, and successful 2021! We recognize that we are all still navigating through the impacts of COVID-19 on agencies, staff, families, children and communities, and we appreciate your hard work and the critical support you provide to children and families every day. Given the elevated rates of COVID-19, we strongly encourage you to stay vigilant in following the CDC recommendations and [guidance for child care providers](#). In the event there is exposure of staff or families at your agency, you should immediately contact your local health department to receive guidance specific to your situation.

Tennessee Department of Human Services Welcomes a New Commissioner

On Wednesday, January 6, 2021 Governor Bill Lee announced the appointment of our new Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) Commissioner, Mr. Clarence H. Carter, who began service January 19.



Commissioner Carter joins TDHS after concluding his time as Director of the Office of Family Assistance and the Acting Director of the Office of Community Services with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families where he was responsible for the administration of seven federal programs, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program.

An Indiana University of Pennsylvania alum, Commissioner Carter brings experience gained serving multiple presidential and gubernatorial administrations. To learn more about our new TDHS Commissioner, [Click Here](#).

2021 Pandemic Child Care Payment Assistance and Certificate Program Updates

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges and many opportunities to approach the delivery of services in different ways over the past several months. During this critical period, Tennessee Department of Human Services remains committed to supporting child care agencies in providing programs that are safe, healthy and educationally rich. As new information becomes available, the Department will share developments through direct emails and postings to our Child Care Services website under the COVID-19 Daily Update located at this [link](#).

Child Care Certificate Program Provider Participation

One of the primary goals of the TDHS Child Care Services Division is to increase access to quality care for all families and promote equity for all children. Our Division believes that all families should have access to quality care that is safe, healthy and educationally rich. Every child should have care that supports learning and fosters social, emotional and cognitive development so children have the opportunity to thrive not only in school, but also in life.

We are very pleased to see the phenomenal increase in enrollment of child care agencies in to the Certificate Program over the past year. Our licensed agency participation increased from 1,436 center and home-based care to 1,812 programs enrolled. This allows families to have more choice in selecting a child care agency that meets the needs of their children and supports equal access. We appreciate your commitment to supporting families within your communities and we encourage those who are currently enrolled to continue the good work!

To help reduce the administrative burden for child care agencies who partner with the State for initiatives like the Child Care Certificate program, the Department is working to modernize systems that strengthen our business processes and efficiencies. Through these efforts, billing and payments will become easier and more automated. As development continues, we will be reaching out to child care agencies who volunteered to serve in an advisory capacity to assist with these efforts. Information will continue to be made available each month in the Newsletter.

COVID-19 Relief Child Care Funding

The Tennessee Department of Human Services expects to receive additional federal funds through the [Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021](#) (Act), signed on December 27, 2020. This bill includes supplemental Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program funding to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic on working families and child care providers. TDHS has not received official notification from the federal agency regarding the amount of funding coming to Tennessee or the timing for release of those funds to our state. However we are proactively making plans to deploy these resources as quickly as possible to meet the needs of families and child care providers who continue to be heavily impacted by COVID-19 and will provide information, as it becomes available.

2020 Disaster/Emergency Response and Recovery Grant Close Out Activities

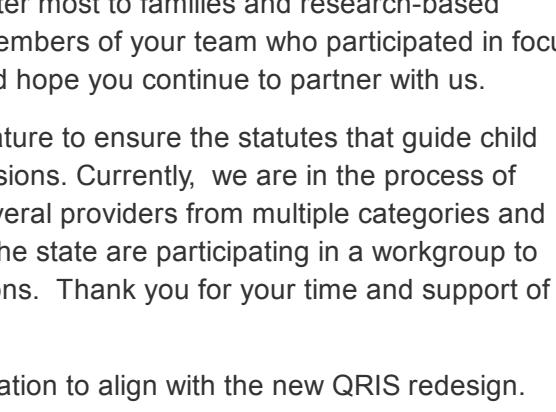
The 2020 Disaster/Emergency Response and Recovery grants program has closed with more than \$52 million approved for distribution to child care agencies to support them as they manage the impact of COVID-19 on operations and customers. Over the last few months, the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee has been completing review of applications and closing out payments. As additional funding becomes available in Tennessee, we will be considering how to best deploy resources to support child care providers.

New Small Business Administration Loan and Grant Programs and Other Sustainability Resources

During this time of COVID, several opportunities have been made available for child care providers to apply for financial relief to support ongoing sustainability through agencies such as the Small Business Administration. Our Federal Partner, the Administration for Children & Families has developed a resource website to explain these different opportunities. This website, which can be accessed [here](#), provides links to webinars, as well as information on other technical assistance resources.

QRIS Redesign Update

The Department of Human Services is continuing the transformative journey of redesigning the current Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), the program used to evaluate and report on the quality of agency child care. With the help of consultants and extensive study, TDHS began modernization that will streamline reporting and provide information based on the metrics that matter most to families and research-based positive outcome predictors. We appreciate the members of your team who participated in focus groups to provide feedback on these big ideas and hope you continue to partner with us.

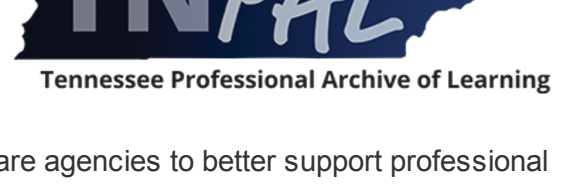


In this new year, we will be working with the legislature to ensure the statutes that guide child care licensing can be updated to reflect QRIS revisions. Currently, we are in the process of drafting rule revisions to support the redesign. Several providers from multiple categories and representatives from partnering agencies across the state are participating in a workgroup to review and give input about proposed rules revisions. Thank you for your time and support of this process!

We are also conducting an internal staff reorganization to align with the new QRIS redesign. This will allow staff resources to be deployed in a manner that builds partner relationships and promotes overall quality improvement. We will use monthly newsletters to keep all providers informed on the progress and plans for QRIS changes and ask for your feedback.

TNPAL Launch

The Tennessee Department of Human Services recently launched the **Tennessee Professional Archive of Learning (TNPAL)**, a free online resource for early childhood professionals working in TDHS-licensed child care agencies to better support professional development. Developed in coordination with the Tennessee State University Center of Excellence for Learning Sciences and the Johns Hopkins University Institute for Innovation in Development, Engagement, and Learning Systems (IDEALS), TNPAL is a secure, password-protected online resource early childhood professionals may access any time on any device.



Educators, directors, and other agency support staff will benefit from TNPAL being a single, web-based tool designed to collect and preserve accomplishments, credentials, education, certifications, awards, and completed trainings. TNPAL supports the TDHS license monitoring process by placing verification of training, education, and employment online for convenient access that is less burdensome for child care agencies. TNPAL also empowers educators to connect with coaches and engage with new professional development planning tools.

Signing up for TNPAL is easy—early childhood professionals open an account using a web browser on any computer, phone, or tablet by visiting [www.tnpal.org](#). The system requires early childhood professionals to use a personal email to ensure data security and that professional development and completed trainings are portable. TNPAL uses a profile registration to match information with trainings completed through TCCOTS and partners like CCR&R and TECTA. Additional training opportunities and resources are available through TrainTN ([www.traintn.org](#)).

Each month, we will provide an update on TNPAL as child care educators and administrators begin familiarizing themselves with this resource and our partners at TECTA and CCR&R are available to assist with guided registrations to support educators and agencies with signing up on TNPAL. The TNPAL Help Desk is also available to assist with your TNPAL user experience. Visit [www.tnpal.org](#) to learn more and sign up. If you prefer a guided experience, register for a TNPAL orientation through our partners by visiting TECTA ([www.tecta.info](#)) or CCR&R ([www.tnccrr.org](#)).

New COVID-19 Vaccine Information

COVID-19 Vaccine Information:

For priority access to the COVID-19 vaccine, child care providers are in the same phase as school teachers. Different parts of the state are in different phases of distributing the vaccine. If a child care agency wants to know which phase is taking place in their community or wants information about how to access the vaccine, they should coordinate with their local health department. [Click here to view the TN Department of Health Press Release](#) for more detailed information about Tennessee's Vaccination Plan.



News from Tennessee Department of Health for Child Care Agencies wanting to obtain COVID-19 Test Kits

The state has authorized a program for interested Tennessee businesses to obtain COVID-19 test kits, free of charge while supplies last. Administered jointly by the Tennessee Department of Health and Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, the program's goal is to help participating businesses demonstrate with greater confidence that their facility is safe to customers and employees.

In order to access the test kits, businesses must follow certain reporting requirements and follow guidelines.

The first step to participate in this program is to fill out [this spreadsheet \(click here\)](#) and send it to the covid19.testing@tn.gov email so the business can be added to the survey. (This usually takes about 24 hours.) Facilities are unable to enter their own address information directly into the survey as a means to control who can access the survey and order supplies. Once added to the survey, child care agencies will be listed under the "Industry" category.

After registering through the survey, child care agencies can order the Binax rapid antigen tests as long as they can fulfill the requirements of obtaining a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) waiver and registering for reporting. Guidance documents are below (Please read each thoroughly):

Directions for ordering supplies: [Ordering BinaxNOW Guidance](#)

General guidance: [General Guidance - Use and Obtaining CLIA Waiver](#)

Reporting: [Reporting Guidance](#)

If you have any questions about this program or issues with the process, please contact covid19.testing@tn.gov

Additional Information from Abbott who produces the BinaxNOW Cards:

Training materials for the BinaxNOW test can be accessed [here](#) and trainings are available via WebEx. The WebEx training consists of a PowerPoint Presentation which lasts approximately 30 minutes. For technical questions regarding the BinaxNOW test, please call Abbott Technical Services at 1-800-257-9525. Email COVID.Laboratory@TN.gov if you are interested in scheduling a training via WebEx.

Your facility's use of BinaxNOW COVID-19 Ag Card will assist with testing and enable adherence to ongoing testing practices according to public health guidelines. For information on Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) POC antigen and asymptomatic testing, click [here](#). For FDA recommendations for health care providers who are ordering authorized tests outside their authorization (e.g., antigen tests for asymptomatic individuals) – see [FDA's FAQ on Testing for SARS-CoV-2](#) ("Q: Does the FDA have recommendations for health care providers using SARS-CoV-2 diagnostic tests for screening asymptomatic individuals for COVID-19?") for further information.

Thank you for remaining flexible and attentive to health and safety protections, while remaining responsive to family needs in our state.

All Daily Child Care Notices Can be Found by Clicking Here