



**Snohomish County**  
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## **Snohomish County Invests \$7.8 Million of Federal Pandemic Recovery Dollars to Increase Access to Child Care**

*Includes Training for School-Aged Care Staff to Support Children and Families' Mental Health and Wellbeing*

**Snohomish County, Wash., November 2, 2022** – Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers announced that the County is investing \$7.8 million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars to increase access to child care, with a focus on children and families' social-emotional development and affordability programs. Through these investments, in the second quarter of 2022, YMCA of Snohomish County reported a 62 percent increase in staff who felt they now had increased strategies to support positive social behaviors among the children they cared for.

The initial package of \$7.8 million in ARPA investments includes:

1. \$2.9 million for school-aged child care and social-emotional development and mental health supports for enrolled children and families;
2. \$2.35 million for stabilizing every Snohomish County Early Childhood Education & Assistance Program (ECEAP) provider; and
3. \$2.5 million for child care vouchers and navigation support primarily for job-seeking families.

The \$7.8 million in ARPA child care investments was proposed by Executive Somers and appropriated by the County Council as part of the 2022 budget process. This funding is in addition to the \$12 million for child care investments Executive Somers proposed as part of the 2023 budget process, which, if appropriated, would bring total County ARPA child care investments to nearly \$20 million.

“When I talk with child care providers, they confirm that the pandemic has caused a serious uptick in behavioral health challenges among the children they’re caring for. Without adequate resources and training, providers are being stretched beyond breaking point and children aren’t getting the kind of support they need,” said Executive Somers. “Through this program, we’re supporting our children, providing tools to caregivers, and helping undo the harms caused by COVID-19. These investments are one part of our broader effort to expand access for communities across our county, particularly in places where child care is already extremely scarce.”

“A plan to equitably recover from the impacts of COVID is incomplete without investing in child care, child care providers, and the young people who need mental and behavioral health services,” said

Council Chair Megan Dunn ([District 2](#)). “When schools were shut down and children learned remotely, parents, and in particular women, exited the workforce to stay home and care for their children. This support by the County to help get our child care system stabilized will pay off not just immediately, but for generations to come.”

“Snohomish County's lack of affordable, quality child care is one of the biggest challenges that the pandemic exacerbated. With this investment, we are starting to take great strides in Snohomish County to address this gap and serve families. Improvements in this sector will continue to be a major focus point in my work going forward,” said Vice Chair Jared Mead ([District 4](#)).

“Lack of child care is one of the most significant burdens to entering the workforce for many Snohomish County individuals. Our youth were also some of the hardest hit from the pandemic shutdowns. These investments will help bolster our child care system in Snohomish County and provide support for our children to make up some of the learning loss over the past two and a half years,” said Councilmember Nate Nehring ([District 1](#)).

“Too often, people that want to work either can't find or can't afford quality child care. Making these targeted investments in our child care system will help us build an economy that works for everyone,” said Councilmember Strom Peterson ([District 3](#)).

“Investing in child care and behavioral health services is critical so that there is improved access to these programs for Snohomish County residents. I am grateful we are getting these funds out to the families that need them,” said Councilmember Sam Low ([District 5](#)).

Snohomish County invested \$2.9 million in school-aged child care subsidies coupled with behavioral health supports through partnerships with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Snohomish County and YMCA of Snohomish County. This program provides tuition subsidies for families at or below 60 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) as well as social-emotional development and mental health services for children and families. These services help youth and families manage stress, increase coping skills, and reduce behavioral challenges. Through September 2022, this program has helped more than 2,300 families through tuition subsidies and/or behavioral health supports.

“The YMCA of Snohomish County is incredibly grateful of the partnership with the County,” said Peyton Tune, CEO, YMCA of Snohomish County. “When our children have the tools to grow, their potential is boundless. At the Y, our child care programs use developmentally appropriate curriculums to foster physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth for every child. The ARPA funds have supported families with financial barriers, and allowed us to provide mental health support to youth and families in need during a very critical time. Removing obstacles to high-quality, affordable child care means more families can attend work and school with peace of mind knowing their child is safe in a supportive environment.”

“Recently, a grandmother stopped into one of our Clubs after unexpectedly getting custody of her three school-age grandkids due to addiction challenges. Being the only wage earner in the household, she was worried that she would not be able to continue her retail job due to the lack of affordable child care. When she learned from a neighbor that we may be able to help, she was skeptical but decided to try. Her relief when she learned that we would indeed be able to provide safe and affordable child care was evident both in the tears and multiple plates of cookies she has brought to the staff,” said Marci Volmer, Chief Operating Officer, Boys & Girls Club of Snohomish County. “Thanks as well to the mental health

staff funded by Snohomish County, Club staff report not only an obvious benefit to the youth but also to staff themselves. They feel more confident in supporting challenging behaviors and credit that change to the ongoing training and modeling of the Mental Health staff.”

In addition, the County is issuing a total of \$2.35 million in stabilization grants to all 16 Snohomish County ECEAP providers across 26 locations. ECEAP providers are using these grants to sustain and expand services without disruption. ECEAP serves some of the County’s most vulnerable children and families, and the cost of providing ECEAP services has significantly increased due to the pandemic, all while social-emotional developmental needs among children have also increased.

“Last year we were able to provide a summer program for students that were enrolled in our ECEAP program. Each of the 60 students that attended received over 100 hours of ECEAP programming, from the middle of June to the end of August. By utilizing these funds to maintain the growth that students have made over the course of the school year, we were able to combat summer regression and close the opportunity gap that can lead to an achievement gap for our students,” said Matt Wyant, Early Learning Center Associate Principal, Lake Stevens School District. “I want to personally thank Snohomish County for recognizing the importance of early learning and supporting the children and families in our community.”

“ARPA funding let us intentionally plan for staff, students, materials, curriculum, activities and parent engagement. We are able to create parent engagement opportunities throughout the summer, incorporate four field trips and end the summer program with an at-home Pizza Party that incorporated language, math, cognitive, social studies, literacy and social-development skills. Without this funding, we would not have been able to create such an in-depth, individualized and engaging program that prepared students for the start of kindergarten,” said Kim D. Parker, ECEAP Coordinator, Mukilteo ECEAP Preschool.

Finally, Snohomish County is investing \$2.5 million in child care affordability vouchers primarily for job-seeking families. The goal with these vouchers is to fill a significant gap in the system by targeting families who are not eligible for the State’s [Working Connections Child Care](#) program.

In addition to vouchers, this program will offer several types of navigation support to families seeking child care assistance. Families will receive help navigating the child care funding system and locating a provider that meets their needs. They will also receive connections to other public benefits and community resources they’re eligible for, including food, housing, employment, health, and other basic needs supports. The voucher program is not currently open to the public; the County and Opportunity Council will identify eligible recipients through partnerships with employment assistance organizations.

“Opportunity Council will be dedicated to connecting families with low incomes who do not qualify for state child care subsidy to maintain or access high-quality, licensed child care while families and caregivers participate in job training, perform job searches, and other employment related activities,” said Wilanne Ollila-Perry, Assistant Director of the Quality Child Care Division/Early Learning and Family Services Department. “Navigators will also be connecting families with other county resources throughout their participation in the Child Care Choice Voucher Program to help them to stabilize and thrive as they pursue their work/life path.”

In the coming weeks, Executive Somers will announce additional efforts using ARPA funds to expand child care services, including investments in new facilities.

Executive Somers established the Office of Recovery & Resilience to guide the County's recovery work by ensuring federal pandemic relief is administered quickly, effectively, and equitably. Information on the County's recovery work can be found at [www.snohomishcountywa.gov/recovery](http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/recovery).

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