

# Comprehensive, Connected Early Childhood Systems

Help Georgia's Young Children and  
Families Thrive



Children's experiences during the early years **set the foundation** for their future learning and development. In fact, more than one million neural connections are formed each second during the first years of a child's life, making access to high-quality services and resources even **more important during this critical window**. The various programs, policies, and agencies that help meet young children's early learning, health, and economic needs constitute an **early childhood system**.

Well-designed early childhood systems are **comprehensive, interconnected, and interdependent**, enabling children to reach their full potential and ensuring stability and continuity of services from the prenatal stage through school-age. **A systems approach** attempts to connect various sectors and child-serving initiatives, despite the often siloed nature of such programs.



The systems map on the reverse was designed to depict Georgia's early childhood system, one that spans early learning, child health, economic wellbeing, and family supports. While comprehensive, this map is not exhaustive and primarily focuses on publicly funded programs and services for children and families.

## A Guide to Georgia's Child-Serving State Agencies

**Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL):** DECAL licenses, monitors, and provides support for child care providers throughout the state. The agency also administers Georgia's Pre-K program and is the lead agency for the administration of the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), the primary funding source for CAPS.

**Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH):** DPH leads Georgia's disease, injury, and disability prevention work; promotes health and wellbeing; and prepares for and responds to health crises. DPH funds and collaborates with Georgia's 159 county health departments and 18 public health districts, emphasizing maternal and child health through initiatives like Georgia Home Visiting and Babies Can't Wait early intervention services.

**Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS):** A division of the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS), DFCS oversees public child welfare in the state. DFCS responds to reports of abuse and neglect against children, as well as oversees foster care placement and adoption services.

**Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH):** DCH oversees the administration of the statewide Medicaid program, as well as PeachCare, Georgia's need-based children's health insurance program.

**Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE):** GaDOE oversees public K-12 education throughout the state. GaDOE ensures that laws and regulations pertaining to education are followed and that state and federal money appropriated for education is properly allocated to local school systems.

**Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD):** DBHDD serves people living with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and intellectual and developmental disabilities by operating state hospitals and providing for community-based services across the state through contracted providers.

**Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA):** DCA supports communities in Georgia through local government assistance, community and economic development, and affordable housing.

	Early Childhood Education				Health						Family Supports & Economic Well-Being			
Program	<b>CAPS</b> <i>Childcare and Parent Services</i>	<b>Georgia's Pre-K</b>	<b>Head Start &amp; Early Head Start</b>	<b>Preschool Special Education</b>	<b>Medicaid PeachCare for Kids</b>	<b>Babies Can't Wait (BCW)</b>	<b>Children's Medical Services</b>	<b>WIC</b>	<b>CACFP</b> <i>Child &amp; Adult Care Food Program</i> Happy Helpings	<b>SNAP</b> <i>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program</i>	<b>TANF</b> <i>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families</i>	<b>Georgia Home Visiting</b>	<b>Housing Assistance</b>	<b>Foster &amp; Adoption</b>  Plans of Safe Care
Description	The CAPS program provides scholarships that help some working families with low-incomes afford child care.	Funded by the Georgia Lottery, Georgia's Pre-K is a voluntary, free pre-kindergarten program, with classrooms in both local school systems and child care centers.	Head Start (serving children ages 4-5) & Early Head Start (serving children 0-3 as well as pregnant women) are federal programs that provide early learning, health, nutrition, & family support services.	Program provides special education services to children ages 3-5 who have been identified by local school districts as needing early intervention services, in accordance with IDEA Part B.	Medicaid and PeachCare are federal-state partnerships that provide healthcare coverage to low-income pregnant women, children, and parents.	Early intervention program that evaluates and serves infants and toddlers (from birth to 36 months) with disabilities and developmental delays, in accordance with IDEA Part C.	Children's Medical Services (CMS) supports families caring for children with special health needs by providing access to healthcare management services.	WIC is the federal supplemental nutrition program providing food, health education, and referrals to pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women with low incomes and children <5 at nutritional risk.	CACFP reimburses for meals at child care programs, emergency shelters, & adult care programs. Happy Helpings, GA's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), similarly reimburses for meals during the summer.	Also known as "Food Stamps," SNAP is a federally funded program for households with low incomes providing monthly benefits to offset the cost of food.	Monthly cash assistance for families and pregnant women with very low incomes and in "child only" cases when children are in kinship care.	Voluntary, evidence-based program that connects parents and caregivers with a trained professional who supports them during the early stages of raising a family.	The federally funded Housing Choice Voucher Program, formerly known as Section 8, provides rental assistance to families, people with disabilities, and the elderly.	Foster and Adoption services provide housing, supervision, and care to children who are child-welfare involved. Plans of Safe Care supports new parents experiencing substance use disorder.
State Agency/Entity Responsible	DECAL	DECAL	DECAL/HS Collaboration Office	GaDOE	DCH CMOs	DPH	DPH	DPH	DECAL	DHS	DCFS	DPH	DCA	DFCS
Eligibility	Family eligibility is set at or below 50% of the state median income based on family size. Parents must participate in approved work/education activities. Due to limited funding, families must also be a member of a <b>priority group</b> .	Georgia's four-year-olds regardless of parental income (subject to available seats)	Family eligibility is set at or below 100% of the federal poverty level.	Georgia's 3-5-year-olds who qualify for special education services	Individuals with low incomes, including pregnant women, children under 19, and parents (income thresholds vary across groups)	Infants and toddlers (0-36 months) with a disability or significant developmental delay who meet certain eligibility requirements	Eligibility is set at 247% of the federal poverty level for children and adults under 21.	Eligibility is set at 185% of the federal poverty level for pregnant, breastfeeding, or postpartum women and parents/guardians.	Providers who serve meals to children and adults in various environments where a percentage of the population receive Medicaid, child care subsidies, or meet the criteria for free or reduced lunch	Households that meet the gross income limits, which is 130% of the federal poverty level	Families with very low incomes who also meet work requirements. Most TANF cases are child-only cases, when children are being cared for by kinship caregivers.	Families who need ongoing support as determined by a screening through First Steps Georgia	Eligibility is set at 50% of the median income for the county in which a family lives; a waitlist exists due to limited funding.	Georgia's children who are determined to be unsafe in their homes by DFCS or who are born with neonatal abstinence syndrome
Reach	69,780 children under 13 receive a scholarship, <sup>1</sup> only an estimated 14.8% of those income-eligible.	73,656 (about 54%) of Georgia's 4-year-olds <sup>2</sup>	~21,975 children are enrolled in Head Start.  ~4,037 children are enrolled in Early Head Start. <sup>3</sup>	27,980 children receive services through Preschool Special Education. <sup>4</sup>	39.7% of Georgia's children are covered by Medicaid/ PeachCare. <sup>5</sup>	17,688 children participate in BCW. <sup>6</sup>	6,389 children receive services through CMS. <sup>7</sup>	186,300 Georgians are enrolled in WIC (38.7% of those eligible). <sup>8</sup>	On average , CACFP serves 129,123 Georgians daily. <sup>9</sup>  On average, SFSP serves 47,564 Georgians daily during the summer. <sup>10</sup>	1,505,624 Georgians receive SNAP benefits monthly. <sup>11</sup>	On average, 6,017 families receive TANF each month, <sup>12</sup> reaching only an estimated 5 out of every 100 families living in poverty.	2,334 children received home visits through Georgia Home Visiting. <sup>13</sup>	<i>Data not available</i>	10,504 children are in Georgia's foster care system. <sup>14</sup>