

Wisconsin Child Care Advisory and Recommendation Exchange (WI-CARE)

December 2, 2025
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Attendees

Attended	First and Last Name	Location	Attended	First and Last Name	Location
	Annette Willburn	Milwaukee	X	Leighton Cooper	Milwaukee
X	Bianca Hill	Milwaukee	X	Liz Tittle	Little Chute
X	Carol Jackomino	Rhineland	X	Margarita Ugalde	Madison
X	Cassie Koch	Madison	X	Rose Catlett	Middleton
X	Christine Larson Salerno	Milwaukee	X	Ryann Counce Barnes	Milwaukee
X	Cynthia Reineking	La Crosse	X	Shelly Boelter	Hager City
X	Jay Martinez	Green Bay	X	Sheri Bishop	Pulaski
X	Jen Kalis	Onalaska	X	Suzette Mayotte	Ashland
X	Joahna Shelton	Spooner	X	Tammy Dannhoff	Oshkosh
X	Jolynn Wendt	Arcadia	X	Thanh Bui-Duquette	Eau Claire
X	Jose Martinez	Statewide	X	Tricia Peterson	Juneau
X	Kahlila Fennell	Milwaukee	X	William Hill	Milwaukee
X	Kishaunda Ransaw	Milwaukee			

DCF Staff: Andrea Cammilleri (tech/notes), Daria Hall (facilitator), Molly Hones (notes), Danielle Karnopp (facilitator), Laura Knott (facilitator), Cassidy Peterson (tech), David Timmerman (facilitator), Sam Weishan (notes)

Meeting Notes

12:00 – 12:10 **Welcome, Reminder of Meeting Norms, Recap of last meeting**

Daria Hall, Policy Initiatives Advisor

DCF Division of Early Care and Education

Notes: Daria read through the meeting norms, meeting agenda, and shared a recap of ideas that members shared about the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards.

12:10 - 12:55 **Subsidy Usage – Additional Resources Discussion**
Danielle Karnopp, Wisconsin Shares Modernization Lead
DCF Division of Early Care and Education
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All WI-CARE Members in breakout rooms

Notes

- In the April 2025 WI-CARE meeting, DCF asked for insights on how subsidy usage and subsidy payment practices impact children, parents, and providers:
 - Holding a Slot
 - Enrollment Based Payments
 - Parents Paying Subsidy to Provider
- Since the implementation of the MyWisconsinChildCare EBT card, DCF policy has been that parents may only pay providers the amount of money they are billed, even if their EBT card is loaded with more funds. Over the years, several items have led to DCF looking to change this policy.
- First, federal rule encourages states to pay child care providers based on the state's subsidy rates. The purpose of this guidance is to both ensure equal access to child care for eligible and non-eligible Wisconsin Shares families, as well as better account for the true cost of care.
- Additionally, Wisconsin transitioned from authorizations based on attendance to authorizations based on enrollment. This transition occurred in the fall of 2023 and authorizations are now determined on a full-time and part-time child care need.
- Finally, DCF saw a large increase in Voluntary Payment Agreements (VPAs) submitted to the Department. This is largely due to part time authorizations, which are defined as under 20 hours, being over the provider's billed price. This resulted in a large amount of subsidy not getting into the field.
- Policy change effective Oct. 1, 2025:
 - Parents are encouraged (but not required) to pay the provider all subsidy funds loaded to their EBT card, even if it is above the provider's billed amount.
 - Providers are allowed to keep all subsidy funds, even if it is above the billed amount.
 - Paying more than the billed amount will no longer be a reason for a Voluntary Payment Agreement (VPA) or an Overpayment.
- Since these policy changes, we've received a lot of questions. providers have requested additional support and guidance in four main areas:
 - Understanding subsidy
 - Ex: "Is it fraud if a parent is not in their approved activity the entire time they're with us?"
 - Working with parents on subsidy and payments
 - Ex: "What if a parent won't pay until the end of the month?"

- Spending/using subsidy
 - Ex: “Can we use the excess subsidy on a parent’s past outstanding balance?”
- Attendance impact on using subsidy
 - Ex: “What if the child hasn’t attended the last 30 days but they owe us a prior balance?”

Question 1: Are these the right topics/questions to address in new resources? What else needs clarification?

Breakout Room 1 Notes

- I agree with all the questions except the second one, because that’s a program issue. Whatever your policy states around payment is what you would need to enforce with that parent.
- I agree, but I’m also wondering because so many providers from my experience don’t always understand that as a business aspect of their role. Even if DCF just clarified it to make sure providers know they need to set and enforce that policy, that would be helpful. I agree the categories are pretty good, but in the second one, when the state switched to MyWICChildCare EBT, the stance was communicated that providers don’t work with the parents on their subsidy, the parents work with the state’s authorizing agency. Our understanding was the parents work with the state partner agency, unless there’s an issue like an overpayment, which then the state goes after the provider, not the family. So there have been some complications in that type of scenario that could be clarified around how to navigate that—specifically, what is providers’ responsibility vs. what is a voluntary courtesy to support parents? It’s good to emphasize that child care is a business and help providers understand those details of how they need to manage that business, especially if they’re new.
- I agree, I like the categories. Is this all going into a Q&A or will information be gathered together as a tool to answer questions that tend to come up from time to time? It seems like it would be intended for providers to help us click through to make sure we understand and can pass the information along to parents. My wondering is if ‘Working with Parents’ should be a sub-category of ‘Understanding Subsidy.’ Is this also intended to be a reference to cite policy? If so, will it then take me to the policy if I need clarity and want to read it more thoroughly? I think that would be a great tool for the provider and potentially for the parent, too.
 - **Follow-up from DCF Facilitator:** The categories do seem a little intertwined and hard to tease out. They aren’t all about the subsidy usage policy change—many of the questions are more fundamental. We started taking a look at all of our resources and recognized that some of our materials are designed for agencies that do the authorization. Our materials for providers are geared

more toward program integrity. Do you think we need a resource around policy for providers?

- I know for our program, having policies for programs to reference for parents would be very helpful. A lot of my struggle is that parents aren't given enough information on how to use subsidy. For example, how do they sign up on their EBT account? What if they take a weeklong vacation? Do they get subsidy for that week? How can they go online to handle issues? Managing subsidy is like a full-time job for me. Anything parent-friendly we can provide would be a big help and a reference of policies for providers around not being able to pay them back in cash, for example, would help, so it's not just me saying I won't pay them back in cash. I would take anything at this point.
 - **DCF Facilitator:** When you're looking for resources like this for parents. I'm gathering that you're doing a lot of the parent educating. What's the most helpful? Are brochures helpful? What is most valuable?
- For our program we use BrightWheel [to communicate with families] and almost everything is online and goes right to their phones—they like quick reads, like images we can send out on that platform. Brochures are outdated and spending money and reprinting constantly is a hassle—we rarely ever use those.
- For outreach purposes at an event, it would be nice to have some things in brochure format but nowadays the use of technology is insurmountable. Integrate the technology so bits of information can be sent from providers to parents in a way that they can receive clear information focused on the exact issue you're dealing with in their situation, as opposed to us sending them to a website to hunt for answers. And then if they're interested and ask us more, we should be able to point them to a broader tool that is written for them to learn more—that will help them with what's allowed for Wisconsin Shares. I would see this as a useful tool and brochures have a purpose, but I don't see sending it out unless I'm at an event with a table, like at a community health fair where we lay out some information. That said, we tend to lay out our agency information, not the DCF information. Not because the subsidy isn't important, but it wouldn't be the first thing we'd consider handing out at those events.
- From my experience, it takes hand-holding, sitting down with each individual family and touring them through the entire process step-by-step. Doing the math with them and again, just a lot of hand-holding. Families that are in this category may already have a lot of other things to deal with. This may not be their top priority if they're worried about food and housing security, for example.
- I agree families don't have a good understanding. In the past, I was always communicating about not paying any more than the exact tuition amount. I've tried to call my Child Care Resource & Referral agency and the county to try to find out how much is on a family's card, but they can't give me that information. It's all on the parents and they unfortunately don't know what's going on with their subsidy.

- I echo what others are saying. I don't have any children on subsidy in my small family program and haven't for many years. When parents call and ask about openings, I ask if they are private pay or subsidy. When I mention subsidy, the majority fire back with a couple questions about subsidy and since I don't have current experience with it, the best I can do is send them back to the subsidy contact to ask those questions. Parents don't have even the most basic information on the process and getting started with it and I can't help with that since I don't know the current process.

Breakout Room 2 Notes

- These are a nice segue into more of the questions we have.

Breakout Room 3 Notes

- I see fewer families participating in Wisconsin Shares but I have families who struggle with paying their child care bill in my county.
- MECA has done a pretty good job of getting in front of this policy change and when my program puts on a program, MECA requests to set up a table. This approach is a great way to get information out.
- I like the policy change.
- I do not currently have a Shares family and do not have any feedback at this time.

Question 2: Within the limits of DCF's role, what materials and guidance are most helpful for providers and families?

Breakout Room 1 Notes

- **DCF Facilitator:** When you are relying on your own business practices to handle subsidy, what is the most helpful from DCF to reinforce that business practice? Do providers need more of something, like training on business practices? I'm hearing that you are doing a lot of this work with parents and this question is about helping us to hear: what are the areas where more detailed guidance and information would be better?
- I almost feel like leaving so much up to programs based on what we choose to do is more difficult. Funding comes in once a month and what if my system isn't set up to take that and I have to completely adjust when I get my first Wisconsin Shares family? It would be good to have scenarios of how to set policies and how to support parents, clarifying whose role is it? What it looks like to me is that they get approval, they get a letter, and they come to me, and the rest is up to me. I want to accept subsidy but the work needed to create all of this is a lot.
- From my perspective and experience with a wide variety of other providers in a large community, often we have the biggest hearts and sometimes it's a challenge to balance delivering loving messages about the child's development and celebrations of their

child's growth and learning, then you almost have to flip a switch to deliver the business messages and indicate they can't stay if they don't pay. You wear so many hats as a provider and it's hard to switch that mindset. Providers want to help, we are trying to meet a need and serve the needs of families in our community. I get that they can't make that payment and we adapt to suggest a later payment date, and we get pushed, and pushed, and pushed. It doesn't mean we don't care, but we can't have a mission if we don't have a business with policies in place. Coaching and guidance for providers is needed, particularly for many who are opening up centers, to help set them up for success. Information overload by kicking someone to a website is not the way to do it. A hotline or a way to talk me through things without fear of punitive reactions would be helpful.

- I propose the idea of options or prompts to share with parents like reminders to submit subsidy payments, step-by-step instructions for general questions that we can share with parents or even emails/text for us to send out on the first of the month to request they send payments. Another thought would be for providers to get a notification when a parent makes a subsidy payment instead of us providers having to look for the payments in the Child Care Provider Portal.

Breakout Room 2 Notes

- It would help to clarify what topics are business practices, not DCF-determined items. I'm often telling providers "your business is your business."
- Handouts for parents (like the WECA parent handout on the food program); similar language for DCF and local agencies.
- My policy is lengthy, sometimes parents don't read it, sometimes parents don't listen to providers or look at child care as a provider business.
- Universal language for parents and providers. For example, could you make it a requirements for funds to be transferred at the beginning of the month? I acknowledge there's tension between wanting universal language/requirements and wanting to maintain providers' business prerogative.
- **DCF Facilitator:** How many providers are struggling to get payments from Wisconsin Shares-participating parents?
 - Lots in my community, but they're not on WI-CARE or in settings like this.
 - I don't have a lot of Shares families, but I do billing reconciliation at the end of a month to make sure they pay their co-pay. I do have an issue with getting to co-pay sometimes. Parents don't withhold to be spiteful, but they do forget sometimes.
- I struggle with the different answers families get when they call the consortia. They get different answers from different workers. Universal language at the consortia level would be helpful.
- The [one pager on subsidy usage](#) was amazing. I'd love if people from the consortia got it.

- Parents don't understand they have a parent share [co-pay] to pay.
- Explain to parents that if you have extra funds and you give them to the provider (subsidy usage), it helps your provider maintain high levels of quality. People want to keep extra funds even if they can't use them. They think they can use them for an extra child, or for the 5th week of the month. More talking points on subsidy usage would be helpful.
- **DCF Facilitator:** Are FAQs helpful?
 - Yes x 2
- Can you share the [max Shares rate document](#) more widely? Some providers would adjust their rates accordingly. This could create more consistency across providers.

Breakout Room 3 Notes

- This is a timely topic and it would be great to have a pamphlet or something similar that is accessible like on the website. The pamphlet should have basic information like "What is Wisconsin Shares?"—that information is not easily found. The website and policy Handbook are antiquated and need updating. Programs should continue to establish the payment process/structure, it should not be up to DCF to step in.
- My business structure is to have parents pay the week prior to the first. I agree that having a pamphlet or something to that effect is a great idea.
- It would be nice to have something that could easily be sent through text, apps, or email, like an infographic.
- Having information on how subsidy can be used could be helpful. The subsidy that providers receive is considered income and it should be a programmatic decision on how it should be used. My program uses a lot of funds to keep the doors open for kids (i.e. afterschool activities) to keep kids off the street and keep them safe. It doesn't hurt to have more information that supports programs.
- I agree with having parameters around how to use funding. Our program goal is to ensure family sustainability and help maintain the parent's employment by providing as much care as possible. It would be helpful to have some information on what subsidy can be used for (e.g., supplies for teachers/caregivers). All standards can be interpreted differently so having ideas on how subsidy can be used would be beneficial.
- I'd like materials for parents that are quick and easy with a catchy saying, something providers can hand out (like a one pager).
- The materials and resources should be parent-friendly, palatable, and easily understood.

Action Items:

- Offer clear resources to providers delineating their role and responsibilities to set business policies, and how they can enforce them with Wisconsin Shares families.

- Develop easy-to-access resources that allow providers to search for information that is presented very clearly in a way that they can pass along to parents in bite-size amounts based on the need. Consider that it will likely be sent via text or an app.
- Develop basic accessible information for families about all aspects they need to know about Wisconsin Shares.
- Support access to business practices coaching and/or customer service support for providers around accepting Wisconsin Shares, particularly when they are getting started.
- Continue to set up tables at community events to get the word out about Wisconsin Shares and answer people's questions about it.
- Consider automating prompts to remind parents to submit their subsidy payment and/or to notify providers when a payment has been submitted.
- Create more talking points, FAQs, and communication templates for providers.
- Consider eliminating some of the uncertain things that are left up to providers to create clarity and consistency, for example: offering guidance that payment is due by a certain date of the month.
- Help parents understand that they won't benefit from withholding any of the subsidy amount, but that the provider will use that money to increase quality.
- Offer guidance and examples to providers around how subsidy funds can be spent.

11:55 – 12:00 **Wrap-Up, Public Comment and Next Steps**
Daria Hall, Policy Initiatives Advisor
DCF Division of Early Care and Education

Notes

- A member of the public commented that she agrees it can be confusing for providers working with parents and families, not knowing what the roles are and how to best support. Providers are in a middle zone between Wisconsin Shares and the family, and as the "middle man" they can't see what families get for benefits. Eliminating some of the questionable things that are left up to discretion would be helpful, for example for DCF to say that payment is due by a certain date of the month, or to help providers write their own policy around the payment due date because it's daunting to write a policy, not knowing if your policy might violate Wisconsin Shares guidelines. Who can I go to for help with that? We need to make that process easier and information more available to help providers and they can then offer better guidance to parents.
- Next steps:
 - DCF will consider your input and finalize additional resources to make available to providers
 - DCF will publish additional resources
- Next meeting: Jan. 9, 2026; Topic: YoungStar Analysis & Update Project

English

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Spanish

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