



# Summary: Participation of Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregivers in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

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Home Grown is a national collaborative of funders, caregivers, and providers working together to advance an inclusive child care system where home-based child care is visible, valued, and well-resourced. We work in partnership with the diverse array of family child care providers and family, friend and neighbor caregivers who comprise the home-based child care sector. Learn more on our [website](#).

## Introduction

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In Cook County, Illinois, family, friend and neighbor (FFN) caregivers are permitted to participate in the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), bringing needed funding to caregivers and healthy nutrition to the children in their care. This summary provides an overview of the funding, policy, and other supports that form the foundation of this innovative practice.

## Illinois State Policies, Regulation & Other Supports

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The Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) subsidy program is called Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) in Illinois and is administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services – Early Childhood Development (IDHS)<sup>1</sup>. The state agency responsible for administering CACFP is the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The state agency responsible for administering CACFP is the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The IL CCDF Plan includes the following: “ISBE works closely with the Lead Agency to include license-exempt (LE) home-based child care providers serving CCDF children. The Lead Agency provides confirmation that home-based child care providers who are applying for the CACFP are currently receiving CCAP funding, which is an eligibility criterion for home providers. This is done on a continuous basis as providers apply for CACFP. This coordination results in stronger compliance with CACFP eligibility criteria and greater access to CACFP funding for LE child care providers.” Note that the terms *license-exempt home-based child care providers* and *family, friend and neighbor (FFN) caregivers* are often used interchangeably as most FFN caregivers are legally exempt from licensure. FFN caregivers are family members and trusted friends who care for related and other children. In Illinois, FFN caregivers may legally care for up to three children without a license.

This collaborative, coordinated and FFN- or LE-inclusive approach is operationalized in several ways: 1) FFN providers participating in CCAP have presumptive eligibility for CACFP (if care is provided in the home of the FFN provider); 2) Trusted intermediaries such as Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) rather than the state lead agency provide health and safety monitoring for FFN providers participating in CCAP; 3) FFN caregivers who complete additional training receive increases in payment for each CCAP child in care and can apply for quality improvement grants; and 4) FFN caregivers have a three-month grace period in which they can continue to participate in CACFP even if the child's CCAP case is expired due to late renewal.

The Illinois policy alignment between CCAP and CACFP can be summarized as follows:

- License-exempt providers (relative & non-relative) participating in CCAP must meet federally mandated background checks.
- License-exempt CCAP providers (non-relative) must meet health and safety pre-service and annual training requirements and are monitored annually for compliance with Federal requirements.
  - **Therefore, CCAP license-exempt providers are eligible to participate in CACFP.**
- License-exempt providers participating in CACFP must meet all CACFP requirements.
- License-exempt CACFP providers are monitored three times per year as CACFP requires.

This results in LE providers who participate in both CCAP and CACFP having a number of structured interactions with publicly funded programs, supports, and resources. Providers in this group receive at least three monitoring visits per year and non-relative FFN providers receive four visits per year. During visits, staff may answer questions, address problems, and give assistance through advice and referral resources. The active engagement helps them better meet their own needs and those of the children they serve, and realize an increase in their social capital.

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<sup>1</sup> Starting July 1, 2026, the CCDF subsidy program and child care licensing in Illinois will be administered by a new state agency called the Illinois Department of Early Childhood.

## Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) Operational Supports

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Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) is one of the CACFP sponsors under annual agreement with ISBE. IAFC is also a CCR&R agency under contract with IDHS for Cook County both to provide information to parents seeking child care and to monitor LE providers that receive CCAP subsidy funding. IAFC creates efficiencies across these roles and systems by leveraging CCDF requirements and funding to bolster FFN outreach, engagement and CACFP participation. Through the CCDF annual monitoring visit, IAFC staff continue to identify new FFNs to enroll in the CACFP program. IAFC CCDF staff take an integrated approach, thereby supporting CACFP outreach, technical assistance and training even in advance of a FFN caregiver's formal enrollment in CACFP. These efficiencies are critical, given that only 25% of FFNs who express interest in CACFP ultimately apply to participate with IAFC. Further stretching the IAFC budget, approximately 24% of enrolled LE providers never submit a menu to claim reimbursement. CACFP sponsors are paid based on the number of menus that providers successfully claim for reimbursement. So as CACFP sponsor, IAFC receives no administrative payment for all the outreach, engagement, enrollment, training, and other work already performed for providers who do not submit their menus for reimbursement.

As a team, IAFC's Health, Safety & Nutrition department engages FFN caregivers with a variety of resources, training, and other supports to ensure that they are maximizing both the quality of care provided and the funding that they receive in compensation for that care. These include:

- CCDF Engagement, Training & Enrollment
  - Pre-service training on 10 health and safety topics
  - Nutrition and physical activity are among the suggested health and safety training topics
  - Coaches promote participation in CACFP during all technical assistance engagements.
- CCDF Annual Monitoring Visit
  - IAFC IDHS-funded Health & Safety Coach uses CCDF-compliant in-home Health & Safety Checklist to confirm that meals and snacks are healthy and that food prep and serving areas are clean and sanitized.
  - Coaches promote CACFP enrollment and make referrals to IAFC CACFP-funded staff during monitoring visits.
  - Pre-service training and annual visits are not required for relative FFN caregivers as negotiated by union (SEIU) contract and allowable by CCDF.
- CCDF Resources Facilitator
  - IAFC created a unique position to "go beyond" the CCDF LE monitoring mandate. The facilitator conducts outreach to all FFN caregivers in Cook County, offering them early childhood, CACFP, and other resources and engaging them to consider early childhood workforce development (training and credentialing) and licensure options.
- CCDF Monthly Payments are provided for child care
- CACFP Monthly Reimbursements are provided for serving healthful meals/snacks
- CACFP Annual Monitoring Visits - two unannounced and one announced
  - FFN caregivers and licensed providers are monitored for CACFP compliance in the same way

For detailed information on IAFC's program implementation, please see the *Implementation Guide: Linking Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregivers to the Child and Adult Care Food Program*. The Implementation Guide is a step-by-step guide for public leaders at the state level responsible for child care and food program administration and for community organizations and advocates working on behalf of vulnerable children and families.

Results

