

## MILITARY CHILD CARE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD-PLUS INITIATIVE

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

#### About Child Care Fee Assistance:

##### **What is Child Care Fee Assistance?**

For more than a decade, the military departments – Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force and Space Force – have provided fee assistance to eligible military families to offset the cost of child care in community programs through Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood, or MCCYN, when on-installation child care is unavailable. MCCYN supports families in locations with extensive waiting lists as well as those that are geographically dispersed – to include Reserve Component families. MCCYN provides fee assistance to eligible military families using nationally accredited child care providers in the community. Child Care Aware® of America serves as the third party administrator for the MCCYN program.

##### **What's new with the Child Care Fee Assistance program?**

The Department of Defense, or DOD, fee assistance program MCCYN has expanded through MCCYN-PLUS. MCCYN-PLUS includes community child care centers that are quality rated by their state's Quality Rating and Improvement System, or QRIS. In locations where national accredited care is unavailable, child care programs with a QRIS level of three or higher will be made available to families. Eligible military families will continue to utilize Child Care Aware® of America as their link to approved fee assistance child care facilities under the MCCYN-PLUS program.

##### **What is the Quality Rating and Improvement System, or QRIS?**

A QRIS is a systemic approach to assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, QRIS awards quality ratings to early and school-age care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. By participating in their state's QRIS, early and school-age care providers embark on a path of continuous quality improvement. Even providers that have met the standards of the lowest QRIS levels have achieved a level of quality that is beyond the minimum requirements to operate.

##### **What is Child Care Aware®?**

Child Care Aware® of America is a nonprofit organization that works directly with child care agencies and families. They are the third party administrator that assists the military departments to serve and support eligible military families through the Child Care Fee Assistance programs. They manage the administration of the MCCYN and MCCYN-PLUS programs. For more information, visit: <https://www.childcareaware.org/>.

##### **Where is MCCYN-PLUS available?**

MCCYN-PLUS is now available in several states. This effort continues to increase the number of eligible child care providers in areas with a high concentration of military families. Child care programs, which include both child care centers and in-home care providers, without accreditation that are currently receiving fee assistance will be required to enroll, and progress, in the state's QRIS system to become an approved MCCYN-PLUS provider. New child care programs will be required to enroll with a minimum quality level of three in the state's QRIS system to become an approved MCCYN-PLUS provider. [Search for eligible providers by state through Child Care Aware® of America.](#)

**Why did the Department of Defense expand MCCYN-PLUS to include quality rated child care?**

The DOD is committed to supporting the health and well-being of all military children. Children play an important role in the strength and resilience of military families. When spouses are comfortable with their family's child care arrangements and children are happy and healthy, service members can focus on their missions. By including quality rated providers as child care options for MCCYN-PLUS, parents can be assured that their children will have safe, healthy and nurturing environments to thrive.

**Will MCCYN-PLUS Fee Assistance program continue to expand to additional states?**

Yes. With the initial success of the program, MCCYN-PLUS continues to grow and expand into additional states. The expansion will provide the opportunity for community child care providers that are enrolled and advancing in their state's QRIS to be eligible to become MCCYN providers. This expansion will offer more available quality child care options for military families. You can learn more about the QRIS programs at <https://ecquality.acf.hhs.gov/>.

**For Service Providers:****What are the benefits to child care providers for participating in the MCCYN-PLUS Fee Assistance program?**

Programs approved for the MCCYN-PLUS fee assistance benefit by expanding their child care businesses to a military family customer base and offer more available options for quality child care. Our military families are getting younger. Well over 400,000 children of all active-duty service members are age 5 and under, and over half of those children are age 2 and under. This is an opportunity to grow their businesses while serving our nation's military parents. In addition, by participating in their state's QRIS program, providers can take advantage of incentives that may be available such as technical assistance, which provides customized support from subject matter experts, and/or financial incentives for professional development training, maintaining accreditation and background check processing.

**What are the standards for becoming an approved MCCYN-PLUS provider?**

Community child care providers must meet the following requirements to be eligible to receive DOD fee assistance:

- Enroll in their state's QRIS program.
- Provide evidence of an initial quality level within twelve months from the date the program is notified of the change in requirements.
- Achieve a quality level three within two years following the initial awarded quality level.
- Advance to a quality level four within two years following the awarded quality level three.
- Advance to the next highest quality level or accreditation within two years.

New applicants requesting to participate in the fee assistance program must meet the following requirements:

- Provide evidence of accreditation recognized by the state's QRIS, if applicable, OR
- Provide evidence of enrollment in QRIS with a minimum level of three.
- Advance to a quality level four within two years following the awarded quality level three.
- Advance to the next highest quality or accreditation within two years.

Community child care providers must continue to meet other MCCYN eligibility requirements for fee assistance as prescribed by the Military Community and Family Policy MCCYN-PLUS Operational Guidance.

**What is the difference between an accredited provider and a provider enrolled in the QRIS program?**

Accredited providers receive national or state recognition by an approved accrediting body that they are meeting a mark of excellence according to a set of quality standards. Providers participating in a QRIS program are recognized for their commitment to quality child care and early education by a state agency. Ratings are awarded to providers as they continue to improve quality based on a set of standards. These quality ratings are also available to families on each state’s website to help them make an informed choice in the care and education of their children.

**Is national accreditation still required for participation in the MCCYN-PLUS program?**

It is the DOD’s policy that community child care programs receiving fee assistance meet state licensing regulations and requirements, adhere to accreditation standards recognized by their state’s QRIS and be inspected by an outside agency once a year. Child Care Aware® will link families to national or state accredited child care programs as a first choice. In locations where national accredited child care programs are unavailable, child care programs with a QRIS level of three or higher will be made available to eligible families.

**For Parents:**

**How do I find out if I am eligible for MCCYN-PLUS?**

Child Care Aware® of America is the third party administrator that manages the administration of the child care fee assistance program, including paying child care providers on behalf of the military services. For more information on eligibility and how to apply, visit: <https://www.childcareaware.org/>. Click on “Learn More” under Fee Assistance and Respite Care for Military/DOD Families. Select your military branch to apply and search for resources and providers near you.

**Will the MCCYN-PLUS program affect the availability of child care?**

Yes, the expansion of the MCCYN-PLUS program will increase the availability of child care. The program is expanding in communities with a high concentration of military families and locations with extensive waitlists for child care. MCCYN-PLUS supports military families by expanding the eligibility requirements to providers enrolled in their state’s quality assurance program.

**Within the scope of the MCCYN-PLUS program, what are my options for child care in the community?**

Military families in search of quality child care options will need to select a provider that is nationally or state accredited. However, in certain locations when accredited care is unavailable, community child care programs with a QRIS level of three or higher will be listed as options.

**I already have a provider. Can he or she participate?**

If care for your child is provided at a child care program, the child care administrator can put you in touch with or contact Child Care Aware® of America for more details on enrollment and eligibility. If your child care program is nationally or state accredited, state licensed and meets the other eligibility requirements, they can participate. If the child care program does not meet the eligibility requirements, Child Care Aware® of America is available to assist with your search for available child care options.

**What happens if my child care provider elects not to participate in their state’s QRIS program?**

Eligible military families with children enrolled in community child care programs that elect not to participate in their state’s QRIS program will be grandfathered until the family’s youngest child ages out of the program, the family disenrolls or the provider becomes ineligible due to noncompliance with state licensing or program policies.