

Diapers for Families in Need: An Overview of Federally Funded Approaches to Diaper Distribution



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Diapers are essential to the health and well-being of babies, toddlers, and their families. They are also expensive, and many families face challenges buying enough of them. When families do not have enough diapers, it can affect child and caregiver health and the family's economic security.¹ For example, diaper need can limit a child's ability to attend child care programs and participate in early childhood education.² If a child cannot attend a child care program, their caregiver may miss work to take care of the child.³

To help address diaper need and increase economic security, the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) [Office of Community Services \(OCS\)](#), in partnership with the [Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation](#), launched the [Diaper Distribution Pilot](#) in September 2022. The Diaper Distribution Pilot provides grants, administered by OCS, to existing diaper distribution programs through community partners. In addition to providing diapers and diapering supplies, such as ointment and wipes, these programs offer to connect families to wraparound services, such as job training, educational support, Head Start, and Early Head Start. Any organization receiving [Community Services Block Grant funding](#) from OCS was eligible to apply for a Diaper Distribution Pilot grant.

ACF separately contracted the [Diaper Distribution Pilot evaluation](#). [Westat](#) and its partners, [Public Profit](#) and Dr. Jennifer Randles, are conducting an evaluation to document how grant recipients serve families, examine the experiences and outcomes for families that receive Diaper Distribution Pilot services, and develop a rigorous design for a future impact study.

This brief is the first in a series of evaluation products that will document the Diaper Distribution Pilot. It uses information from the grant recipients' applications for funding and OCS-developed program spotlights.

^a Updates were made in September 2024 to Exhibits 3, 5, and 6 to correct graphical errors and one coding error.

What's Inside?

This brief is for anyone looking to learn more about the federally funded Diaper Distribution Demonstration and Research Pilot (Diaper Distribution Pilot) and how its grant recipients are getting diapers to families. The brief includes information on the communities the grant recipients serve, the design and structure of their programs, their processes for purchasing and distributing diapers, and the other supports they offer families.

Quick Facts on Diaper Need



33%–50%
percentage of families with young children that experience challenges securing enough diapers^{4,5}



\$945–\$1,500
average amount families spend yearly on diapers for one child⁶



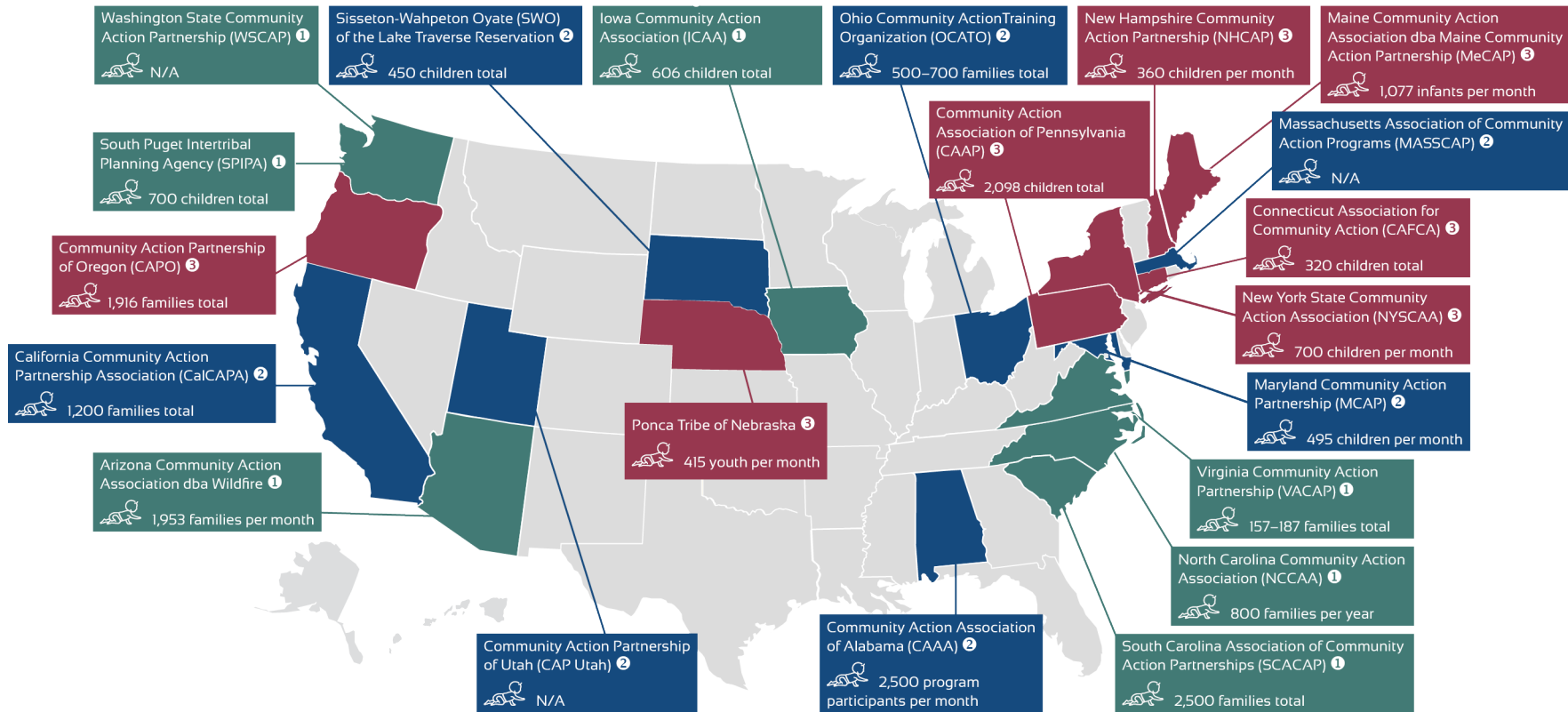
4,600–4,800
average amount of diapers a child will use from birth until potty training⁷

Diaper Distribution Pilot Communities at a Glance

Twenty-one grant recipients serve communities across the nation

Twenty-one grant recipients are carrying out diaper distribution efforts across 21 states, two tribes and one tribal consortium, and the District of Columbia. Grant recipients are grouped into three cohorts based on when they began providing services. Together, they expect to provide diapers to more than 18,000 children or families. Exhibit 1 shows where the Diaper Distribution Pilot is operating and the number of children or families each grant recipient expects to serve.

Exhibit 1 Diaper Distribution Pilot Geographic Coverage and Expected Number of Families Served
Grant recipients serve large geographic areas on both coasts and in the Midwest



1 Cohort 1: September 2022–September 2024 2 Cohort 2: May 2023–April 2025 3 Cohort 3: September 2023–September 2025

Note: The evaluation team identified expected service numbers using grant recipient applications. Not all grant recipients included expected service numbers; these have been marked as N/A. Grant recipients defined their service populations differently; these numbers may indicate expected service numbers of children, families, or participants. dba = doing business as

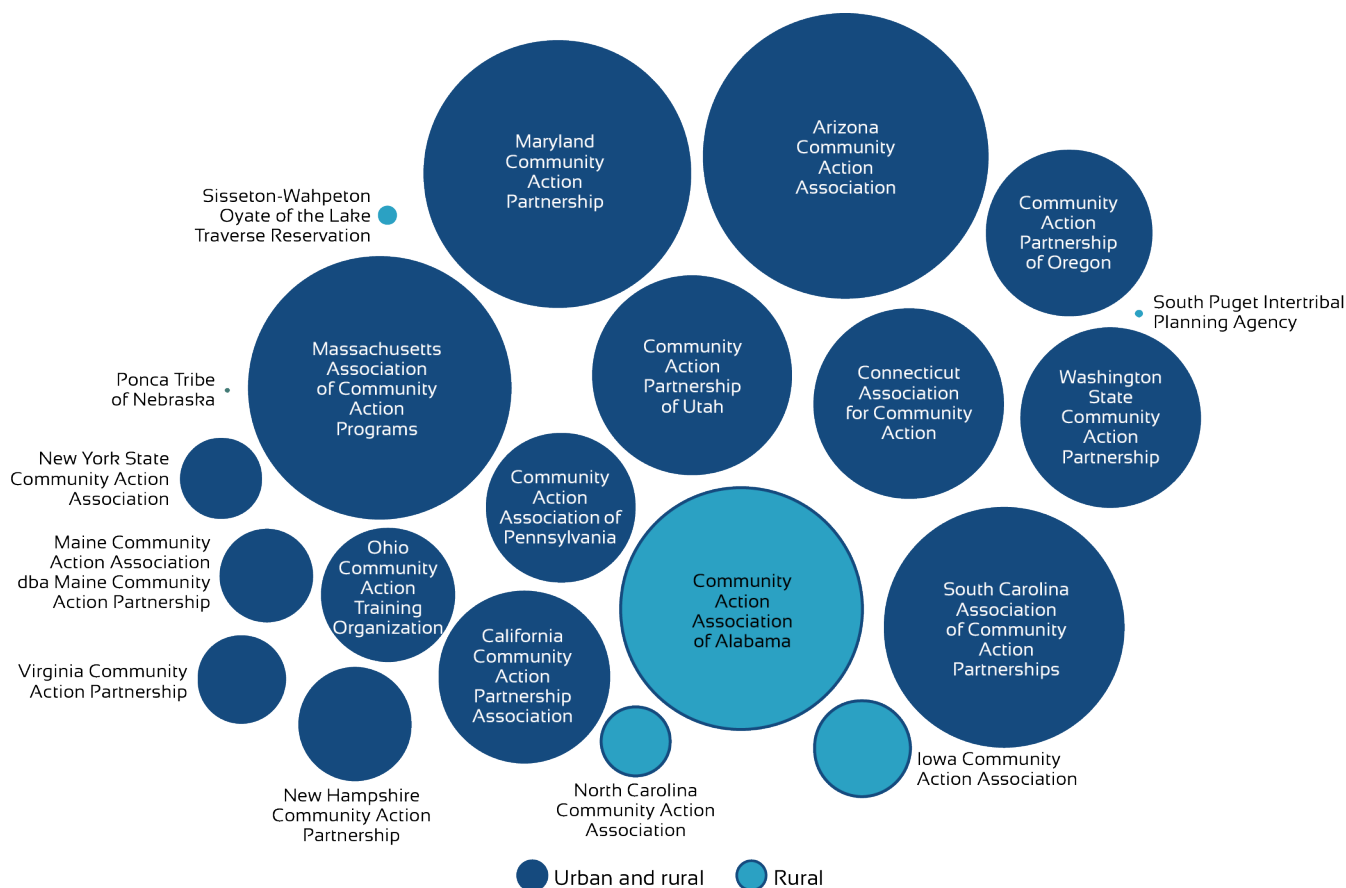
Many of the geographic areas the grant recipients operate in cover urban and rural communities. The number of children in need of diapers also varies widely by grant recipient area. Of the 21 grant recipients, 16 provide services in both urban and rural areas, and five focus their services on rural areas. While some grant recipients serve their entire state or several states, others focus on specific counties.

Exhibit 2 compares the number of children under age 5 who live in the geographic area each grant covers.

Exhibit 2

Comparing the Number of Children Under 5 in Each Grant Recipient's Area

Some grant recipients have many children who potentially need diapers in the area grant recipients serve; others have relatively fewer children with potential diaper need



Note: Each circle represents the total number of children under 5 in the counties and/or cities the grant recipient serves. The larger the circle, the higher the number of children under 5 in the service area. County data on children under 5 were drawn from 2020 U.S. Census. Virginia also includes city population data. Data sources for tribal grant recipients: South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency: Tribal Enrollment Offices and Planning Departments, 2020; Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate: Early Childhood Intervention Program database, 2023; Ponca Tribe: Ponca Tribe of Nebraska enrollment numbers within its Service Delivery Area as of August 2023 dba = doing business as

Four grant recipients are working with partners across state or Tribal lines to serve families:

- Massachusetts Association of Community Action Programs (MASSCAP) coordinates its program across Massachusetts and nearby counties in Connecticut.
- Maryland Community Action Partnership (MCAP) coordinates its program across Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia.
- The Ponca Tribe coordinates its program across Nebraska, Iowa, and South Dakota to serve Ponca tribal members and other Native families that live in this region.
- South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency (SPIPA) coordinates its program across the Chehalis, Nisqually, Shoalwater Bay, Skokomish, and Squaxin Island Tribal communities.

Distribution Models: Diapers to Support Services

Each grant recipient partners⁸ with other organizations to provide diapers to families in need and connect them with other wraparound services. The following sections provide additional details on program structure and partners, grant recipients' processes for purchasing diapers and getting them to families, the connections to wraparound services, and strategies to strengthen and expand diaper distribution services. No matter how a program operates, a key feature of the Diaper Distribution Pilot is that participating families can expect to receive diapers regularly and know exactly how many diapers they will receive.

1. Program Structure and Partners

All 21 grant recipients are partnering with other organizations to purchase and distribute diapers and connect families to wraparound services. Grant recipients that do not have their own diaper program are partnering with one or more diaper banks. Exhibit 3 shows the number and types of organizations involved in the Diaper Distribution Pilot.

All grant recipients focus on families with low incomes. Grant recipients can choose their own criteria to determine which families can participate in the program. Some choose to enroll families that self-report not having enough income to buy as many diapers as their children need. Others recruit families that can show they are eligible for other social service programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Grant recipients typically enroll participants who already have a relationship with their partners, such as participants who are already food bank clients or Head Start families. Tribal grant recipients are largely enrolling Native families in their service areas.⁹

What Is a Community Action Agency (CAA)?

CAAs are private or public nonprofit organizations funded by the Community Services Block Grant dollars and dedicated to reducing the causes and conditions of poverty in their local communities. First established by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, CAAs were born from the idea that local communities need local solutions to reduce poverty. Each CAA's work looks different because it reflects the specific needs of the local community. A core requirement of CAAs is that community members with low incomes help lead the poverty-reduction efforts.

Key Takeaways

- Grant recipients are partnering with other organizations, such as CAAs, diaper banks, food banks, community organizations, and local government programs.
- Grant recipients are enrolling families with low incomes in need of diapers and diapering supplies that are already receiving other services from their programs.

Exhibit 3

Organizational Partnerships to Provide Diapers to Families

Most grant recipients are working with CAAs and local diaper banks



108 CAAs



9 local government programs or entities



32 diaper banks



4 food banks



15 community organizations (Head Start, Maternity Health Center)

Note: This summary does not include nonfunded partners.
CAA = Community Action Agency

2. Procurement Processes and Distribution Strategies

Grant recipients have different ways of obtaining and distributing diapers. Some purchase diapers from distributors and manufacturers, negotiate larger group purchases through SupplyBank.org, or receive free diapers through donations. Grant recipients coordinate the delivery of diapers to their partners, which then distribute them to participating families. Exhibit 4 shows the process of obtaining diapers and delivering them to families in need.

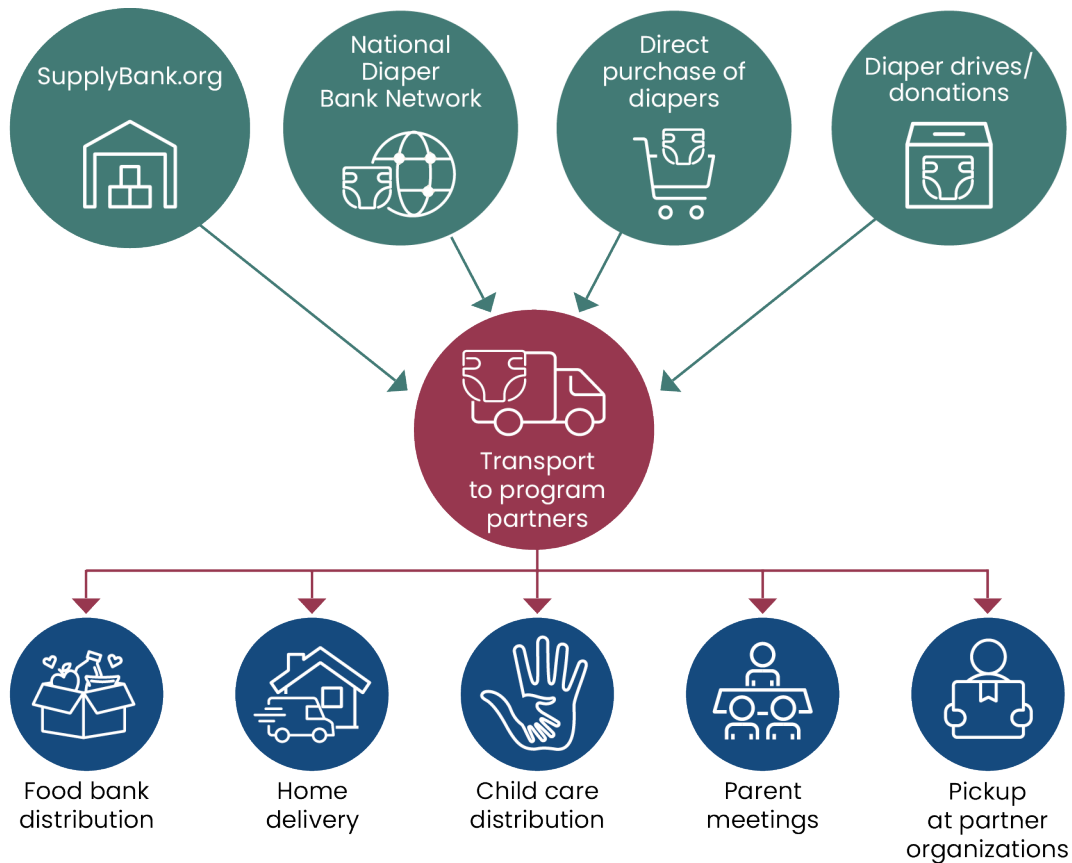
Key Takeaways

- Grant recipients obtain diapers and diapering supplies by purchasing directly from manufacturers and receiving donations from diaper drives.
- Grant recipients distribute diapers to families through various methods, such as pickup locations, home visitations, and Early Head Start and Head Start programs.

Exhibit 4

From Warehouses to Homes: The Path of Diapers Through Diaper Distribution Programs

The flow of diapers involves a variety of sources and destinations



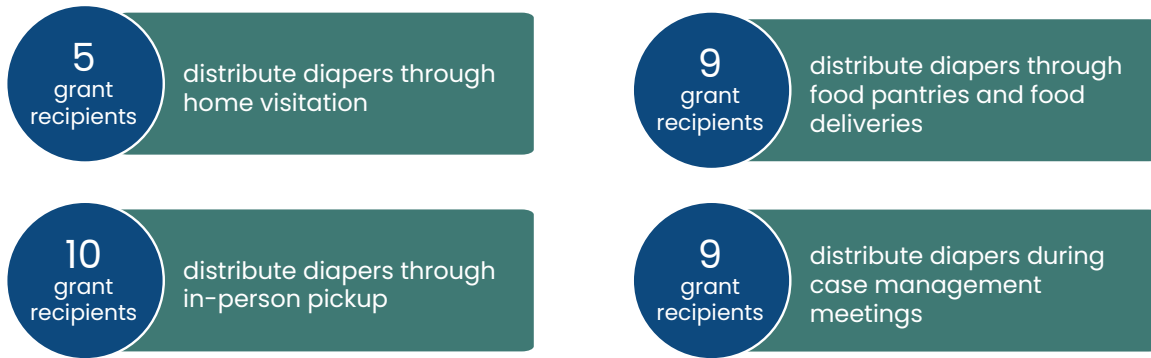
Grant recipients use many methods to get diapers to participating families. Some have a standalone diaper distribution program, where families come to their local community organization to pick up diapers or grant recipient partners deliver diapers to families. Others distribute diapers as part of larger programs. They may deliver diapers as part of a separate home visitation program, where a case manager brings diapers to participating families during their regular home check-in meetings. Exhibit 5 shows some of the most common ways grant recipients get diapers to families.

Key Takeaways

- In addition to providing diapers, grant recipients also connect families with wraparound services, depending on their needs.
- Wraparound services include Head Start and Early Head Start, employment programs, home weatherization and food assistance, and other support services.

Exhibit 5 | Methods of Distributing Diapers to Families

Some grant recipients use in-person pickup, while others use existing connections with families



Note: This graphic adds up to more than 21 grant recipients because some grant recipients use more than one distribution method.



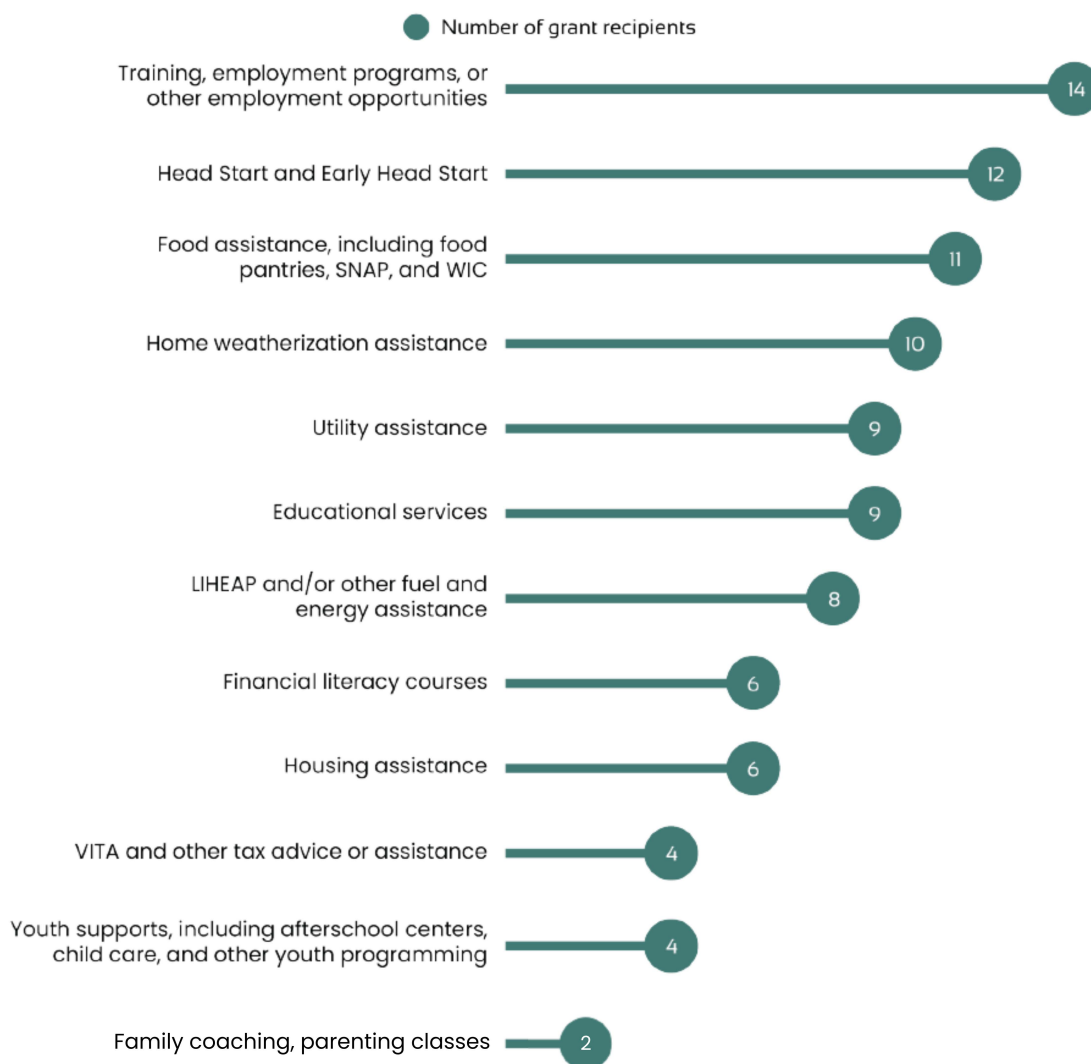
3. Connections to Other Services and Supports

In addition to addressing diaper need, the Diaper Distribution Pilot aims to connect families to wraparound services that provide additional support for families' needs. Many diaper distribution partners, such as local CAAs, offer other supports, such as Head Start and Early Head Start, employment and training programs, or food assistance. When a family receives diapers through these organizations, staff members can ask if the family would also like to enroll in other programs. They can also refer families to outside services, such as housing and financial assistance or SNAP. Exhibit 6 shows the most common connections to wraparound services grant recipients can provide.

Exhibit 6

Connections to Additional Social Services

Most grant recipients connect families to employment programs, Head Start and Early Head Start, and food and other assistance



LIHEAP = Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program; SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; VITA = Volunteer Income Tax Assistance; WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

Capacity Building for Diaper Distribution

Diaper Distribution Pilot funding is expanding grant recipients' existing diaper distribution services. Previously, some grant recipients and their partners were only able to provide diapers to families occasionally and depended on donations. Now, they can serve more families on a regular schedule families can count on. The Maine Community Action Partnership, for example, will be able to supply diapers to an additional 700 families that would not have received regular support otherwise. Other grant recipients are expanding their diaper distribution services to new programs. The North Carolina Community Action Association and the South Carolina Association of Community Action Partnerships have been distributing diapers to Head Start and Early Head Start families. Now, with Diaper Distribution Pilot support, they plan to expand this service to families on Head Start waitlists and families that participate in emergency drop-in child care.

The Diaper Distribution Pilot has also helped establish new partnerships across community organizations. Nine grant recipients are partnering with community organizations that have not distributed diapers before or do not have existing relationships with diaper banks. For example, six of the Community Action Partnership of Utah's CAA partners are now distributing diapers to families in their community for the first time. Participating in this program may help these organizations build the knowledge, relationships, and skills needed to obtain and distribute diapers to their communities.

Conclusion

As part of the Diaper Distribution Pilot, 21 grant recipients across the United States are providing diapers and diapering supplies to families in need. They obtain these diapers and supplies by purchasing directly from manufacturers or receiving them as donations. They then distribute them through their partnering organizations, including CAAs and food banks. These organizations also connect families to other social services, such as employment programs, Head Start or Early Head Start, and food assistance programs. Through funding from this Diaper Distribution Pilot, grant recipients are expanding their diaper distribution efforts and building or strengthening relationships across community organizations.

Endnotes

¹ Sobowale, K., Clayton, A., & Smith, M. V. (2021). Diaper need is associated with pediatric care use: An analysis of a nationally representative sample of parents of young children. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 230, 146–151.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2006). *Depression in the lives of Early Head Start families: Early Head Start research and evaluation project*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/depression-lives-early-head-start-families-research-practice-brief>

³ Randles, J. (2017). The diaper dilemma. *Contexts*, 16(4), 66–68.

⁴ Belarmino, E. H., Malinowski, A., & Flynn, K. (2021). Diaper need is associated with risk for food insecurity in a statewide sample of participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). *Preventative Medicine Reports*, 22, 101–332.

⁵ National Diaper Bank Network. (2023). *The NDBN diaper check 2023: Diaper insecurity among U.S. children and families*.

https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NDBN-Diaper-Check-2023_Executive-Summary-FINAL.pdf

⁶ Sobowale, K., Clayton, A., & Smith M. (2020). Diaper need is associated with pediatric care utilization: An analysis of a nationally representative sample of parents of young children. *Journal of Pediatrics*, 230, 146–151.

Key Takeaways

- Through Diaper Distribution Pilot funding, grant recipients have been able to expand their diaper distribution efforts to new areas and serve more families that need diapers.
- The Diaper Distribution Pilot is helping community organizations build new relationships or strengthen existing relationships with diaper banks.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The terms “partners” and “partnering” in this section refer to funded grant recipients, partners that also receive funding (subrecipients), and nonfunded partners.

⁹ South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency will provide diapers to Tribal families and children enrolled at Tribal day cares in the area the grant recipient covers. Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate will provide diapers to Native children who live on the Lake Traverse Reservation. The Ponca Tribe will prioritize providing diapers to Ponca Tribe members but intends to also serve other Native families in the region it covers.

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