The military child-care system, the largest system of employer-sponsored child care in the country, has received high marks for providing quality, accessible care for children of military employees. At the same time, the Department of Defense (DoD) is under pressure to control costs and has considered a number of different approaches to delivering care. But efforts to control costs have been hampered by a lack of information on how much it actually costs to deliver care in various settings to children of different ages.

This report presents estimates of the costs associated with providing care to children in DoD-operated Child Development Centers (CDCs), Family Child Care (FCC) homes, and centers operated by outside providers under contract to the DoD. By commissioning this study, the DoD has enabled the first comprehensive analysis of child-care costs across the Military Services. An earlier report on military child-care costs by the U.S. Government Accounting Office focused exclusively on the Air Force, and earlier Service reports on child care provided some cost information, but those reports were limited in their scope. Here, the authors examine cost estimates across Services and across the various age groups served in CDCs and in FCC. To place the study within a broader context, the authors also examine employer-sponsored care provided by civilian employers.

The findings and the recommendations in this report should help military policymakers, military Child Development Program (CDP) managers, and installation-level commands better understand the issue of cost in delivering child care, and help them to determine the best use of resources for the DoD child-care system. This report
should also be helpful to civilian child-care policymakers and practitioners, who are increasingly looking at the military system as a model for delivering high-quality care to large numbers of children.


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