**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Responding to urgent need, state agencies and early childhood organizations
pilot website to connect parents to open child care providers**

<https://www.nechildcarereferral.org/> ***is the first-ever database of licensed child care providers in Nebraska***

(Lincoln, NE) – Responding to the needs of essential workers who are desperate for safe places for their children during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the hundreds of licensed child care professionals struggling to keep their businesses open, a group of early childhood stakeholders has collaborated to create the Nebraska Child Care Referral Network — a searchable database at <https://www.nechildcarereferral.org/>.

Although a significant portion of our state’s workforce has been temporarily sidelined by the COVID-19 emergency, many of our friends and neighbors must still report to jobs outside their homes. That means the need for a safe, healthy child care environment is as urgent as ever. This website can help those who need quality emergency child care find it.

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation Senior Vice President Betty Medinger said, “We have heard from essential workers who are having a hard time finding providers to care for their children, which unfortunately leads to some parents feeling forced to quit their job or put together arrangements that are inconsistent, require health risks to grandparents caring for grandchildren, include older children taking care of younger children, and other emergency short-term solutions. We also work closely with many licensed child care providers across the state who have seen their enrollments drop by 50 percent or more and are trying to avoid closure, and the potential financial disaster that would mean.”

The website allows parents to search for providers by:

* address (including multiple radius options around your home) or zip code
* age of child(ren)
* providers who accept subsidy payments
* providers who are part of Step Up to Quality

All programs listed on the website have been licensed by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to care for and educate young children and meet safety and quality standards of the State of Nebraska. Providers will be encouraged to update their information as they fill openings or have slots open up, to keep the database as current as possible.

* Parents who would like more information about how to choose a provider can call Nebraska's **Child Care Resource**and**Referral**Line at 1-800-892-4453 or 402-557-6880
* Licensed providers who are not currently represented on the site but would like to be, can call their regional [Early Learning Connection Coordinators through the Nebraska Department of Education](https://www.education.ne.gov/oec/early-learning-connection/).

During the COVID-19 crisis, child care providers in Nebraska must operate under the terms of public health directives that limit groups to no more than 10 people at one time and to practice social distancing. These steps include maintaining a distance of at least six feet from others, washing hands frequently and right before eating, and cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces. People are also encouraged to wear cloth face masks when they are unable to stay less than six feet from others.

This is the first child care resource and referral website in Nebraska. Although the push to create it came out of the COVID-19 crisis, the website is a first step in creating a robust database to serve the needs of parents and providers long after this emergency has passed. It is also an important tool to provide a means for child care providers to keep their doors open and support Nebraska’s economic engine. In addition to the Nebraska Child Care Referral Network website, the early childhood partners have created a [resource webpage](https://www.nebraskachildren.org/childcare-providers-covid-19-information-and-resources.html) for Nebraska’s child care providers with information on everything from small business loans to mental health support.

This website is a collaborative effort of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Extension, First Five Nebraska, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, and numerous other state and local partners. Dedicated resources to support the site are provided by Early Learning Connections Coordinators based across the state.

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**ABOUT NEBRASKA CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOUNDATION:**

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation supports children, young adults, and families at risk with the overall goal of giving our state's most vulnerable kids what they need to thrive. We do this by building strong communities that support families so their children can grow up to be successful, productive adults. To learn more, visit [nebraskachildren.org](http://www.nebraskachildren.org).