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**During first year, Nebraska Child Care Referral website sees growth;
new features coming to make site even more valuable for parents and providers**

[www.NEChildCare](http://www.NEChildCare)Referral.org ***is Nebraska-specific database of licensed child care providers***

(Lincoln, NE) – What began in April 2020 as a response to desperate parents seeking child care during the pandemic as well as providers who were operating at less than half capacity, a group of early childhood stakeholders collaborated to create the Nebraska Child Care Referral Network. All licensed child care homes, centers, and preschools in Nebraska can be found in the searchable database at [www.NEChildCareReferral.org](http://www.NEChildCareReferral.org).

Highlights of the first year of website operations include:

* A high of 2194 Nebraska visitors during the first full month of operation in May 2020
* 1522 Nebraska users in August 2020 as children went back to school either in person or remotely
* 16,175 total visitors to the site during the first year
* 59% of Nebraska users of the site were from Lincoln or Omaha
* 41% of site users were from outside these metro areas

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation Senior Vice President Betty Medinger said, “Even without COVID-19, finding a child care provider is a difficult task. In the first few weeks of the pandemic, we were hearing about the desperate state of parents who had no options for child care when their usual provider was forced to close temporarily or permanently. A group of dedicated partners came together to make the Child Care Referral site a reality in a short amount of time. Not only does the site help parents find care for their children, but it helps providers, many of whom have seen their business drop dramatically during the pandemic, keep their operation open. We know that there are still many providers struggling to stay open and we encourage them to register on the site as a means of advertising their openings.”

The website allows parents to search for providers by:

* address (including radius options around your home or office)
* age of child(ren) – from infant to school-age
* center or home-based care
* those who accept subsidy payments
* those who are part of Step Up to Quality, Nebraska’s child care quality rating system.
* those who have Spanish-speaking staff
* those who are able to work with children with disabilities
* those who are able to care for remote learners

Among the new features coming to the Nebraska Child Care Referral site include:

* additional search filters
* addition of Head Start and school-based Pre-K programs

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 need help using the site can call 2-1-1 anywhere in Nebraska and someone will help them navigate the site.
* There is no cost for licensed providers to register on the site. To register on the site, click on “My Account” in the top right of the homepage and click on “Register”

Although the push to create it came out of the COVID-19 crisis, there has long been a need for a robust database to serve the needs of parents and providers. 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.

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.

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**ABOUT NEBRASKA CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOUNDATION:**

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation supports children, young adults, and families with the overall goal of giving our state's 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).