

# Our Nation's Care Infrastructure Is Failing Families. It's Time for Philanthropy to Make It a Priority.

By [Carla Thompson Payton](#)

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When the United States shut down last year, my husband and I joined the ranks of millions of American families navigating uncertainties regarding our health and safety and the care of our loved ones. We both work full-time and had no idea how we could manage our professional commitments and care for our 4-year-old son without our normal child-care arrangements.

But we were luckier than most. My mother, a Jamaican immigrant who lives on the East Coast, offered a year and a half of her life and moved to Michigan to care for our son while we navigated our new Zoom work lives. That arrangement continues to this day.

Like most mothers, I have hopes and aspirations for my young son. Yet as the mother of a Black boy in America today, I do not take for granted that I have the support I need to put him on a trajectory toward success. This is too often the case for families of color. Many women — particularly women of color — often lack the resources and the options to operate in their families' best interest. High-quality child care remains inaccessible and unaffordable for millions of people.

This past year we saw in stark terms how our infrastructure of care fails most Americans. Nearly [3 million women left the labor force](#) in the past 16 months, many due to a lack of care options. One year of living with Covid-19 undid 30 years of progress for women's labor-force participation, jeopardizing family economic security and increasing the racial wealth gap. For too long, we have left families to shoulder the burden of caregiving and working without common-sense protections.

This reality recently led my organization, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, to join seven other grant makers in supporting the [Care for All With Respect and Equity Fund](#), or CARE Fund — a five-year, \$50 million investment to build a comprehensive and equitable care infrastructure.

A care infrastructure, as we see it, recognizes that all families and individuals need high-quality care for their loved ones. That includes universal paid leave, high-quality affordable child care and early education, long-term support for older adults and people with disabilities, home- and community-based services, such as home health aides, and well-paying jobs with good benefits for care workers. We need to ensure that those who take care of our loved ones can also take care of their own families.

By pooling our resources, we believe we can create transformational change in how our nation cares for children and families.

## **Why Philanthropy Needs to Step Up**

A philanthropic show of force is especially critical at a time when policy makers are stepping up efforts to expand our care infrastructure. President Biden’s proposed second infrastructure proposal — the American Families Plan — includes multibillion-dollar investments in child care and calls for universal pre-K and the establishment of the nation’s first comprehensive paid family and medical leave program. Such policies would allow more women to stay in the work force and improve family economic security. It is the right step for children and families.

Consider who needs care: [Sixty-one million](#) adults with disabilities, injuries, or illnesses; [48 million](#) people age 65 or older — and the [10,000](#) baby boomers who join their ranks each day — who will eventually require long-term care; and [33.6 million](#) families with children under age 18.

Consider who provides care: An estimated [six in 10 family caregivers](#) are women, and [most paid caregivers](#) are immigrant, Black, and Latina women. An unacceptable 20 percent of [care service workers](#) live in poverty, and 40 percent rely on public assistance. Care workers — primarily women of color — keep our families functioning and our economy churning even as we fail to give them the care and support they need.

The economic imperative to invest in care is enormous. [A Time’s Up Foundation study found](#) that investing \$77.5 billion annually in the care economy would support

more than 2 million new jobs each year and 22.5 million over 10 years. This investment would translate into \$220 billion in new economic activity annually.

All eight organizations participating in the CARE Fund have for years individually focused on various aspects of the care economy. But a much more cohesive effort is needed across government, business, and philanthropy as we recover from the pandemic and set out to build a more just and equitable society. Like philanthropic giving broadly, our investments need to amplify the voices of those most affected. That means the individuals who provide and consume care, including parents, family caregivers, people with disabilities, older adults, home care workers, and early educators.

The CARE Fund's initial grantees are doing just that by building coalitions to advocate for universal paid leave, quality care jobs, and more support for early care and education for all young children. For example, the Care Can't Wait coalition is mobilizing local, state, and national organizations to ensure a new approach to care — one that puts caregivers, care recipients, and their families at the center of efforts to strengthen the movement for quality care.

The fund also supports grassroots leadership and movement-building efforts to ensure that the diverse voices and expertise of parent leaders, family caregivers, and care workers inform federal policy efforts. For instance, Family Values @ Work partners with local coalitions, families, business owners, racial-justice advocates, public health experts, and many more groups to identify policy solutions and create an American workplace that values caring for families, as well as providing for them.

## **Rebuilding What Families Have Lost**

As grant makers, we have an opportunity to help change what care looks like in the United States by listening to the voices of parents, community members, and movement builders. But we need other philanthropic institutions to join us in not only rebuilding what families lost during the past 18 months but in creating a far better system that will strengthen our economy as it helps Americans receive the care they need.

My family, like so many others, is now trying to adapt to a new normal. We will begin to plan our fall school schedules and navigate new remote workplace policies that will necessitate different care options for our son.

Amid these transitions, I am reminded of how care connects us all — professionally and personally. We all know our care infrastructure is broken. We cannot let this moment pass without doing all we can to fix it and expand who has access to quality, affordable care and who does not. We know what families and workers need. Now let's make it happen together.

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