

# Building Child Care Resiliency in the Face of a Changing Climate

*Prepared by NAEYC and LIIF*



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The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate and work on behalf of young children. The association comprises nearly 55,000 individual members of the early childhood community and 51 Affiliates, all committed to delivering on the promise of high-quality early learning. Together, we work to achieve a collective vision: that all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

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Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) is a national community development financial institution (CDFI), headquartered in San Francisco with offices in New York City, Atlanta, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., that invests to help create communities of opportunity, equity and well-being. As a CDFI, LIIF supports projects that have high social value but lack access to traditional financial institutions. Since 1984, LIIF has deployed more than \$3.5 billion to serve more than 2.5 million people in communities across the country from its five offices. An S&P-rated organization, LIIF funds healthy communities by providing innovative capital solutions.

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# Introduction

Climate change is a pressing global challenge with profound implications for daily life. For early childhood educators, the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, such as heat waves, hurricanes, wildfires and floods, pose significant risks to the physical and mental health of children, caregivers and staff, and make it increasingly difficult to keep their programs operational.<sup>1</sup> The impacts include and extend beyond immediate safety concerns, threatening to worsen the child care crisis, harm community cohesion, and exacerbate social and economic inequalities.



“

*We experienced three hurricanes within a three month span. This forced week long shutdowns.”*

— Specialist, Florida

”

Early childhood programs often operate on limited budgets, making them particularly susceptible to the escalating costs of maintaining safe, resilient infrastructure, and protecting the health and well-being of themselves and their workforce. Climate change magnifies these challenges, disproportionately affecting low-income communities where operators in centers and family child care homes are less likely to have the resources to adapt, repair or renovate their facilities; keep up with rising insurance costs; or provide health benefits and supports to staff, families and children. Without targeted and sustained investments, these inequities are likely to deepen, perpetuating cycles of intergenerational injustice.

There is urgent need for resources to address robust, weather-resilient infrastructure that protects facilities, supports the health and well-being of educators and the children they serve, and ensures that current child care and early learning programs can remain open and that new programs can open to meet the needs of their communities. Addressing these challenges through climate-resilient investments, insurance adjustments, policy, advocacy and community support is necessary

to create healthier, safer environments that strengthen early childhood ecosystems and ensure a more equitable future in which quality child care and early learning programs are available to children and families where and when they need them.

NAEYC and LIIF both served on the U.S. Early Years Climate Action Task Force, which produced a report with strategies to empower our early years sector to advance climate solutions. Our dual organizational perspectives are based on hearing from thousands of educators working in child care and early learning programs across the country who are experiencing the effects of extreme weather firsthand. NAEYC, with more than 55,000 members, has been hearing more and more from educators on the impact of extreme weather on their physical facilities; their staff, children and families; and their bottom line. LIIF, which manages the \$350.5 million Infrastructure Grant Program (IGP) for over 3,700 child care operators on behalf of the state of California, found that 40% of applicants requested climate related repairs to their facilities like HVAC systems, shade structures and misting systems for extreme heat.

“

*We are an all day care center. The children need to be outside at some point. The air quality in California has been terrible due to fire. The children have been exposed to less than desirable conditions to get them out of the classroom.*

— Early childhood educator, California

”



# the problem

Faced with a supply crisis that makes child care too hard for families to find and afford, decision-makers have allocated insufficient attention and funding to helping early childhood education programs stay open and stay healthy by responding to the increasing threats and impacts of climate change and extreme weather events, such as wildfires, floods and hurricanes.



## Infrastructure Inadequacies

Many early childhood facilities, including those in centers, schools and homes, lack the resilience to withstand harsh weather conditions. Yet they are happening with increasing frequency and reach. In NAEYC's January 2025 ECE workforce [survey](#), 45% of respondents reported impacts from at least one weather-related challenge, including extreme heat, extreme cold, extreme wind, severe storms, wildfires, flooding or poor air quality. Natural disasters can displace or shut down facilities, causing prolonged operational disruptions in service and instability for children and families who rely on these programs.<sup>2</sup> The prevalent inequality in development and resource availability in low-income communities make child care facilities particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.<sup>3</sup> For instance, facilities without adequate or well-maintained HVAC systems — something which may normally be a more minor inconvenience — are, under worsening effects of climate change, now exposed to rising temperatures, pollution and other adverse weather conditions that degrade air quality. Children's physical and mental health are uniquely vulnerable to these conditions, which exacerbate respiratory issues such as asthma and can lead to other heat-related illnesses — and which in turn make educators' jobs more high stakes and more complex.<sup>4</sup>

## Health Implications

The health implications of climate change on early childhood facilities extend beyond respiratory issues and heat-related illnesses.<sup>5</sup> Mold and mildew in facilities damaged by floods can cause additional health problems.<sup>6</sup> Further, climate-related disasters and the instability they create can cause chronic stress and trauma that deeply affects the health of children, families and educators, and can in turn cause additional challenges including sleep disorders, memory loss and weakened

immune systems.<sup>7</sup> These health impacts, which can affect both children and staff, require access to comprehensive health care plans and responsive measures to protect the health of children and staff, placing additional responsibilities and financial burdens on early childhood education programs.

## Economic Challenges

The effects of climate change drive higher operational costs due to increased energy use, ongoing maintenance, and necessary repairs and improvements to enhance facility resilience and support human health and well-being.<sup>8</sup> These financial strains are further compounded by rising and increasingly unavailable insurance premiums and potential funding cuts resulting from the broader economic impacts of climate change.<sup>9</sup> As programs shift their limited resources to respond to these urgent operational needs, they have even fewer resources available to invest in their core missions of care and education, which means things like lower salaries for educators; fewer books, toys and educational materials for children; fewer opportunities for family support; and less professional development and support for staff. These economic burdens and consequences are particularly acute in low-income communities, where far too many early childhood facilities and the families they serve already struggle with limited budgets and resources.<sup>10</sup>

NAEYC's winter 2025 ECE workforce survey asked respondents to report on the following. *"In the last year, has your program been impacted by any of the following weather-related challenges (select all that apply)?"*

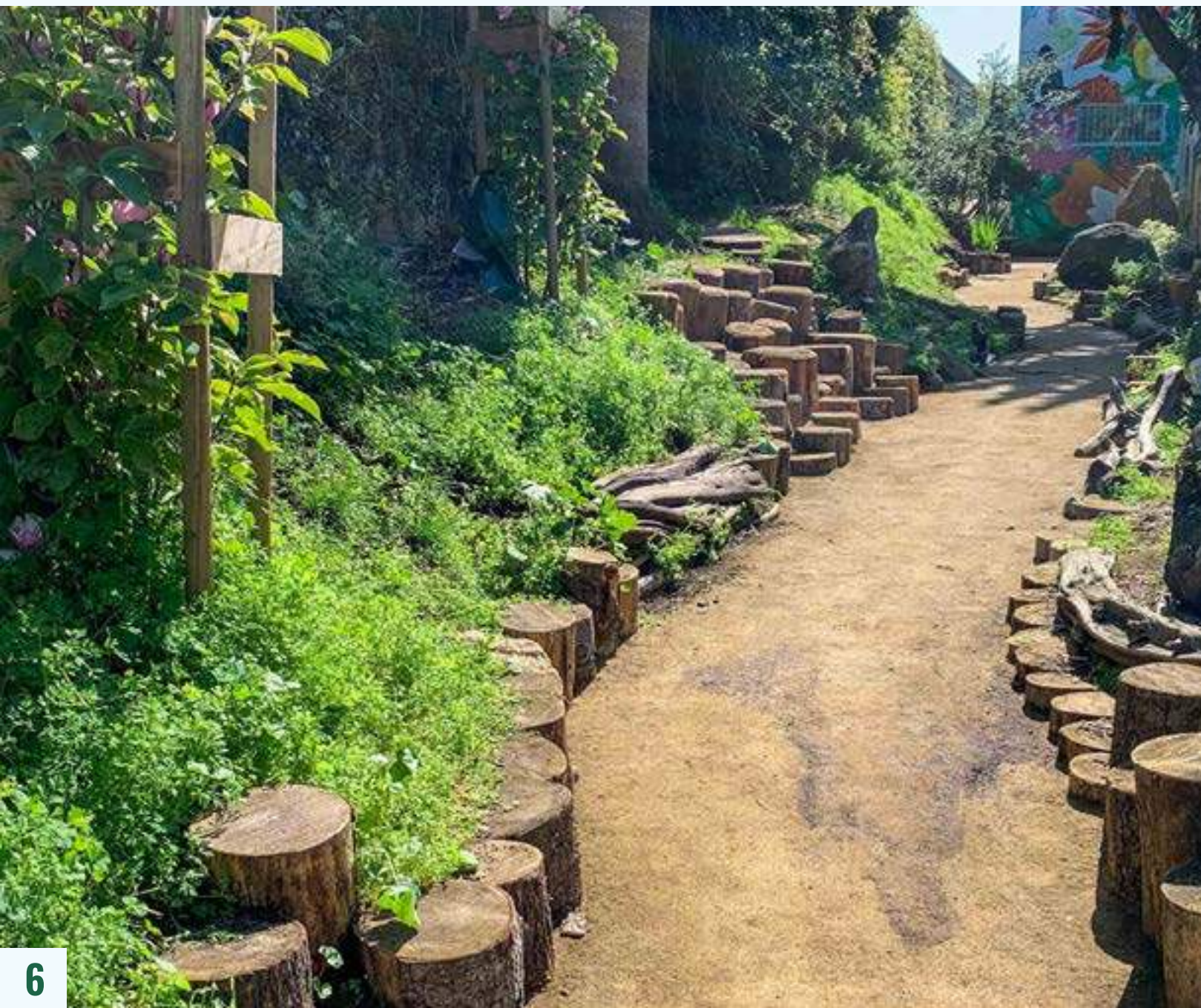
With nearly 10,000 responses from across the nation, 45.1% of respondents selected at least one from the following list:

- Extreme heat
- Extreme cold
- Extreme wind
- Severe storms
- Wildfires
- Flooding
- Air quality



# the solution

Climate change significantly affects the well-being of early childhood providers, children and the centers, schools and family child care homes that they operate. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including through infrastructural improvements, enhanced emergency preparedness and response, and community and workforce support and resources. By investing in key elements in each of these areas, policymakers can help early childhood education programs stay open, and create safer and more resilient environments for young children and their caregivers.



## Infrastructure Improvements

Child care is infrastructure — it helps the rest of America function and thrive. It also requires infrastructure — including facilities that must be upgraded to withstand harsh elements and extreme weather conditions. Since climate-resilient infrastructure can enhance service reliability, extend the lifespan of assets and safeguard returns on investment, it makes sense to build the infrastructure of child care and early learning with those results in mind.<sup>11</sup> That means that infrastructure investments should be intentionally structured to be inclusive of child care and early learning programs operating in centers, schools and homes, and should include support for:

- improved heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems. Many IGP grantees have replaced their HVAC systems and seen immediate improvements in air quality and cost of heating and cooling.
- Sustainable landscaping and green systems. Investments such as green roofs, solar power and shaded outdoor play areas boost air quality, increase efficiency and reduce the negative effects of heat on children and staff.
- Adaptive management strategies. To manage uncertainties, child care programs need to develop and implement plans that support practical changes such as adjusted maintenance schedules as well as structural changes that make their program more climate-resilient.

## Enhanced Emergency Preparedness and Response

Early childhood educators play a key role in planning and preparing for emergencies, protecting young children by caring for them during emergencies, and by helping children cope and recover after an emergency.<sup>12</sup> Given their importance, early childhood education

programs should receive the following support:

- Develop and implement comprehensive strategies and needed upgrades related to emergency plans for evacuation, communication and the **continuity** of care, inclusive of all child care settings.
- Equitable access to professional development and training in disaster response and mental health to effectively support themselves, families and children during and after climate-related events.
- Example of one of these in action: *“I live in a tsunami hazard zone. The IGP funds were essential for me to repair my 20+-year-old storage shed where I keep my emergency water and food for the daycare as well as snack foods, toys, arts and craft supplies, books, and miscellaneous equipment and supplies needed to run my daycare. The roof was beginning to leak, and the walls had a lot of rot. It also helped me replace the falling apart fencing and shelving around my propane tank.”*  
— Family Child Care Provider, California

## Community and Workforce Support and Resources

Early childhood educators need support from each other as well as partner organizations in responding and adapting to climate change. Policymakers and philanthropists can facilitate and invest in:

- Partnerships between early childhood education programs, local health departments, environmental organizations and emergency services.
- Networks for shared services, operational supports, benefits like health insurance, resource sharing, and mutual aid between and among government entities and early childhood providers, including centers and family child care homes, to enhance collective resilience.



*We experienced flooding and had to use grants for repairs.*

— Family Child Care Provider, Vermont





# before



**The Problem:**  
*Santa Ana winds  
blew down Yessika's  
temporary shade*

**Case Study:**  
**Family Child Care Provider Yessika Magdaleno**  
**Orange County, California**

**The Solution:**  
*Yessika's yard with  
a new permanent  
shade structure,  
which helps children  
play outside even on  
SoCal's hot  
and sunny days.*



# after

# conclusion

“

*We have a small outdoor play area that currently does not have play equipment due to extreme weather destroying our playground last year.*

— Family Child Care Provider

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Child care and early learning programs are serving our nation's youngest and most vulnerable citizens at the time of their most rapid brain development. Children need to be served in places and by people that can safely and securely protect them, including from harsh elements and extreme weather conditions.

Early childhood educators, families, business leaders and allies should work together to advocate for increased public funding that allows child care and early learning programs to update their infrastructure, support themselves and their staff, and improve disaster preparedness and response. Individuals and communities can also advocate

for better policies, including those that help child care programs access grants and loans that are equitably available to those programs located in small centers and homes; access available and affordable insurance; and meet climate-resilient building codes and standards.

As the effects of climate change and extreme weather events on early childhood programs increase, policymakers must begin to seriously address these considerable infrastructure and resource needs so that child care and early learning programs can be open, and children, families and educators can thrive in healthy and resilient spaces no matter where they live and work.

### **Additional Climate-Related Resources**

[Planning for Resilient Early Care and Education: Addressing Climate Vulnerabilities](#)

[As Our Kids' Protectors, It's Our Obligation to Mitigate Climate Emergencies for the Child Care Sector](#)

[Why Child Care Must be Part of Any Conversation Around the Climate Emergency](#)

['Helping Them Build Resiliency': How This Bay Area Preschool Is Protecting Kids From Extreme Weather](#)

[Extreme Heat Affects Young Children. Are Early Learning Programs Equipped for It?](#)

[Little Kids Need Outdoor Play — But Not When It's 110 Degrees](#)

# endnotes

<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. (n.d.). Climate change promoting healthy environments for children. [https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/HealthyEnv\\_ClimateChange.pdf](https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/HealthyEnv_ClimateChange.pdf)

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<sup>3</sup> Climate change and the health of socially vulnerable people | US EPA. (2023, December 27). US EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/climateimpacts/climate-change-and-health-socially-vulnerable-people>

<sup>4</sup> Ahdoot, S., Baum, C. R., Cataletto, M. B., Hogan, P., Wu, C. B., Bernstein, A., Bole, A., Balk, S. J., Byron, L. G., Huerta-Montañez, G. M., Landrigan, P. J., Marcus, S. M., Nerlinger, A. L., Patel, L. H., Philipsborn, R., Woolf, A. D., Zajac, L., Gray, K. A., Briskin, J., Onyema-Melton, N. (2024). Climate change and Children's Health: Building a healthy future for every child. *Pediatrics*. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2023-065504>

<sup>5</sup> Climate change. (n.d.). National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/climate-change>

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<sup>7</sup> Mitchell, A., Maheen, H., & Bowen, K. (2024). Mental health impacts from repeated climate disasters: an Australian longitudinal analysis. *the Lancet Regional Health. Western Pacific*, 47, 101087. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2024.101087>

<sup>8</sup> Mullan, M., OECD, Danielson, L., Lasfargues, B., Morgado, N. C., & Perry, E. (2018). Climate-resilient infrastructure. In S. Buckle, A. Cox, L. Vallejo, L. Adkins, C. Baubion, R. Boyd, T. Deubelli, J. Ellis, J. Jansen, X. Leflaive, L. Wolfrom, EBRD, IADB, & World Bank, OECD ENVIRONMENT POLICY PAPER [Report]. OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/environment/cc/policy-perspectives-climate-resilient-infrastructure.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Climate change and human health (n.d.). National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/programs/climatechange>

<sup>10</sup> Nelson, H. (2023, October 20). Climate change has significant impacts on the health and well-being of children and families - Colorado Children's Campaign. Colorado Children's Campaign. <https://www.coloradokids.org/climate-change-has-significant-impacts-on-the-health-and-well-being-of-children-and-families/>

<sup>11</sup> Mullan, M., OECD, Danielson, L., Lasfargues, B., Morgado, N. C., & Perry, E. (2018b). Climate-resilient infrastructure. In S. Buckle, A. Cox, L. Vallejo, L. Adkins, C. Baubion, R. Boyd, T. Deubelli, J. Ellis, J. Jansen, X. Leflaive, L. Wolfrom, EBRD, IADB, & World Bank, OECD ENVIRONMENT POLICY PAPER [Report]. OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/environment/cc/policy-perspectives-climate-resilient-infrastructure.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Emergency Preparedness | Early Care and Education Portal | CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/early-care/emergency-preparedness/index.html>