

### Governance and Policy priorities

Responsibility for family support services in Japan is shared by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) and local governments. The MHLW is responsible for national family service policy development, while municipalities are to implement the national frameworks and are responsible for (and frequently operate) family services on the ground. The role of prefectural governments is limited in family services, but they play a role in supporting people with disabilities (with specialized centers being organized at prefectural levels). Both prefectural and municipal government can levy taxes to co-finance the services they deliver. In providing child education services, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology works with the MHLW.

In April 2015, the “New System of Support for Children and Child Care” came into effect, which extended family policy to the tune of 0.7 trillion Japanese yen (about USD 6.5 billion) each year by raising the consumption tax.

### Programmes, characteristics and use

Japan has a range of family support measures to help families with children, including:

- All municipal governments provide for free of charge mandatory “infant health check-ups (nyuyoujikennshinn) when children are 18 and 36 months. In addition, municipalities can offer subsidies for voluntary check-ups at different ages with the amount varying from one hospital to another.
- All municipal governments provide financial support to pregnant women for prenatal care check-ups in order to ensure, at least, a minimum number of doctor visits specified by the MHLW.
- The Community Child Care Support Centers Project is a nationwide initiative to promote parenting support in communities. The programme aims for community members to help each other, such as organising meetings with other families with children, parenting seminars, information sharing and counselling sessions. Many municipal governments are involved in the project and in 2019 there were 7578 sites where programme activities took place.
- Some municipal governments provide mental and physical care as well as support in childrearing to mothers and newborns through postnatal care programmes.
- “Parenting Classes” are provided in some municipalities. These classes aim to raise awareness and disseminate knowledge about mother and child healthcare through seminars and counselling sessions.
- Respite care programmes are offered by municipal governments to parents who temporarily cannot look after their children due to health issues or other reasons.
- Most of the municipalities have child centers (jidokan) that children up to 18 years old can use for free, and provide support program for parenting and sound growth of children.
- After-school children’s clubs (hokago-jido-club) initiative is aimed to ensure safe and secure places to be for school-aged children whose parents are not at home when they come home from school. There is often a usage fee, which can sometimes be waived or reduced. The national government plans to secure service providers to increase the number of clubs’ users in response to an enhancement of the female employment rate and parenting support needs.
- The entrance fee for national museums and art museums is free for primary school children and younger.

Services to support families with children with disabilities are also provided as follows.

- Municipal governments loan or provide daily living assistive equipment to families with children with disabilities.
- “Jido-hattatsu-shien-centre”, the Child Development Support centre in each municipality, serves as a community hub of support for families with children with disabilities. It connects these families to relevant (specialized) institutions in order to provide adequate support. The consultation service for persons with disabilities, “Syougaisya-soudan-shien-jigyuu”, operated by municipal governments, provides assistance (such as information and consultation) for persons with disabilities to access public welfare services and referrals to specialized social agencies.

#### Box 1. Examples of family support service programmes

Municipal governments issue a “mother-and-baby notebook (boshi-kenko-techo)”, which records the health status of mother and baby from prenatal and perinatal through postnatal period, to those who report their pregnancy to local authorities. The contents of this widely utilized notebook include articles on childbirth and childrearing, as well as spaces to fill in health status record and vaccination record. The contents of the notebook are defined by the ordinance of the MHLW.

Prefectural and municipal governments implement support programmes for families with children with neurodevelopmental disorders (e.g. Asperger’s) and/ or neurobehavioral disorders of childhood (e.g. ADHD). It provides, among other things, parenting training that equip parents with skills to understand their children’s behaviour through observation or understand proper ways to respond to them by providing proper knowledge about the characteristics of these developmental issues. In addition, it also promotes peer-support initiatives where families and persons with developmental disabilities can share their challenges and experiences. The support centre for persons with developmental disabilities, “Hattatsu-syougaisya-shien centre”, sponsored by prefectural governments provide specialized advice and depending on the user needs refers to relevant institutions.

## Cost and Funding

Cost for family support services are covered mainly by municipal governments using tax revenue as a source of funds. The cost-sharing ratio between national and municipal government varies with the nature of the service.

## Monitoring and knowledge sharing

Data related to family policy, such as number of implemented infant health check-ups, nursery schools, are collected by the national government to better assess and understand children’s circumstances. The national government also collects information on innovative initiatives developed and carried out by Non-profit organizations and others. Most of the collected data and information are open to public online in the e-Stat (portal site of official statistics of Japan) or each ministry’s website.

When there is an initiative that is widely implemented in many municipalities, the national government assesses the effectiveness. If appropriate, the good practice is disseminated through legislation that recommends or requires all municipalities across Japan to implement the initiative.

Families’ opinions and needs are taken into account to guide policies through service providers, parents organizations, national surveys, and other measures. Service providers who have direct contact with those who need family support services listen to them to understand their needs, and the feedback informs policy making in several ways, e.g. having them participate in the government’s councils and committees and get a hearing.

## Contact

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