

Chapter 4 New Support and Unity for Raising Children

Section 1 Enhance Preschool Education and Childcare

1. Strategy for a Zero Waiting List for New Entrants

- In 2003, the number of children on the waiting lists of kindergartens and nurseries peaked. However, from FY 2002, thanks to the utilization of day care centers with nurseries, childcare givers and kindergartens, the number of children accepted rose to approximately 156,000, exceeding the target within 3 years. As a result, waiting list figures had decreased over 4 consecutive years to 179,260 in April 2007. However, the trend was followed by an increase for the first time in five years, with the number reaching 19,550 as of April 1, 2008.
- From February 2008, a new strategy for a “zero waiting list for new entrants” was developed to enhance, secure and promote the quality, as well as the quantity, of childcare facilities such as day care centers. Moreover, in the fiscal 2008 supplementary budget, the “Anshin Kodomo Kikin Fund” was established in prefectures for improving systems that enable people to raise their children with a sense of security by taking the following measures: improving day nurseries according to the “Anti-waiting-list-for-new-entrants strategy”, meeting new child care demands through approved child institutions etc, and providing training for improving the quality of nursing.

2. Nursing services responding to various needs

- In order to respond to various nursing needs, the promotion of overtime nursing, nighttime nursing, sick and convalescent child nursing projects and so forth also continue to be attempted.
- Before and after regular curricular hours or during long-term leave periods of kindergartens, according to regional current statuses or requests from protectors, support is being provided to kindergartens performing “extracurricular hour nursing” for applicants. In March 2008, the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education were revised, for the improvement of which an attempt was made in order to make kindergarten activities more appropriate as being educational.

3. Collaboration of Kindergartens, Day Cares, and Certificated Children’s Nurseries

- Collaboration between nursery schools and kindergartens is promoted by ensuring consistency in the revised (on March 2008) childcare centers guidelines and nursery school education policies.
- A system was put in place by which the prefectures recognize any facility at kindergartens and day-care centers that have the capacity to provide education and day-care to preschool children and to provide child raising support in the region as a “Certified Children’s Nursery” and it provide every special measure(As of April 1, 2008, Number of certified nurseries is 229). In addition, based on an agreement concluded by three ministers, i.e., the Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, discussions took place at the “Meeting for Reviewing System of Approved Child Institutions” toward the creation of reports in March 2009.

4. Promoting the Evaluation and Information Services of Kindergartens and Day Care Centers

- Information services regarding kindergartens are encouraged, along with efforts to carry out self-evaluation and to disclose its results. The “School Assessment Guidelines for Kindergartens” were created in March 2008.
- Regarding childcare center services, third party evaluation is promoted in order to improve the services from children’s point of view.

5. Promoting Setting up Day Care Facilities in Office

- As part of the effort to support business operators and their organizations, half their costs are paid to those who install, manage and expand childcare facilities for employees in their offices (Grant to support upgrades – course for installing and managing childcare facilities within the office). (The number of grants in fiscal 2008 budget was 541.) Moreover, in the case of corporations having newly established child-minding facilities within their place of business, and with regard to those facilities and fixed appliances and equipment installed simultaneously with them, preferential tax treatment is provided that enables 20% extra depreciation for five years (30% in case of small business operators provided in the Next Generation Nurturing Support Measures Promotion Act). In addition, for small and medium sized enterprise operators attempting to improve child-minding facilities within their places of business, a system has been implemented from fiscal 2007 on wherein a fund is provided to them from Japan Finance Corporation at the base rate with the loan period being within 15 years.

Section 2 Enhance After-school Measures

1. Steadily Promotion of the “After School Care Program”

- In FY 2007, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Labour and Welfare jointly cooperated and promoted comprehensive measures for children after school called the "After School Care Program," providing a safe and healthy place to be.

2. Promotion of establishing after school clubs based on the “Anti-waiting-list-for-new-entrants strategy”

- The “Anti-waiting-list-for-new-entrants strategy”, which expressed the ten year goal of increasing the share of provided after-school children’s classrooms (elementary school first to third grade) from present the 19% to 60%, provides for the promotion of high quality after-school children’s classrooms based on the “Guidelines for After School Children Club” to be attempted.

Section 3 Enhance and Maintain Support Bases for Raising Children in the Region

1. Promotion of Regional Support Services for Raising Children

- Based on the “Act to Amend Part of the Child Welfare Law etc” enacted in November 2008, from April 2009 on the “All Homes Visiting Project for Infants”, "Visiting Project for Supporting Child Care" , and "Temporary Custody Project" were placed as projects based on the Child Welfare Law and efforts by cities, towns and villages toward their implementation being made obligatory.
- Vacant shops on a shopping street were used to set up community centers which function as support bases for raising children and parent-child communication spaces. This is expected to reduce the number of vacant shops and to deal with the issue of the aging society. Measures were thus taken to enliven the community by organizing activities in shopping streets.

2. Creating a Network for Regional Child-raising Support

- Local governments are made responsible for acquiring integrated information on various regional support services for raising children, such as temporary childcare projects, regional child-raising support base projects, and support for raising children implemented by private organizations, including NPOs. This also includes providing information to users, coordinating case management work, and utilizing any support available for child-raising.
- To improve “child-raising supporters” stationed throughout Japan, “child-raising supporter leader” training is conducted. This aims to enhance the consultation system relating to bringing up a child.
- Welcoming workers or homemakers with infants or elementary school children as members, family support centers are established and promoted to carry out mutual support activities such as picking up and dropping off children and caring for children after school. This was carried out in 579 places in FY 2008.

Section 4 Support Family Education

1. To Provide Information and Opportunity to Study Family Education

- Utilizing the opportunities for maximum parent participation, such as medical checkups for infants and preschool checkups, learning opportunities related to family education such as child care lectures are being provided. In addition, Family education Notebooks created a hint collection related to family education, to which individual parents can easily access, that is being provided to the Boards of Education all over the country and attempts are being made to utilize them in learning opportunities with regard to family education.

2. Maintenance of the Regional Environment that Supports Family Education as a Whole Society

- In order to contribute to the promotion of mutual cooperation between “child-raising supporters”, and to providing opportunities for exchanging information, child-raising support leaders who work in a wider area are being trained to further enhance the consultation system in the region.

3. Training a Child in Basic Life-style Habits

- Besides research on activities to promote the improvement of children’s life rhythm and its practice, with the cooperation of various institutions like PTA, a nationwide movement, “early to bed, early to rise, and breakfast,” is being promoted regionally with the aim to improve the rhythm of life.

Section 5 Promoting Support by Local Residents, Private Associations and Inter-generational Communication

- Regional organizations that involve voluntary participation by local residents, such as mothers’ clubs and child-raising circles, proactively carry out activities like monitoring school zones for children, checking the safety of playing equipment in parks, and offering exchange opportunities between parents and children on the one hand and elderly people on the other.

Section 6 Promoting Child Abuse Prevention Measures

1. The Child Abuse Situation

- The systematic approach to tackle the problem of child abuse has been enhanced through revision of the Child Abuse Prevention Act and Child Welfare Act, but the number of child abuse-related consultations at child consultation centers of Japan has been increasing and reached 40,639, which is 3.5 times as high as that during the period immediately before the enactment of the Child Abuse Prevention Law. It is an important problem to be quickly tackled with by society as a whole.

2. Child Abuse Prevention Measures

- To prevent abuse, it should be detected and dealt with at an early stage. Moreover, it is necessary to enhance the ongoing comprehensive support system in order for protection and support for the child who has been abused to be independent. For this, it is necessary to work on setup and functional reinforcements by visiting homes that have infants of four months old or less. Promotion of measures for the protection of children include the induction and functional enhancement of visits to families with babies of four months old or less, known as the "Hello baby project," and regional conferences (regional networks that defend children).

3. Revision of Child Abuse Prevention Act and Children's Welfare Act

- The Child Abuse Prevention Act and the Children's Welfare Act were revised in 2007 and came into force in April, 2008. Following that revisions were also performed of the management guidelines of child consultation centers. In addition, the enactment of the "Law to Amend Part of the Child Welfare Law etc" caused measures for improving domestic care, such as revising foster parent systems and establishing small-size residence type child care businesses, to be incorporated (Enforced from April 1, 2007, but excluding part of it):

4. Raising Child Abuse Prevention Awareness by Public Relations

- Every November is designated as "Child abuse prevention promotion month". To aim at rousing social awareness about child abuse prevention, supports are being provided to the "Orange Ribbon Campaign" implemented mainly by a private organization (NPO: The Japan Network for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect).

5. Inspecting Cases of Child Abuse

- The inspection of fatal cases by child abuse is important in order to establish preventative measures. The Special Committee for the Inspection of Child Abuse Cases and Others Requiring Protection has published its general reports from the first to the fourth in June 2008.

Section 7 Promoting Child Raising Support for Families, Especially Those in Need

1. Support for Fatherless Families to Become Independent

- From fiscal 2008 on, and regarding the Work and Independence Support Center Projects for Mother-And-Child Families, etc, in-home work promotion projects were added and the “Work preparation support course” newly established in encouraging mothers of mother-and-child families with difficulties to immediately transfer to working through participating in volunteer activities in order to enhance their will to work. From February 2009 on attempts have been made to improve work support measures for mothers of mother-and-child families, such as extending the period of paying the Grant-in-Aid for Advanced Skill Training

2. To Support Healthy Development of Children with Disabilities

- As measures for building emotional health, consultation by experts in adolescent children at child consultation centers will be carried out. Children with disabilities are admitted for a short time stay in a clinic and provided with protection (“Temporary admission”)
- The revised school education act enforced from April 2007 legally clarified that special support education is promoted at elementary and junior high schools too, from elementary, to high school and secondary school. In FY 2008, promotion is being made through various operations such as "special support education system promotion project" and "integrated support model project for the early stage of developmental disorder" and local finance measures regarding the Project for Promoting Support of Persons with Developmental Disorders etc and Comprehensively Promoting Special Support Education and the placement of "special support education support members."

3. Countermeasures for Specific Chronic Diseases of Children

- Among children suffering from chronic diseases, the treatment for specific diseases like childhood cancer requires a long time, and the total medical treatment cost is high. Hence, a treatment research project for specific chronic diseases of children has been implemented to assist with part of the medical expenses.

Section 8 Promote the Unification of Administrative Services

- Based on the formulated important strategies and charter/behavioral guidelines (December 2007), the improvement of promotion systems within the agencies of each local government and the establishment of councils with related regional persons were requested. It is estimated that by the end of FY 2009 the progress of “the improvement of promotion systems within agencies” of prefectures would be 100% (47 prefectures), that of cities, towns and villages 62% (1,128 cities, towns and villages), while the progress of “the promotion of cooperation with regional businesses and private organizations” of prefectures would be 100% (47 prefectures) and that of cities, towns and villages 52% (946 cities, towns and villages) (Stated as of August 1, 2008).

Section 9 Enhance Infant Medical Treatment System

- An infant emergency telephone consultation project (abbreviated dial “#8000”) where pediatricians etc provide advice to protectors of infant patients over the telephone has been performed from fiscal 2004 on. In addition, support has been provided to regional residents and related organizations making efforts toward support for regional pediatric medicine. Moreover, regarding pediatric medicine, in the fiscal 2008 revision of medical fees, measures have just been taken such as developing evaluations of pediatric hospitalization medical cares and night and holiday pediatric emergency medical systems
- With regard to dealing with National Health Insurance qualification certificates, the “Act to Amend Part of the National Health Insurance Act” was enacted in December 2008 and provides that from April 2009 on, for the insured who are junior high school students or younger in a household provided with qualification certificates, insured certificates with an effective period of 6 months rather than qualification certificates shall be provided.

Section 10 Support Children’s Health

1. Dietary Education Promotion

- In March 2008 the Courses of Study for elementary and junior high schools were revised. In the General Provisions the “Promotion of dietary education at schools” was clearly placed and descriptions on dietary education in related textbooks etc improved. In June the same year the National School Lunch Act was revised in that it provides for the necessary measures to be taken as follows: “the promotion of dietary education at schools” shall be performed as a purpose of the law, nutrition teachers shall provide instructions on foods with use of school lunches, and principals formulate an overall instruction plan on foods.
- In order to promote the practice of “Japanese style eating habits” that are excellent in their nutrition balance, for districts ready to make studious efforts toward the dissemination, promotion and dietary education utilizing posters, mass media and so forth, disseminating and enlightening “Japanese style eating habits” utilizing concentratively and emphatically “Meal balance guides” were promoted.
- In order to promote further dietary education, in fiscal 2008 Health and Labour Sciences Research, autonomous bodies’ various cases of efforts in dietary education were collected and the information provided on home pages.

2. Children's Accident Prevention

- In 2004, Health, Welfare and Labour Science Study drew up The Handling Manual for Activities in Municipalities to Prevent Accidents Involving Children. Efforts are being made to spread awareness by the publication of the results of studies on its website and by distributing an accident prevention check list that can be used at health checkups in local municipalities.

3. Children’s Mental Health Support

- In fiscal 2008 projects were being implemented that aim at building support systems centering on base hospitals of prefectural areas and cooperating with various medical institutions and health and welfare organizations. Developments of central base hospitals, personnel training, and technical support for prefectural base hospitals also took place.

4. Healthy Awareness about Sex

- The Course of Study revised in March 2008 provides that school instructions on sex shall aim at providing scientific knowledge and making pupils understand the importance of life according to their development and enabling them to behave based on real knowledge and understanding, and that instruction shall be provided through all school education activities.

Section 11 Enhance the Support System for Pregnancy, Maternity and a Perinatal Medical Treatment System

1. Securing safe and secure child births

- In the fiscal 2008 second supplementary budget, in order that pregnancies and child births can be carried out without care about expenses and expectant mother medical checks can be received at the necessary times (about 14 times), concerning the remnant, i.e., 9 times, that support through local financial measures have yet have provided, it has just been decided that support shall be provided through state subsidies and local financial measures half-and-half during the period up to fiscal 2010.
- In January 2009 on implementation of “the Japan Obstetric Compensation System” commenced, where delivery institutions shall pay a premium of 30,000 yen per delivery performed during the 22nd gestational week or later, and hence the lump-sum allowance for childbirth and nursing paid from the Health Insurance has been increased by 30,000 yen (i.e., from 350,000 to 380,000 yen) for the abovementioned childbirth. In addition, it was decided that the lump-sum allowance for childbirth and nursing should be further increased by 40,000 yen during the period of October 2009 to fiscal 2010.

2. Enhancement of Perinatal Medical Treatment System

- In order to offer appropriate highly developed medical treatment to pregnant women and newborn babies at high risk, a medical treatment network with integrated perinatal mother and child medical treatment centers at its core is maintained, and a coordinated system has been established between regional delivery facilities and highly equipped medical treatment facilities. (in fiscal 2008 improvements had taken place in 45 prefectures.)

3. Securing perinatal period emergency transportation acceptance systems

- Based on a case that occurred in Tokyo in 2008 discussions were performed on perinatal period emergency medical care at the “Round-Table Conference on Security and Cooperation of Perinatal Period Medical Care and Emergency Medical Care”. In March 2009, a report was created by the abovementioned conference, and proposals have just been presented on reviewing perinatal period medical care measure projects, providing financial assistance for emergency and perinatal period medical care, improving NICU according to regional actual conditions, developing emergency patient transportation systems, and so forth. According to the abovementioned report efforts shall be made toward the security of perinatal period emergency medical care.

Section 12 Work on Support for Infertility Treatment

1. Reduction of Infertility Treatment Expenses

- The expenses for test tube fertilization and micro insemination are huge. Therefore, a grant is given to cover a part of the cost required for infertility treatment for the couples. This aims at the reduction of the economic burden. From FY 2007, the maximum amount of the allowance has been increased to 100,000 yen per treatment, approved for up to twice in a year, and also income restriction has been eased to a total of 7,300,000 yen per couple. (provision results in fiscal 2007: 60,536 persons).

2. Improvement of “Fertility Treatment Consultation Centers”

- Health facilities playing a central role in regions and specialists etc are implementing the “Fertility Treatment Consultation Center Project” that provides (1) medical consultations on fertility treatment and (2) consultations on mental distress caused by infertility (Fiscal 2007: 56 facilities).

Section 13 Secure Good Quality Domiciliary and Residential

1. Support for Securing a Comfortable House that Supports Nurturing Children

- In order to promote people’s obtaining their own houses, while utilizing frameworks for securitization support projects of the Japan Housing Finance Agency, measures are being taken such as support for constructing large housing suitable for child care by taking advantage of the Parent And Child Relay Return System and interest rate cuts related to housing of especially high durability and variability with use of the good housing acquisition system.

2. Support for Child-raising Households in Public Rented Accommodation

- In selecting public housing, the local government, as business proprietor, gives priority to households with children when they select and judge a tenant. The income standard for moving in to such accommodation is lowered for households with preschool children.
- Regarding rental housing of the Urban Renaissance Agency, for support households wishing to live with or wishing to live near a parenting household, preferential applicant electing ratios are applied to them when new rental housing tenants are needed and preferential application period applied to them when replacing existing rental housing tenants.

3. Promoting Residence near Workplace as well as a Countermeasure to Sick House Syndrome

- In order to support households with children to live close to their work place in the city center, the supply of city housing is promoted by converting existing offices into family rented accommodation. Moreover, considering the influence on children's health, countermeasures against sick house syndrome are promoted further at school, in addition to advancing investigations into countermeasures against sick house syndrome. It is promoted by deepening the understanding of those working at school.

Section 14 Promoting Barrier-Free Child-raising

1. Promotion of Barrier-Free Measures Based on the Idea of Universal Design

- The “New Barrier-free Law” was enacted (enforced in December 2006) that attempted to improve measures based on the universal design idea of “Anywhere, Anyone, Freely, and Easy-to-use”.

2. Promoting Barrier-Free Buildings

- Architectural design standards with consideration for the elderly and the disabled promote barrier-free measures in architectural spaces and facilities that take into consideration use by expectant mothers, children/infants, the elderly, and the disabled.

3. Promoting Barrier-Free Public Transportation

- Barrier-free public transportation is aimed at by various means of support, such as subsidies, tax systems and financing. Example measures taken include the removal of steps in transport facilities, installing multi-purpose rest rooms (diaper exchange boards, etc.), and introducing non-step buses and light rail vehicles (LRV).

4. Promoting Barrier-Free City Parks, Natural Parks, River Spaces, etc.

- City parks that expectant mothers, children or people with children can use to exercise, play, take a rest and interact are systematically maintained within walking distance. Also in natural parks, facilities to make them barrier-free, such as visitor centers, footpaths and toilets, are promoted at spots where many expectant mothers, children, and people with children visit. Moreover, in districts where hospitals and welfare facilities are located near rivers, barrier-free measures are implemented, such as hand rails and slopes for stairs and providing gentle slopes, etc., for easy access to the banks of the waterway.

5. Providing Information on Barrier-Free for Child-raising

- In order to maintain a childcare environment where families with pregnant women and mothers with babies can live with safety in the area, support is provided to municipalities when they draw up basic plans for barrier-free, childcare-friendly towns. Moreover, municipalities provide maps to families with children, showing playgrounds, breast-feeding rooms, and places which provide temporary childcare.

6. Maintenance of a Road Traffic Environment which Supports Child-raising

- In order that expectant mothers, children, or people with children can walk safely without worries, priority is given to the maintenance of signals, optical beacons, etc., by the Administrative Division’s Public Safety Commissioner and that of walkways, humps (convex-shaped facilities on the surface of roads), chicanes (feature creating extra turns in a roadway) and so forth by road managers improved to try to maintain walking spaces on residential roads, to restrict passing traffic, and limit the speed of vehicles.

7. Promotion of measures for preventing children's accidents

- Regarding play equipment in city parks, the guidelines for playground safety and security at city parks providing the basic concept of safety and security were revised in August 2008 based on recent accidents. Efforts are being made to notify that to each facility manager.
- The formulation of maintenance plans and the compliance with regular report systems are promoted for specific special buildings used by many people in order to maintain required performance levels in buildings and keep them in the condition prescribed by law in order to secure the safety. This forms the basis for the promotion of appropriate safety maintenance and necessary refurbishment.
- The development and spreading of "kids design," aimed at the creation of a living environment leading to safety and the healthy growth of children, has been promoted. In August 2008, through the 2nd Kid's Design Award Prize-Winning Works Exhibition, the "Kid's Design Exhibition 2008", which is a parent-child participation type and experience type event held in Tokyo, and travelling exhibitions held in Kanazawa, Kobe, Takamatsu and so forth, child-friendly goods, services and efforts were widely disseminated. In addition, in order to improve living environments enabling parents to bear and rear children, the collection, analysis, and sharing of children's accidents are being performed and the "Project of Building a Safety-Knowledge-Recycling-Based Society" aiming at preventing children's accidents is being implemented.

8. Promotion to Protect Children from Becoming Victims of Crime

- In December 2008, at the Ministerial Conference against Crime, the "Measures for Protecting Children from Crime" was revised and the "The Action Plan for the Realization of a Society Resistant to Crime 2008" formulated. Based on those, fighting crimes against children and patrol activities on commuting roads during commuting hours are being strengthened, while support for patrol activities by crime prevention volunteers and activities of the "Home of Children Emergency Call 110" are being promoted.

9. Promotion of "Safe and Peaceful Towns"

- Efforts are being made to grasp and improve dangerous places around schools, along commuting roads, in parks, in underground passages, in vacant houses, and so forth, where there is a possibility of the occurrence of crimes against children.

Section 15 Enhance the Child Allowance and the Examine the Nature of the Tax System

1. Enhancement of Child Allowance

- In April 2007, the Child Allowance Act was revised with the aim of reducing the economic load on young couple households with children. The monthly allowance paid to the nurturer with an infant less than three years old has doubled to 10,000 yen, uniformly. This applies to the first and second child, regardless of the birth order..

2. Paying "Special Allowances for Supporting Child Cares"

- Under current severe economic conditions, with the burden of child care during the infant education period at households with multiple children taken into consideration, it was decided to contribute to the parenting family's life security by performing the following as an urgent measure of fiscal 2008: if there is a child belonging to the three year preschool period and being the second child or later, the payment of 36,000 yen per capita shall be made to them.

3. Tax System-based Measures

- Tax laws allow for a special 5-year ordinary additional depreciation limit of 20% (30% for small and medium businesses provided in Next generation nurturing support measures promotion act) for childcare facilities and fixed equipments simultaneously built within office by businesses that fulfill certain requirements.

4. Pension Plan-based Measures to Support Next Generation Training

- Pension plan-based measures to expand next generation training support involves extension of the waiver of premiums during the childcare leave until the child reaches 3 years old.