

# Child Care

SAFE, AFFORDABLE, AND AVAILABLE CARE FOR KIDS

## Why It's Important

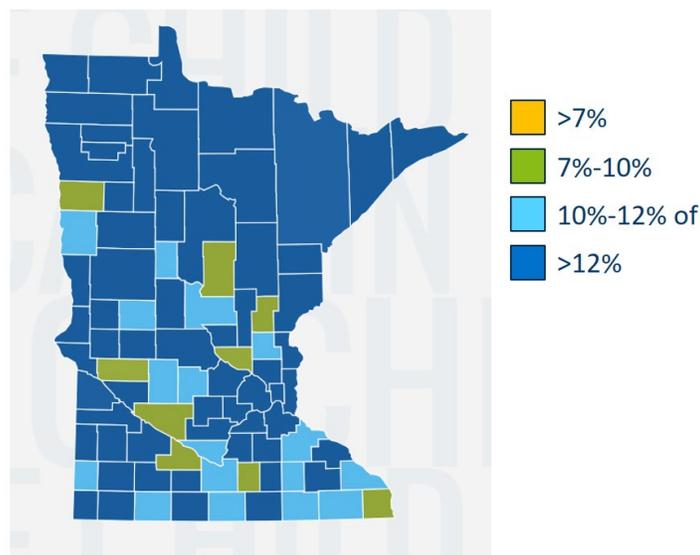
Communities, children, families, and society as a whole benefit from high quality child care being available to all kids. The early years (ages 0-5) are the most important in a person's life for brain development; with over 90 percent of brain growth taking place during the first five years of our lives.<sup>1</sup> Kids with high-quality early childhood experiences are more likely to demonstrate healthy development, have fewer behavioral, cognitive and social issues, graduate from high school, and are less likely to commit crimes.<sup>1</sup> By ensuring kids receive quality child care we are fostering a healthy future workforce that improves the health of our communities and our state as a whole.

*“There is not enough child care and not enough affordable child care for women to return to work. Women have to quit working and have a lower family income because of this.” – Needs Assessment Discovery Survey Respondent*

The cost of child care is a significant barrier for families searching for quality care for their child. According to a 2017 report from the national Child Care Aware organization, Minnesota ranks as the fifth least affordable state in the country for center-based infant care, with an average cost of \$15,340 per year, which is higher than in-state tuition for a University of Minnesota freshman.<sup>4</sup>

**Minnesotans are paying more for childcare than college.**

**Figure 1. Percent of a Married Couples Income Going Towards Center-Based Infant Care, Minnesota**

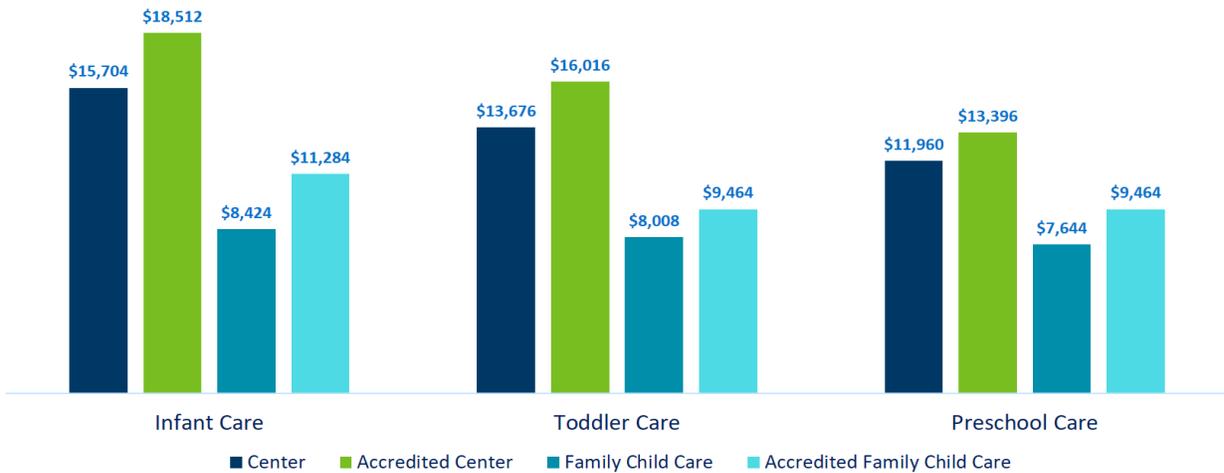


Source: Child Care Aware, 2018

## CHILD CARE

It is important to note with Figure 1 that the map reflects affordability for married couples: the cost of infant care is over half of a single parents' median income. While the cost of infant care is often prohibitive, child care costs for all age groups presents economic challenges for many families in Minnesota.

**Figure 2. Annual Cost of Care for Young Children in Minnesota, 2018**



Source: Child Care Aware, State Fact Sheets 2018

In addition to affordability, simply finding child care at all can be challenging, with shortages impacting much of the state.<sup>4</sup> As Minnesota faces a critical shortage of child care providers, families in some areas plan when to have babies around when there will be openings for infant care. In 2018 Minnesota had 8,410 licensed family child care (FCC) homes and 1,742 child care centers with a total of 222,133 available licensed child care spaces (down from 227,792 spaces in 2017); and 305,858 children under the age of 6 who potentially needed child care.<sup>3</sup> 2017 estimates showed that in order for there to be enough child care for all children who need it, there would need to be 37 percent growth in licensed child care capacity.<sup>4</sup>

Child care options discussed in this data story include center-based care, home-based care, and family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care. FFN care is child care provided by a person who is a relative, friend, neighbor, babysitter or nanny and is also known as legally unlicensed child care. Families may choose FFN care for many different reasons including lower cost, more flexible hours, and feeling more comfortable with someone they know well watching their child.

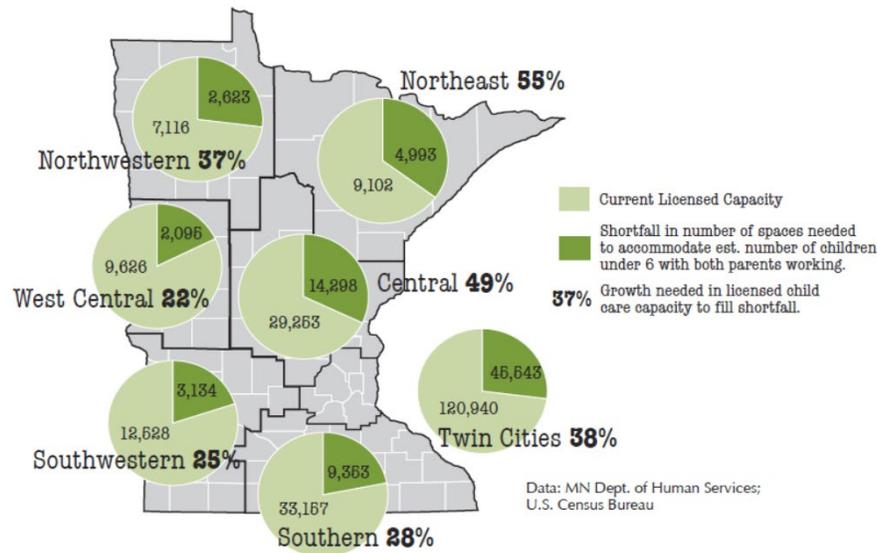
Addressing the need for improvements in our child care systems with a two-generation approach (i.e. thinking about the needs of parents and their children simultaneously) creates more opportunities for families. When parents have child care for their kids they can pursue education and continue working. Kids with safe, secure, high-quality child care are more likely to have healthy development and be ready for school. Specifically for families living in poverty, quality, affordable child care can contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty.

## Focus on Health Equity

### Child Care Shortages in Greater Minnesota

The child care shortage disproportionately affects families living in Greater Minnesota. A 2017 legislative report showed the number of licensed in-home providers in Minnesota dropped nearly 30 percent between 2005 and 2014, a loss of about 36,500 child care spaces.<sup>4</sup> In the Twin Cities, a surge of center-based child care covered the losses felt by less in-home options, but that same effect was not seen in Greater Minnesota, where there was still a net loss of over 15,000 child care spaces.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 3. Child Care Shortages across the State**



Source: Minnesota Legislative Task Force on Access to Affordable Child Care, 2017

Child care shortages have a significant impact on the economy. In communities with critical shortages, employers struggle to attract and retain workers. Parents may also choose to stay home and not work if care is not available or if it is unaffordable. The economic impact of child care shortages have the greatest impact in Greater Minnesota.<sup>4</sup> Nationally, U.S. businesses lose approximately \$4.4 billion every year due to employee absenteeism as the result of interruptions to child care.<sup>5</sup>

### Racial & Cultural Disparities

Parents of color and American Indian are impacted differently than white parents when it comes to the child care shortage in the state. According to DHS, among all parents, parents of color are more likely than white parents to report that they felt like they had to take whatever child care option they could get (44% versus 27%) and similarly parents whose primary language was not English felt they had to take whatever arrangement they could get (48% versus 29%).<sup>4</sup>

It is also important to note that our childhood workforce is primarily made up of white women whose average age is 44 years old: meaning our child care workforce does not match the diversity of children in the state of Minnesota.<sup>6</sup>

### Families Who Need a Flexible Child Care Schedule

Parents and caregivers who have shift work or a non-traditional schedule may need more flexible hours for child care arrangements. This can be difficult to find, and limits the child care options for many families.

## Additional Considerations

### The Early Childhood Workforce

The early childhood workforce is the foundation of our child care system. There are 43,000 child care workers in Minnesota, including 14,000 in licensed home settings and 29,000 in center-based programs.<sup>6</sup> Many factors contribute to the child care shortage, but the low pay of child care professionals is a well-known barrier to hiring and retaining quality staff to care for children. The median hourly wage in Minnesota for a child care worker is only \$11.44 per hour, or \$23,795 a year.<sup>7</sup> In fact, child care workers in Minnesota make so little money that many of them qualify for government assistance: taxpayers spend \$43 million per year in safety net benefits for early childhood workers.<sup>6</sup>

**“Minnesota needs qualified, diverse, supported and fairly compensated early childhood educators so that parents can go to work, businesses can hire employees and children can thrive.” – Transforming Minnesota’s Early Childhood Workforce Team**

*“[We] want to underscore the fact that the child care field is a valued industry and an honorable profession. It is a central pillar of the economy. Members were continually impressed by the heartfelt passion and dedication providers conveyed via testimony and which they bring to the children and families they serve. Child care is a field that requires long hours, relatively low pay, and a great deal of sacrifice. Providers persevere even though other careers with less stress and better wages are available. They do it for the love of the children, and they make sacrifices because they recognize their communities need them. Members are grateful for their commitment.” - 2017 Legislative Report*

### Discovery Survey Results

In the summer of 2018, Minnesota’s Title V Maternal and Child Health Needs Assessment distributed a Discovery Survey asking people living in Minnesota, “What are the biggest unmet needs of women, children, and families in your community?” More than 2,700 people responded. Child care was mentioned 814 times in the Title V Needs Assessment Discovery Survey; the number one need from the over 2,700 respondents.

### Important Note on Equity and Intersectionality

The Minnesota Department of Health’s Title V Needs Assessment team acknowledges that structural (social, economic, political and environmental) inequities can result in poor health outcomes across generations. They have a greater influence on health outcomes than individual choices or a person’s ability to access health care, and not all communities are impacted in the same way.

**All people living in Minnesota benefit when we reduce health disparities.**

We also acknowledge that the topic addressed in this data story does not exist in isolation— which is important to remember as we do needs assessments and as we start thinking about how we approach solutions. In addition to the needs themselves being intersectional, there are also intersecting processes and systems through which power and inequity are produced, reproduced, and actively resisted.

## Citations

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7. Transforming Minnesota’s Early Childhood Workforce. One Page Brief for the Minnesota Legislature 2019. Retrieved from Ann McCully May 2019.

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