

2023

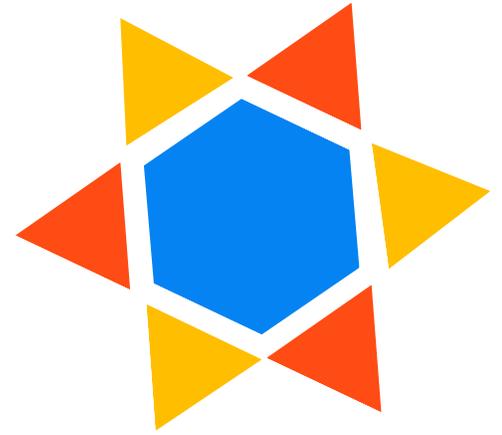
# Mapping Care for Kids

A County-Level Look at Utah's Crisis in Licensed Child Care



[utahchildren.org](http://utahchildren.org)

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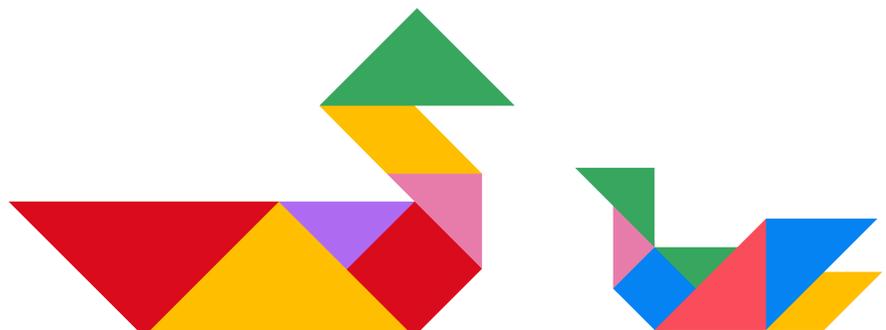
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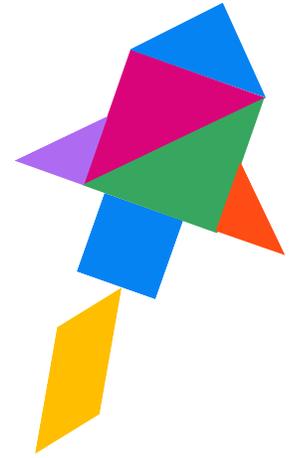
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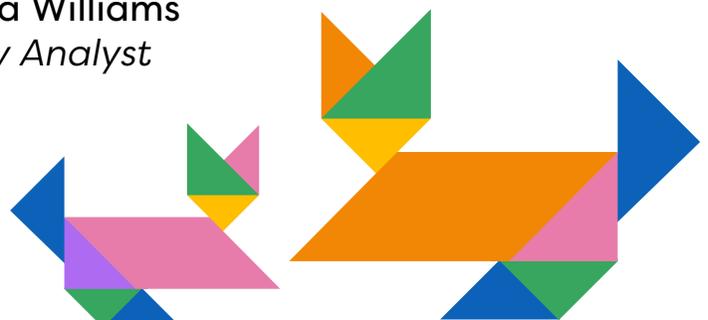


## Voices for Utah Children Staff

This report was prepared by:

Anna Thomas  
*Policy Director*

Jenna Williams  
*Policy Analyst*



# Helpful Definitions

## Center-based Child Care

Child care that is provided in a commercial or other non-residential setting. Child care centers usually provide service to more children than a home-based program and often include different classrooms for separate age groups.

## Home-based Child Care

Child care that is provided by a regulated child care professional in a residential setting, also referred to as “family child care.” This report includes both licensed family child care providers and those with residential certificates (which require a lower level of health and safety oversight) in this category. Family child care providers can only serve up to 16 children in their programs; residential certificate holders must serve fewer than eight.

## Child Care Subsidy

A Child Care Assistance Program benefit that an eligible child can receive through the Utah Office of Child Care, to be applied to their formal care by a regulated child care provider. The monthly amount of the benefit is determined by the household income of the child’s family and the market rate for child care in a particular region of the state. Most families who utilize a child care subsidy are still responsible for a “co-pay,” which also varies based on family income.

## Infant/Toddler Care

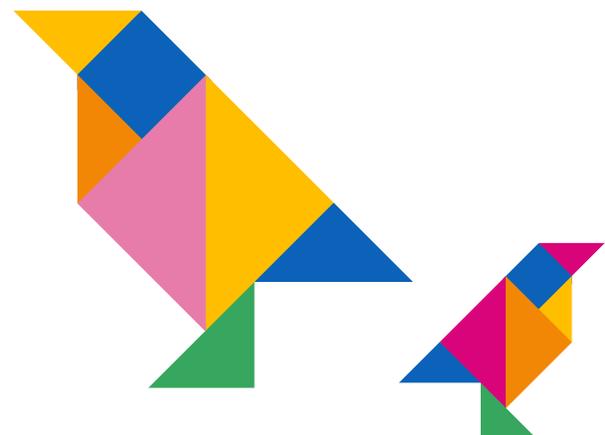
Child care for children between the ages of zero and two. This age group is referred to separately from preschool-aged children, as different health and safety standards apply when these younger children are in care. Under state regulation, one adult child care provider may care for up to four infant/toddler children at a time.

## Preschool-aged Child Care

Child care for children who are older than two but younger than six. This group is referred to separately from infant/toddler children, as different health and safety standards apply when these older children are in care. Under state regulation, one adult child care provider may care for up to eight preschool-aged children at a time.

## School-aged Child Care

Child care for children generally between the ages of six and 18 who are old enough to enroll in public school (starting with kindergarten).





# Executive Summary

Utah's family demographics have changed. About 53% of Utah families have all available parents - either both parents or the sole single parent - in the workforce. This makes child care a necessity.

These days, most Utah families need two incomes to maintain financial stability. To afford to have one parent stay home, a young family with two children would need to make at least \$83,483 a year (1).

Child care is infrastructure, comparable to highways and housing. When child care isn't accessible in a community, families with young children struggle to participate in the workforce. When communities lack a strong child care infrastructure, the economy sees labor shortages and depressed economic output. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates that child care issues result in an estimated \$1.36 billion loss annually for Utah's economy (2).

**The majority of families can't afford the high cost of quality child care.**

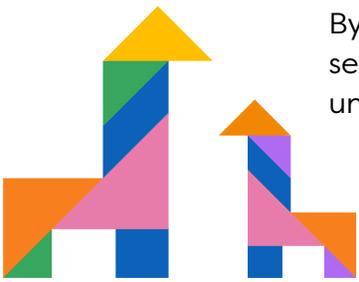
Child care costs are the highest for the youngest children. Parents are most likely to be raising young children while they are still early in their professional careers, with low earning power. Child care providers, though, are unable to offer quality child care for any less; the industry already struggles with low wages, few benefits, and economic insecurity.

In Utah, the median hourly wage for child care workers is \$12.87/hour (\$26,770/year) (3). That is less than they could make as professional dog walkers (4).

Utah's licensed child care system struggles to meet the demand. One report shows a staggering 77% of Utah's population lives in a child care desert - the worst in the nation (5). Another report, from Utah's own Office of Child Care, showed a 65% gap between families' need for child care and the capacity of licensed programs (6). Both of these reports are from before the pandemic.

**To provide a comprehensive picture of Utah's current child care crisis, this report examines the availability of licensed child care across the state, and in each individual county.**

By conducting an analysis of both the demand and supply of child care services, the report aims to provide policymakers and the public with a clear understanding of the urgent need for child care reform.



# Key Takeaways



**There is insufficient licensed child care in Utah to meet the needs of working families.**

There are more than 154,000 children under the age of six living in Utah with all available parents in the workforce. But, there are only 54,804 licensed child care spots in 1,367 programs statewide.

Licensed child care program capacity is only sufficient to serve about 36% of all children under six whose parents are working.

That means, even with recent improvements, the working families of nearly two-thirds of Utah's youngest children must rely on alternate arrangements (such as utilizing family members, hiring or sharing a nanny, alternating parent work schedules, using unlicensed child care providers, or some combination of these).



**The high cost of child care makes it even less accessible to low- and middle-income families, and rural families struggle most.**

The median income of a Utah family of four is \$100,752. The average annual cost of care for two children under the age of six (one infant/toddler, one preschool-aged child) is \$16,871, or about 17% of the state median income.

In Grand County, with the state's lowest median annual income at \$42,654, the average cost of child care is actually higher at \$17,339 per year. That comprises about 41% of the median household income for a family of four in Grand County.

The lack of dramatic differences in child care prices from county to county is an illustration of how little flexibility providers have to reduce tuition costs for parents, even in areas of the state where family incomes clearly can't keep up.



**Licensed child care is insufficient in every county in Utah, though the level of unmet need varies from place to place.**

Summit County emerges as the county with the highest percentage of potential child care need met, reaching 54%, followed by Carbon, (48%), Sevier (45%), Grand (45%), Salt Lake (45%), and Iron Counties (41%). All other counties have less than 40% of their potential child care need met with licensed program capacity, and multiple rural counties (Daggett, Piute, Rich, and Wayne) have no licensed child care available at all.

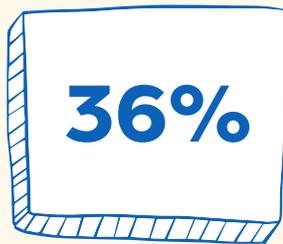


**With substantial public investment, Utah's child care system has grown 31% since the start of the COVID pandemic.**

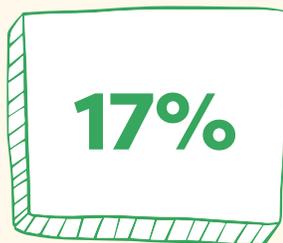
Through various federal funding streams, nearly \$600 million has worked to grow Utah's child care capacity from approximately 42,000 licensed slots in March 2020 to over 54,000 in August 2023.

In contrast to many other states, Utah has managed to increase its licensed child care capacity - despite substantial pandemic disruptions - through stabilization grants paid directly to existing providers for wage supplementation, startup support for new programs, and a one-time worker bonus of \$2,000 per registered child care professional.

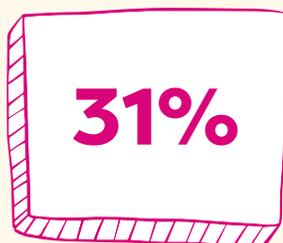
These financial investments both expanded the enrollment capacities of existing programs as well as recruited new providers into the sector.



of Utah's potential child care need is met by existing licensed care.



of a family's income, on average, is spent on child care for two children under six.



growth in licensed child care capacity since March 2020 shows that substantial public investment works.

# Recommendations

## Commit to Public Investment in Child Care

- 1** Utah's child care crisis requires public investment. Funding is needed to bridge the gap between what families can afford and the true cost of care. While businesses can contribute, their capacity to address this crisis is limited.

There is no sufficient source of investment to address child care's market failure aside from public funding. Child care should be valued in the same ways as the public education system, ensuring equal access and opportunities for all children. Currently, the burden of expensive early education falls largely on Utah families, with minimal public support, even though most brain development occurs before age six.

## Help Parents to Afford the Care They Want

- Utah's current child care system doesn't promote parent choice.
- 2** Child care affordability and accessibility severely limit family choice when it comes to child care, forcing decisions based on cost or access, rather than preference and values. This also impacts family planning and career choices. Parents are forced to make difficult choices, such as changing jobs, adjusting school and work schedules, or choosing suboptimal child care situations.

To address these issues, policymakers should consider improving the child care subsidy program, expanding the child tax credit, and finding ways to help alleviate the financial burden on Utah families.

## Support the Critical Work of Child Care Professionals

- Child care professionals face significant financial challenges.
- 3** Low wages and a lack of benefits, including healthcare and retirement, have made the profession unsustainable, leading to high rates of turnover each year. Since Utah's current child care system only meets 36% of the state's need, Utah must invest in the child care profession to attract and retain a robust workforce.

To support child care providers, policymakers should consider measures including state funding of Child Care Stabilization Grants, wage supplement programs, eliminating barriers to licensure, and increasing access to employment benefits.



# Utah's Child Care Crisis

Families Can't Afford to Pay

Providers Can't Afford to Stay

There Has to be a Better Way

## Families Can't Afford to Pay

Affordability remains a significant hurdle with child care costs often consuming a substantial portion of a family's income. For a four-person family in Utah with two children under six (one infant/toddler, one preschool-aged child) the cost of care averages 17% of a family's income. Issues of affordability and accessibility severely limit family choice when it comes to child care. Because families are most likely to make their child care decisions based on cost, they don't always secure their first choice in child care arrangements. The high cost of child care may also impact a family's decision when to have children, how many children to have, or when to enter the workforce.

Families that rely on care outside the home are often limited by cost, location, openings in programs, and available hours of care. 84% of parents feel overwhelmed by the cost of care (7). As post-COVID inflation is starting to ease, the same cannot be said for child care costs. Recent data from the U.S. Department of Labor shows the average price of child care services has increased by 6% in one year. This is nearly twice the overall inflation rate (3.2%) (8).

*We just had our second child and she will be starting daycare in October. We will be paying just under \$30,000/year for two kids at school. It is reaching the point of being unaffordable and allows for less flexibility. I was hoping to be able to cut down my work schedule as to be able to hang out with my kids one day a week, however, with the rate increase and having to pay five days/week no matter what for infant care, it doesn't make sense for me.”*

*- Parent in Holladay*

The financial strain, combined with the limited availability of licensed child care, forces parents to make difficult choices between work and caregiving. Parents who can only afford part-time care, or who need child care during overnight shifts, struggle to find programs and providers that can accommodate them.

In Utah, 13% of parents report changing jobs due to child care problems (9), and 48% report needing to make a significant adjustment to school or work in the past 12 months due to child care issues (10).

Such low child care availability makes access even more prohibitive for families of children with special needs or families searching for culturally responsive care. For families that desire to have one parent stay home with the children, many are thwarted by economic reality.

To afford to have one parent stay home in a family of four in Utah, a young family would need to make at least \$83,483 a year (11). The median salary for an occupation in Utah is \$44,470 (12).

Genuine choice within a child care system grants the freedom to select any form of care, yet Utah's current system falls short of delivering this level of parental autonomy. For many Utah families, the prospect of choosing child care is not a matter of preference but a necessity, as they depend on dual incomes to sustain their household's financial stability.

Families that utilize paid child care see their options additionally limited by cost, proximity, and availability. While some families may find their child care arrangements satisfactory, most cannot exercise their ideal choice, whether that is having one parent stay home full- or part-time, or enrolling their children in their preferred local child care program (13).

## Providers Can't Afford to Stay

Operating a child care program offers little financial incentive. Many child care professionals participate in the sector due purely to their genuine love for children, and their commitment to children's quality care and education (14).

For decades, Utah's child care system has been subsidized by the unsustainable financial and personal sacrifices made by early childhood educators and their families.

These educators work hundreds of hours of unpaid work, dedicate large portions of their homes to child care programming, forgo paid time off for mental and physical health issues, offer tuition discounts to struggling families, and offer free peer support and professional development to child care colleagues. Many could easily find less strenuous jobs that offer better pay and decent benefits in other industries.

*"I closed my daycare June 2023. I decided it would be better to find a new career as the daycare would no longer be sustainable for my family's income and the inconvenience of the lifestyle made it seem better to look for other career options." - Provider in North Logan*

Child care is a labor-intensive industry with high operational costs. The majority of child care owners operate on extremely thin profit margins, often less than one percent (15).

In Utah, the median hourly wage for child care providers is just \$12.87 per hour, or \$26,770 annually. Meanwhile, the median annual salary for kindergarten teachers is \$57,150. The poverty rate among child care providers in Utah is 23.1%, more than 8 times higher than that of K-8 teachers (16).

Nationally, child care educators are twice as likely as the general workforce to have no health insurance and only one in 10 child care professionals have any retirement benefits (17). These disparities highlight the consistent and systemic undervaluing of a workforce composed almost entirely of women and primarily women of color (18).

Working with multiple children, of various ages, from different families, for hours at a time requires incredible skill and stamina. Yet the rewards for providing this invaluable care to children in Utah communities remain embarrassingly minimal.

The combination of low pay and few employment benefits has resulted in high turnover rates, with between 26 and 40% of the workforce estimated to be leaving their positions every year (19).

### Figure 1.1 How Do Child Care Provider Wages Stack Up

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (20)



With Utah's current child care system meeting only 36% of the potential need, the sector is clearly failing to attract and retain the skilled and dedicated workforce that all Utah families deserve. Cultivating and maintaining such a workforce requires long-term planning and investment, as well as cross-sector collaboration.

The most significant driver of quality in child care is the quality of interaction between the child and caregiver (21). It is children who lose without a skilled, respected, and well-compensated workforce.

*“The child care field is so hard. Because we are working like crazy to develop relationships with these families and we see them every single day. We know when they don’t have groceries in their house. And if we want to get paid, we either have to kick those families out, who maybe we knew for years or we have to go against our gut. I don’t think there’s another field like this. Teachers don’t have to collect payment. People at grocery stores have zero relationships with parents and there’s nothing they can do. If a parent can’t pay, they can’t just leave with the food. Banks and rental companies have zero relationships with families.”*

*-Provider in Cedar City*

# There Has to be a Better Way

In 2021, the U.S. Department of the Treasury characterized the nation’s child care system as a “market failure” (22). This means that economic realities preclude a solution that relies fully or even mostly on the private sector.

Simply put, care for children is more valuable than most families can afford to pay. When working parents put their children in the care of another person, they are paying not only for the child care provider’s time, but also for; the provider’s experience and education, the rent or mortgage of the child care facility, equipment such as high chairs and changing tables, toys and learning materials, food and drink, liability insurance, and the benefit of having fewer children compete for the caregiver’s attention.

*“As a provider, I struggle to raise our rates because I care about the families I serve. I know that most providers agree. We never want to add additional burdens to anyone. However, if we want to remain open to support families, we have to.” - Provider in Layton*

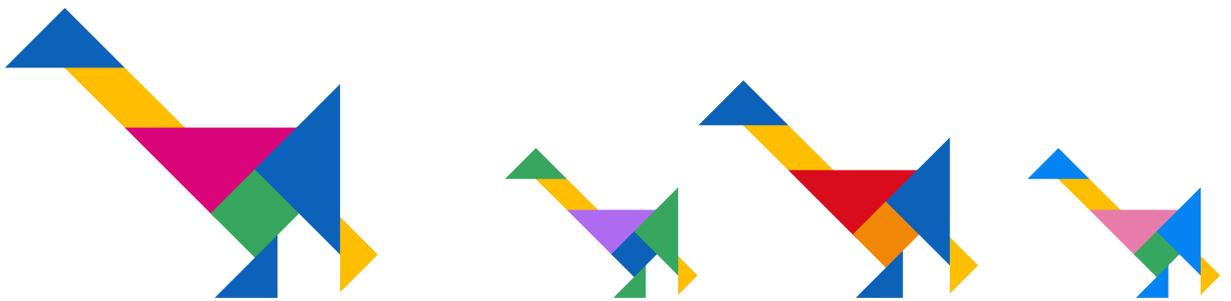
Child care is a public good and should be regarded as such by policymakers and elected officials. As a community, children’s health and safety—as well as their foundational learning and development—should be our top priority. Public schools exist to ensure equal opportunities and foster the future civic engagement of Utah’s children.

The child care sector currently attends to the early care and education of these same children, at a time when their brains are even more developmentally dynamic, without the same dedicated investment.

As a state, Utah should also consider the economy’s future well-being when discussing public investment in the child care system.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates that child care issues result in an estimated \$1.36 billion loss annually for Utah’s economy, while also causing the state government to forgo nearly \$260 million per year in tax revenue.

**Ignoring child care issues now is an abdication of our responsibilities to future Utahns.**





# Child Care Availability in Utah

Utah is confronted with a child care crisis that poses significant challenges for families seeking accessible and affordable care.

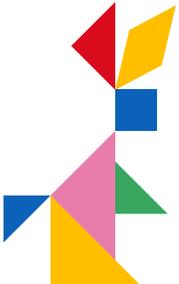
This report aims to assess the current reality of child care availability in Utah, by comparing the potential need for child care to the licensed child care capacity in each of Utah's 29 counties. The data examines the number of young children in each county with all available household parents in the workforce, as compared to the number of licensed child care slots and programs.

In addition to data related to county-by-county child care availability, this report includes other relevant metrics about child care at the county level, such as the estimated cost of care and the median household income in each area.

Taken together, this report seeks to demonstrate the seriousness of Utah's child care crisis in urban, suburban and rural areas - and inspire public action to: improve child care access; support growth and stability among existing child care programs; and ensure that working families in every county have access to the child care services that work for them.

Child population calculations, at both the state and county levels, relied on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2021, 5-Year Estimates). Utah's Office of Child Care Licensing provided all licensed child care figures (August 2023). Cost of care figures come directly from the Utah Office of Child Care's 2021 Child Care Market Rate Study.

The American Community Survey (2021, 5-Year Estimates) provided data for median four-person household income at the state and county levels, as well as data to estimate the number of children in each county eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP or child care subsidies). The Office of Child Care directly provided the actual number of children in each county receiving CCAP support.

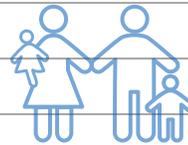


Child care provider compensation data is from U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics' State Occupational Employment and Wages Estimates (May 2022). For a full description of the methodology used, please refer to Appendix A.

# Statewide Child Care Data

Table 2.1

| Children Potentially in Need of Care   |           |
|--|-----------|
| All Children Under 6 Years Old   | 289,240   |
| Children Under 6 Years Potentially in Need of Care   | 154,229   |
| Rate of Children Under 6 with Potential Child Care Needs   | 53%       |
| Licensed Child Care Programming  |           |
| Home-based Child Care Programs   | 940       |
| Center-based Child Care Programs   | 427       |
| Total Licensed Slots   | 54,804    |
| Percent of Child Care Need Met   | 36%       |
| Cost of Care for Families  |           |
| Average Annual Cost of Home-based Child Care for Infant/Toddler  | \$8,267   |
| Average Annual Cost of Center-based Child Care for Infant/Toddler                                      | \$11,232  |
| Average Annual Cost of Home-based Child Care for Preschool-aged Child                                  | \$7,311   |
| Average Annual Cost of Center-based Child Care for Preschool-aged Child                                | \$8,487   |
| Number of Children Eligible for Child Care Subsidies   | 81,805    |
| Number of Children Receiving Child Care Subsidies  | 11,665    |
| Rate of Eligible Children Receiving Child Care Subsidies   | 14%       |
| Child Care Workforce Compensation  |           |
| Median Hourly Wage for Child Care Professionals  | \$12.87   |
| Median Annual Salary for Child Care Professionals  | \$26,770  |
| Child Care Costs for a Typical Four-Person Family with One Infant/Toddler and One Preschool-Aged Child |           |
| Median Four-Person Family Household Income   | \$100,752 |
| Average Annual Cost of Infant/Toddler Care   | \$9,193   |
| Average Annual Cost of Preschool-Aged Care   | \$7,678   |
| Considered "Affordable" Child Care for this Family*  | \$7,053   |
| Average Amount this Family Will Spend on Child Care  | \$16,871  |
| Percent of Income this Family Will Spend on Child Care   | 17%       |



\*Based on 7% federal affordability benchmark determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

# Potential Child Need by County

Table 2.2

| Rank | County           | Rate of Children Under 6 with Potential Child Care Needs | All Children Under 6 Years Old | Children Under 6 Potentially in Need of Care |
|------|------------------|--|--------------------------------|--|
| 1    | Grand            | 75%  | 589                            | 442  |
| 2    | Kane             | 71%  | 452                            | 320  |
| 2    | Summit           | 71%  | 2,301                          | 1,634  |
| 4    | Beaver           | 67%  | 809                            | 546  |
| 5    | Weber            | 65%  | 22,036                         | 14,277                                       |
| 6    | Juab             | 60%  | 1,155                          | 696  |
| 7    | Garfield         | 59%  | 404                            | 237  |
| 7    | Salt Lake        | 59%  | 95,957                         | 57,093                                       |
| 9    | San Juan         | 58%  | 1,263                          | 737  |
| 10   | Emery            | 57%  | 785                            | 451  |
| 10   | Tooele           | 57%  | 6,402                          | 3,640  |
| 10   | Wasatch          | 57%  | 2,978                          | 1,704  |
| 13   | Box Elder        | 52%  | 5,286                          | 2,769  |
| 13   | Davis            | 52%  | 34,370                         | 17,794                                       |
| 15   | Cache            | 51%  | 12,454                         | 6,323  |
| 15   | Millard          | 51%  | 1,209                          | 622  |
| 15   | Wayne            | 51%  | 172                            | 88   |
| 18   | Sanpete          | 50%  | 2,103                          | 1,047  |
| 19   | Iron             | 49%  | 4,892                          | 2,402  |
| 20   | Sevier           | 48%  | 1,702                          | 813  |
| 21   | Carbon           | 47%  | 1,620                          | 767  |
| 22   | Morgan           | 46%  | 1,130                          | 525  |
| 22   | Washington       | 46%  | 13,184                         | 6,123  |
| 24   | Uintah           | 44%  | 3,606                          | 1,576  |
| 24   | Utah             | 44%  | 69,872                         | 30,569                                       |
| 26   | Rich             | 43%  | 228                            | 97   |
| 27   | Piute            | 42%  | 77                             | 32   |
| 28   | Duchesne         | 41%  | 2,174                          | 897  |
| 29   | Daggett          | 27%  | 30                             | 8  |
|      | <b>Statewide</b> | <b>53%</b>   | <b>289,240</b>                 | <b>154,229</b>                               |

# Child Care Need Met by County

Table 2.3

| Rank | County           | Percent of Child Care Need Met | Center-based Child Care Programs | Home-based Child Care Programs | Total Licensed Slots |
|------|------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1    | Summit           | 54%                            | 12                               | 7                              | 885                  |
| 2    | Carbon           | 48%                            | 4                                | 6                              | 369                  |
| 3    | Sevier           | 45%                            | 3                                | 14                             | 369                  |
| 3    | Grand            | 45%                            | 4                                | 6                              | 199                  |
| 3    | Salt Lake        | 45%                            | 201                              | 412                            | 25,488               |
| 6    | Iron             | 41%                            | 5                                | 24                             | 986                  |
| 7    | Weber            | 38%                            | 43                               | 67                             | 5,376                |
| 7    | Washington       | 38%                            | 22                               | 32                             | 2,304                |
| 9    | Davis            | 34%                            | 42                               | 66                             | 6,117                |
| 10   | Cache            | 31%                            | 9                                | 67                             | 1,953                |
| 11   | Tooele           | 29%                            | 6                                | 26                             | 1,057                |
| 12   | Utah             | 25%                            | 53                               | 147                            | 7,591                |
| 12   | Sanpete          | 25%                            | 3                                | 11                             | 258                  |
| 14   | Duchesne         | 23%                            | 1                                | 7                              | 210                  |
| 15   | San Juan         | 22%                            | 2                                | 7                              | 162                  |
| 16   | Juab             | 20%                            | 2                                | 2                              | 136                  |
| 17   | Box Elder        | 19%                            | 3                                | 27                             | 521                  |
| 18   | Millard          | 18%                            | 2                                | 1                              | 113                  |
| 19   | Uintah           | 16%                            | 3                                | 2                              | 248                  |
| 20   | Garfield         | 15%                            | 1                                | 0                              | 36                   |
| 20   | Kane             | 15%                            | 1                                | 1                              | 47                   |
| 22   | Beaver           | 14%                            | 2                                | 1                              | 78                   |
| 22   | Wasatch          | 14%                            | 3                                | 1                              | 233                  |
| 24   | Emery            | 12%                            | 0                                | 4                              | 52                   |
| 25   | Morgan           | 3%                             | 0                                | 2                              | 16                   |
| 26   | Wayne            | 0%                             | 0                                | 0                              | 0                    |
| 26   | Rich             | 0%                             | 0                                | 0                              | 0                    |
| 26   | Piute            | 0%                             | 0                                | 0                              | 0                    |
| 26   | Daggett          | 0%                             | 0                                | 0                              | 0                    |
|      | <b>Statewide</b> | <b>36%</b>                     | <b>427</b>                       | <b>940</b>                     | <b>54,804</b>        |

# Average Annual Cost of Child Care by County

Table 2.4

| County           | Home-based Care for Infant/Toddler | Center-based Care for Infant/Toddler | Home-based Care for Preschool-aged Child | Center-based Care for Preschool-aged Child |
|------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Beaver           | \$8,400                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,440                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Box Elder        | \$8,260                            | \$11,232                             | \$7,306                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Cache            | \$8,400                            | \$11,232                             | \$7,410                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Carbon           | \$8,400                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,440                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Daggett          | \$7,650                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,071                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Davis            | \$8,170                            | \$11,232                             | \$7,239                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Duchesne         | \$8,400                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,440                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Emery            | \$8,400                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,440                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Garfield         | \$7,650                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,071                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Grand            | \$8,400                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,440                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Iron             | \$8,338                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,409                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Juab             | \$8,400                            | \$11,232                             | \$7,410                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Kane             | \$7,650                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,071                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Millard          | \$8,400                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,440                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Morgan           | \$7,452                            | \$11,232                             | \$6,705                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Piute            | \$7,650                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,071                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Rich             | \$7,650                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,071                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Salt Lake        | \$8,257                            | \$11,232                             | \$7,304                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| San Juan         | \$8,186                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,335                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Sanpete          | \$8,400                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,440                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Sevier           | \$8,293                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,387                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Summit           | \$8,400                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,440                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Tooele           | \$7,890                            | \$11,232                             | \$7,030                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Uintah           | \$8,400                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,440                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Utah             | \$8,323                            | \$11,232                             | \$7,352                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Wasatch          | \$8,400                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,440                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Washington       | \$8,400                            | \$11,232                             | \$7,410                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Wayne            | \$7,650                            | \$11,100                             | \$7,071                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| Weber            | \$8,174                            | \$11,232                             | \$7,242                                  | \$8,487                                    |
| <b>Statewide</b> | <b>\$8,267</b>                     | <b>\$11,232</b>                      | <b>\$7,311</b>                           | <b>\$8,487</b>                             |

# Child Care Affordability by County

Table 2.5

| Rank | County           | % Income Typical Utah 4-Person Family Spends on Care for One Infant/Toddler & One Preschool-aged Child | Amount Typical Utah Family of Four Spends on Care for One Infant/Toddler & one Preschool-aged Child | Median 4-Person Household Income | "Affordable" Child Care for Typical 4-Person Family* |
|------|------------------|--|---|----------------------------------|--|
| 1    | Grand            | 41%  | \$17,339  | \$42,654                         | \$2,986  |
| 2    | Garfield         | 33%  | \$19,587  | \$58,750                         | \$4,113  |
| 3    | San Juan         | 27%  | \$16,424  | \$61,397                         | \$4,298  |
| 4    | Rich             | 26%  | \$17,154  | \$65,313                         | \$4,572  |
| 5    | Carbon           | 25%  | \$17,339  | \$69,496                         | \$4,865  |
| 5    | Iron             | 25%  | \$16,409  | \$66,752                         | \$4,673  |
| 7    | Wayne            | 24%  | \$17,154  | \$71,776                         | \$5,024  |
| 7    | Millard          | 24%  | \$18,338  | \$77,813                         | \$5,447  |
| 9    | Uintah           | 21%  | \$18,088  | \$85,369                         | \$5,976  |
| 10   | Duchesne         | 20%  | \$16,308  | \$80,917                         | \$5,664  |
| 10   | Juab             | 20%  | \$17,765  | \$88,375                         | \$6,186  |
| 12   | Emery            | 19%  | \$15,840  | \$82,794                         | \$5,796  |
| 12   | Box Elder        | 19%  | \$15,981  | \$83,844                         | \$5,869  |
| 12   | Sanpete          | 19%  | \$16,643  | \$87,026                         | \$6,092  |
| 12   | Cache            | 19%  | \$16,273  | \$86,814                         | \$6,077  |
| 12   | Beaver           | 19%  | \$18,338  | \$97,875                         | \$6,851  |
| 12   | Kane             | 19%  | \$17,714  | \$95,375                         | \$6,676  |
| 12   | Sevier           | 19%  | \$16,370  | \$88,179                         | \$6,173  |
| 19   | Washington       | 18%  | \$17,403  | \$95,040                         | \$6,653  |
| 19   | Weber            | 18%  | \$17,098  | \$95,322                         | \$6,673  |
| 19   | Piute            | 18%  | \$17,154  | \$97,083                         | \$6,796  |
| 22   | Utah             | 17%  | \$16,747  | \$96,989                         | \$6,789  |
| 23   | Daggett          | 16%  | \$17,154  | \$105,714                        | \$7,400  |
| 23   | Tooele           | 16%  | \$15,820  | \$98,875                         | \$6,921  |
| 23   | Davis            | 16%  | \$17,085  | \$108,244                        | \$7,577  |
| 26   | Salt Lake        | 15%  | \$16,925  | \$109,718                        | \$7,680  |
| 27   | Wasatch          | 14%  | \$18,650  | \$130,531                        | \$9,137  |
| 28   | Summit           | 10%  | \$18,207  | \$173,542                        | \$12,148   |
| 28   | Morgan           | 10%  | \$14,157  | \$136,118                        | \$9,528  |
|      | <b>Statewide</b> | <b>17%</b>   | <b>\$16,871</b>   | <b>\$100,752</b>                 | <b>\$7,053</b>                                       |

\*Based on 7% federal affordability benchmark determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

# Child Care Workforce Compensation by County

Table 2.6

| County           | Median Hourly Wage for Child Care Professionals | Median Annual Salary for Child Care Professionals |
|------------------|---|---|
| Beaver           | \$12.66   | \$26,340  |
| Box Elder        | \$12.27   | \$25,530  |
| Cache            | \$11.96   | \$24,880  |
| Carbon           | \$12.51   | \$26,030  |
| Daggett          | \$12.51   | \$26,030  |
| Davis            | \$12.27   | \$25,530  |
| Duchesne         | \$12.51   | \$26,030  |
| Emery            | \$12.51   | \$26,030  |
| Garfield         | \$12.66   | \$26,340  |
| Grand            | \$12.51   | \$26,030  |
| Iron             | \$12.66   | \$26,340  |
| Juab             | \$12.69   | \$26,400  |
| Kane             | \$12.66   | \$26,340  |
| Millard          | \$12.66   | \$26,340  |
| Morgan           | \$12.27   | \$25,530  |
| Piute            | \$12.66   | \$26,340  |
| Rich             | \$12.51   | \$26,030  |
| Salt Lake        | \$13.26   | \$27,590  |
| San Juan         | \$12.51   | \$26,030  |
| Sanpete          | \$12.66   | \$26,340  |
| Sevier           | \$12.66   | \$26,340  |
| Summit           | \$12.51   | \$26,030  |
| Tooele           | \$13.26   | \$27,590  |
| Uintah           | \$12.51   | \$26,030  |
| Utah             | \$12.69   | \$26,400  |
| Wasatch          | \$12.51   | \$26,030  |
| Washington       | \$12.91   | \$26,860  |
| Wayne            | \$12.66   | \$26,340  |
| Weber            | \$12.27   | \$25,530  |
| <b>Statewide</b> | <b>\$12.87</b>                                  | <b>\$26,770</b>                                   |

# Child Care Subsidy Data

Table 2.7

| Region  | Number of Children Eligible for Subsidies | Number of Kids Receiving Subsidies | Rate of Eligible Kids Receiving Subsidy |
|---|---|------------------------------------|---|
| Davis County  | 8,751                                     | 1,141                              | 13%                                     |
| Salt Lake County  | 27,335                                    | 4,730                              | 17%                                     |
| Utah County   | 15,428                                    | 1,413                              | 9%                                      |
| Weber County  | 8,304                                     | 1,538                              | 19%                                     |
| Tooele & Box Elder Counties   | 3,536                                     | 463                                | 13%                                     |
| Cache, Summit, Morgan & Rich Counties   | 5,433                                     | 571                                | 11%                                     |
| Southeast Utah & Uintah Basin Region (Carbon, Duchesne, Emery, Daggett, Grand, San Juan, Uintah & Wasatch Counties)               | 4,094                                     | 596                                | 15%                                     |
| Southwest & South Central Utah (Beaver, Garfield, Iron, Juab, Kane, Millard, Piute, Sanpete, Sevier, Wayne & Washington Counties) | 8,924                                     | 1,489                              | 17%                                     |
| <b>Statewide</b>  | <b>81,805</b>                             | <b>11,665*</b>                     | <b>14%</b>                              |

*\*Total "number of kids receiving subsidies" does not match the sum of all county and regional totals, as some children may be counted in two different areas of the state in the same year. For example, a child living in Davis County who receives child care assistance, then moves to Salt Lake County that same year, will be counted twice.*

# Key Takeaways



## There is insufficient licensed child care in Utah to meet the needs of working families.

There are more than 154,000 children under the age of six living in Utah with all available parents in the workforce. Child care needs vary between counties, but there is not a stark urban-rural divide. The county with the highest potential child care need is Grand County at 75%, while the county with the lowest potential child care need is Daggett County at 27%.

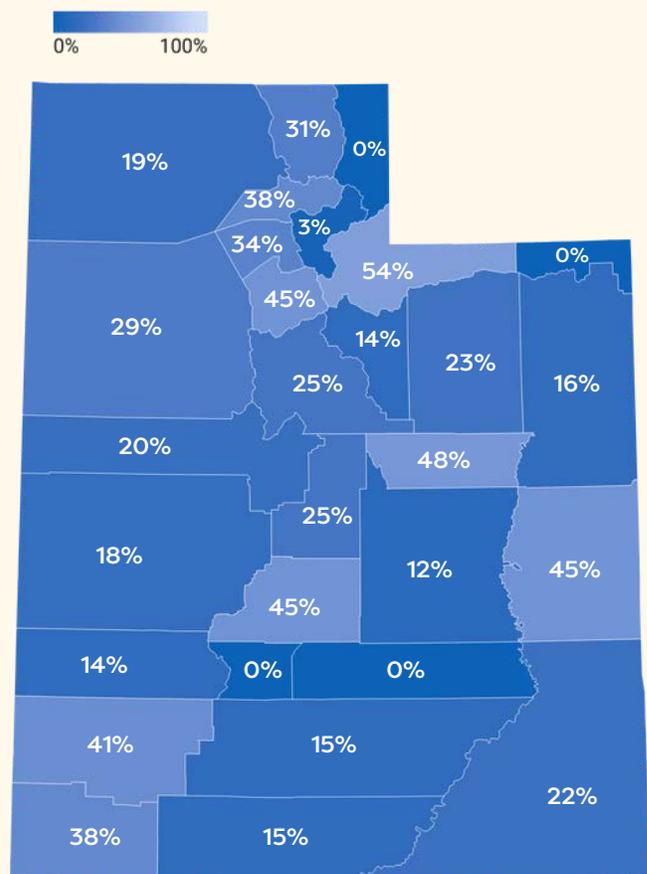
There are only 54,804 licensed child care spots in 1,367 programs statewide.

Statewide, licensed child care program capacity is only sufficient to serve about 36% of all children under six whose parents are working.

Even with recent growth in licensed child care capacity, nearly two-thirds of Utah's youngest children - and their parents - must utilize alternate child care arrangements (such as relying on family members, hiring or sharing a nanny, alternating parent work schedules, using unlicensed child care providers or some combination of these).

**Figure 3.1 Child Care Need Fulfilled by Licensed Child Care by County**

Percentage of licensed child care slots divided by the number of kids under 6 with all parents in the workforce. ACS 2021 5-year estimates Table B23008. Licensed child care data provided by the Utah Office of Child Care 8/2023 and tabulated by Voices for Utah Children.





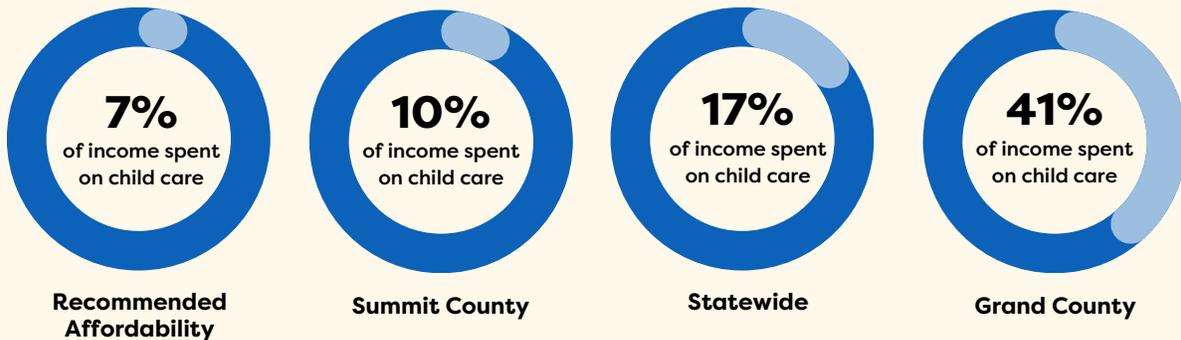
## The high cost of child care makes it even less accessible to low- and middle-income families, and rural families struggle most.

The median income for a Utah family of four is \$100,752. The average annual cost of care for two children under the age of six (one infant/toddler, one preschool-aged child) is \$16,871, or about 17% of state median income. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines affordable child care as care that costs no more than 7% of a family's income.

There are only two counties that meet this affordability benchmark when evaluating care needed for just one infant/toddler (23). There are only seven counties that meet this affordability benchmark for care for one preschool-aged child (24). No county meets this affordability benchmark when evaluating care needed for one infant/toddler and one preschool-aged child.

In Grand County, with the state's lowest median annual income at \$42,654, the cost of child care for two children under the age of six would actually be higher than the statewide average at \$17,339 per year. That comprises about 41% of the median household income for a family of four in Grand County.

The lack of dramatic differences in child care prices from county to county is an illustration of how little flexibility providers have in setting tuition costs for parents, even in areas of the state where family incomes clearly can't keep up. In fact, of counties paying more than the statewide average of 17% of their income on child care costs, all but one are rural (25).



Interestingly, provider wages vary little across the state. A recent report from the Office of Child Care, notes that while rent and other nonpersonnel costs are lower in rural markets, wages are not (26). With a statewide median hourly wage of \$12.87, the county with the lowest wage is Cache County at \$11.96/hour and the counties with the highest wage are Salt Lake County and Tooele County at \$13.26/hour.

The statewide weighted average for infant/toddler care is \$9,193. There are 18 counties (27) where the average cost of infant/toddler care is higher than the statewide average, with the highest being Garfield County at \$11,100. The statewide weighted average for preschool-aged child care is \$7,678. There are 18 counties (28) where the average cost of infant/toddler care cost is higher than the statewide average, with the highest being Garfield County at \$8,487.



## Licensed child care is insufficient in every county in Utah, though the level of unmet need varies from place to place.

Summit County has the highest percentage of child care need met (54%), followed by Carbon, (48%), Sevier (45%), Grand (45%), Salt Lake (45%), and Iron Counties (41%). All other counties have less than 40% child care need met with licensed program capacity. Multiple rural counties (Daggett, Piute, Rich, and Wayne) have no licensed child care available at all.

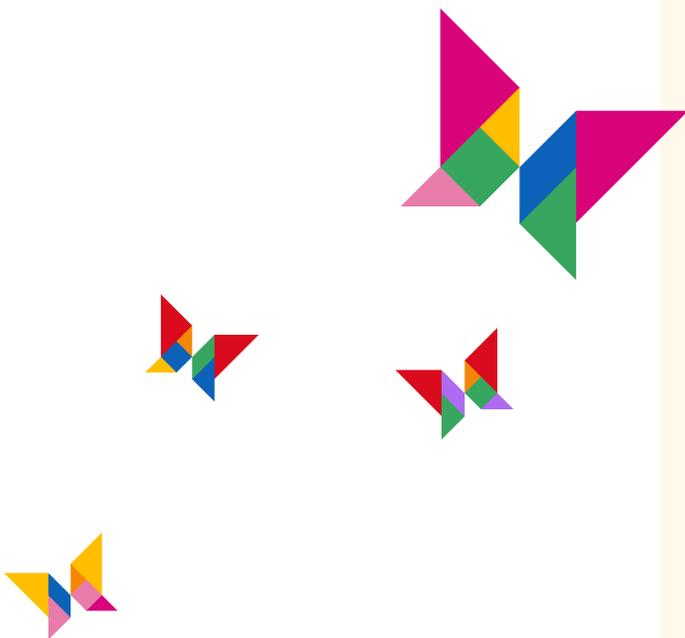
**Table 3.1 Best and Worst Counties by Child Care Needs Fulfilled**

Of Utah’s 29 counties, the 17 counties with the lowest rates of child care need met are rural (29).

In some regions, families may cross county lines to access child care as part of typical regional travel, but likely that has little impact on the overall child care need met in each county.

No county has sufficient licensed care for the young children in their own county, much less those of neighboring counties.

| Top 10     | %   | Last 10  | %   |
|------------|-----|----------|-----|
| Summit     | 54% | Daggett  | 0%  |
| Carbon     | 48% | Wayne    | 0%  |
| Sevier     | 45% | Piute    | 0%  |
| Grand      | 45% | Rich     | 0%  |
| Salt Lake  | 45% | Morgan   | 3%  |
| Iron       | 41% | Emery    | 12% |
| Weber      | 38% | Wasatch  | 14% |
| Washington | 38% | Beaver   | 14% |
| Davis      | 34% | Kane     | 15% |
| Cache      | 31% | Garfield | 15% |





## With substantial public investment, Utah’s licensed child care capacity has grown by 31% since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since March 2020, Utah has received \$572 million in emergency federal funding to stabilize and support Utah’s already fragile child care system amid overwhelming COVID-era challenges (30).

This unprecedented public investment in the child care sector kept hundreds of programs open, expanded families’ access to child care subsidies while reducing out-of-pocket expenses, funded higher wages and even a workforce bonus for child care professionals, and supported regional efforts to recruit new child care providers into the field.

*“The state has been so generous and good to help daycares doors stay open, workers stay employed, and children cared for and I am so very grateful for that. Because the state stepped in, I was able to give my employees a very significant raise, do significant improvements to the center, and not raise tuitions for the past two and a half years or so.”*  
- Provider in Salt Lake City

In contrast to many other states, Utah has actually managed to increase its number of licensed child care spots statewide since March 2020, by both expanding the enrollment capacities of existing programs as well as recruiting new providers into the sector.

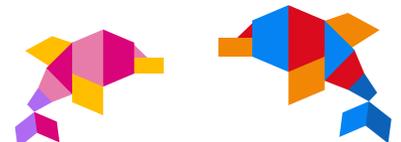
**Table 3.2 Growth in Utah Child Care Programs (March 2020 to August 2023)**

|                               | March 2020 | August 2023 | Change |
|-------------------------------|------------|-------------|--------|
| <b>Center Programs</b>        | 340        | 427         | ↑ 26%  |
| <b>Home-Based Programs</b>    | 838        | 940         | ↑ 12%  |
| <b>Total Child Care Slots</b> | 41,820     | 54,804      | ↑ 31%  |



Much of this federal support was used to subsidize the wages of child care professionals. This was accomplished through grants to providers who committed to pay workers at least \$15 per hour, as well as a one-time recognition bonus of \$2,000 for each registered child care professional.

Without sustained public investment in these effective strategies, Utah’s gains in licensed child care capacity almost certainly will be lost.





# Recommendations

## Recommendation #1: Commit to Public Investment in Child Care

1

To address Utah's worsening child care crisis, substantial investment is required to bridge the gap between what families can afford, and what providers must charge to ensure quality care. Public funding should be used to support families with the cost of tuition, to lower the cost of care by subsidizing child care programs, or both.

There is no sufficient or sustainable source of private investment to address child care's market failure. Since 2020, it has taken nearly \$600 million to stabilize and improve the capacity and quality of Utah's child care system. Ongoing funding at this level is beyond what can be expected of private philanthropy or the business sector (unless obtained through a dedicated corporate tax for such a purpose).

### Recognize Child Care as Early Education

Utah must adopt a new framework for addressing child care needs, wherein child care is understood as an integral part of the public education system. Public education provides free schooling to all to ensure a measure of equal access to opportunity, support an informed citizenry, and equip individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to be effective contributors to society.

If every Utah family had to pay for the K-12 schooling for all their children, access to education would plummet. Only the wealthiest and luckiest families would be able to afford quality, professionally-provided education. Low- and middle-income families who wished to see their children educated, would face years of financial struggle and instability to ensure their schooling.

This is how the child care system currently works. Almost every Utah family with young children is left on their own to afford years of expensive early education for their children, with little or no public support. Knowing that the vast majority of brain development occurs before the age of six (31), it is shocking that this situation has persisted for so long.

**Of all of Utah’s spending on children, only 1.04% is spent on early education, compared to 92% of state-funded spending on K-12 education (32).**

### **Have Reasonable Expectations of the Business Sector**

State leaders insist that the child care crisis could be solved with minimal government intervention, if only the business sector would “do its part.” While some critical contributions can be made by business and corporate entities, their role in developing a more accessible and higher-quality child care system is quite limited.

The policy recommendations made in the Utah Office of Child Care’s Child Care Access in Utah report, released in March 2020, rely heavily on participation by the business sector (33). However, several of these recommendations have been attempted (in Utah and elsewhere) with little success, and others fail to address key aspects of the child care crisis.

For example, providing on-site child care isn’t realistic for small- and mid-sized businesses, due to liability and economies of scale. The large corporations that do offer on-site child care typically still charge for that care, addressing the accessibility issue but not that of affordability.

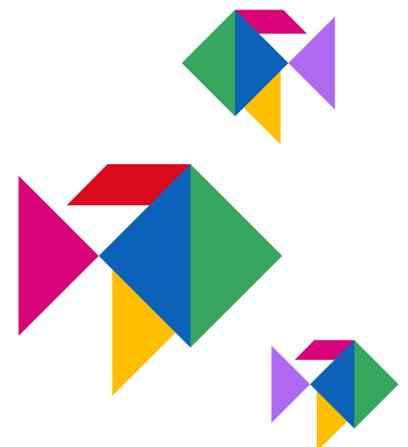
Those businesses that do offer child care to their employees, have little incentive to create additional programs to serve community members who are not working for them and typically reserve child care spaces for their white-collar workers only.

Building child care facilities as part of new housing or business developments is of little help, without ongoing funding for programs in those facilities. Similarly, offering startup grants to new child care programs won’t address persistent operating expenses over time.

Utah’s \$5 million program, established in 2022, which offers businesses startup grants to partner with local child care providers, remains underutilized and offers only a minor potential impact. As of September 1, 2023, only two grantees have been approved, and the (federal) funding used for the program must be spent by September 2024.

Child care stipends are occasionally offered to white-collar executives and managers. But what about hourly workers, such as retail clerks and maintenance staff? Businesses that rely on in-person services, manufacturing, and other physical labor are unlikely to offer special child care support to these lower-wage employees.

Such stipends, in the rare cases where they are made available to employees, can help with child care affordability, but do little to enhance access. The same can be said for solutions like “workplace flexibility” and “remote work.” Neither offer relief to the 75% of U.S. workers whose jobs require in-person attendance and consistent work hours (34), like agricultural workers, service industry employees, and first responders.



### Provide Paid Family Leave

The most important contribution employers can make toward solving the child care crisis is to offer generous paid parental leave. Care for infants is the most expensive of all child care. For safety and positive development, only a few very young children should be cared for by a single child care professional. Accordingly, care for infants is also the hardest to find for families, as few child care programs can afford to provide it and still break even (35).

Ensuring that new parents can opt to stay home with their children for the first year of the child’s life, with pay and without negative ramifications for future career advancement, would substantially reduce the child care cost burden and stress for working families. This approach also offers the best prospect for high-quality interaction and attentive nurturing for these children.

However, Utah policymakers are extremely unlikely to ever mandate the provision of such a critical early care and education investment by private businesses. The business sector is even less likely to offer such a generous benefit without being required to do so.

The most reasonable and efficient way to engage the business sector in the provision of child care, is to assess an appropriate level of taxation. Collected taxes dedicated to early care and education can then be used to pay for: the subsidization of quality child care programs, financial support for families, or both.

### Recommendation #2: Help Parents Afford the Care They Want

- 2 Severe constraints in child care affordability and accessibility restrict families' abilities to make choices based on preference, often leaving them with no option but to make decisions driven by cost or availability. To establish a system that genuinely empowers parent choice in child care, families need financial supports.

#### Strengthen the Child Care Assistance Program

Utah’s Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), administered by the Office of Child Care, helps middle- and low-income parents cover child care costs while they work, seek employment, or engage in job training. A child care subsidy payment usually does not cover the full cost of child care tuition, which families often have to make up for with additional provider co-pays.

The federal government provides all essential funding for Utah’s child child assistance program. Eligibility is determined by household size, immigration status, income, and work requirements. Eligibility parameters are set broadly by the federal government, with substantial discretion in program implementation afforded to the state.

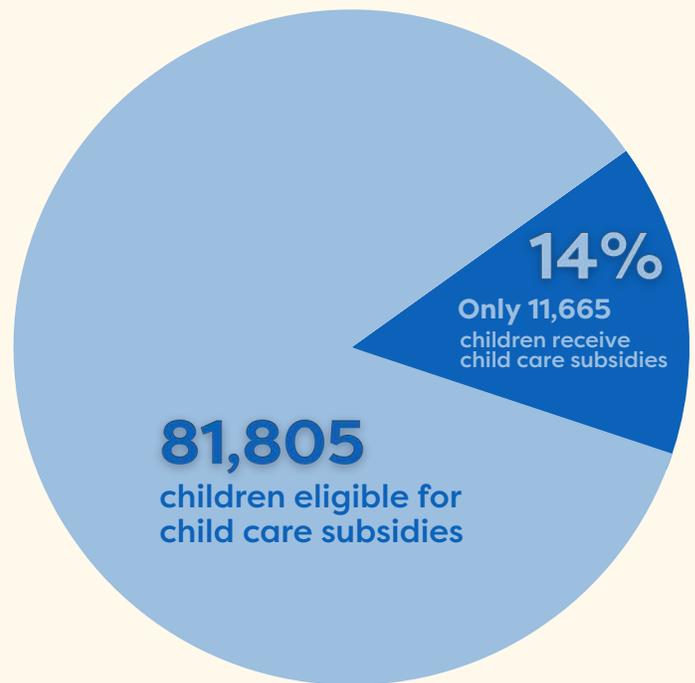


Statewide, 81,805 children are eligible for child care subsidies. However, only 14% of those receive assistance. The rate is highest on average in Weber County, at 19%, and lowest in Utah County, at 9%. Overall, rates of enrollment are too low in all counties.

Currently, families and child care providers report long wait times between application for child care assistance, approval, and disbursement of funds. These inefficiencies, coupled with complicated paperwork and reporting requirements, make consistent enrollment of participating children difficult for their families.

The Office of Child Care must engage in more concerted outreach to families with eligible children. The state should also conduct an internal review of all barriers to subsidy program participation, with a clear goal of making enrollment and participation easier for eligible families.

Figure 4.1 Number of Children Eligible for Child Care Subsidies vs. Number of Children Receiving Child Care Subsidies



### Expand Eligibility Criteria for Child Care Assistance

Currently, CCAP subsidies are not available to parents pursuing higher education. The state has the discretion to include these families in the eligibility criteria and should do so.

All child care professionals should be considered a “special population” for purposes of child care assistance eligibility. This means that, as in Kentucky and in Maine, child care workers, regardless of total household income, would be able to access child care subsidies if they meet all other program requirements.

A typical child care professional in Utah would have to spend approximately 34% of their annual earnings to afford infant care for their own child. This change could attract more workers into the child care field, and increase revenue for child care programs that already subsidize their workforce’s child care needs (by offering free care to program employees). This approach is being utilized in both Kentucky and Maine, with other states planning to follow suit.



## Increase Subsidy Rates to Bolster Quality and Affordability

Utah's child care subsidy rates must increase to reflect the true cost of care. The Office of Child Care recently published a cost estimation model report (36), showing that current subsidy amounts don't meet provider costs. In fact, the higher the quality of care offered, the more insufficient the subsidy funding is to cover program costs. Utah's subsidy rates, as recommended by federal guidelines, are set to the 75th percentile of market rates; this means the subsidy amounts are supposed to be high enough to give these families access to approximately 75% of the child care programs offered statewide.

The cost modeling report also revealed dramatic gaps between the amount parents are paying for child care (the market rate) and the actual costs incurred by child care programs when providing that care (estimated cost of care). This gap is most often filled by child care providers themselves underpaying themselves and their employees, and forgoing critical benefits as well as program upgrades. These providers underprice their programs, knowing that families they serve can't afford the true cost.

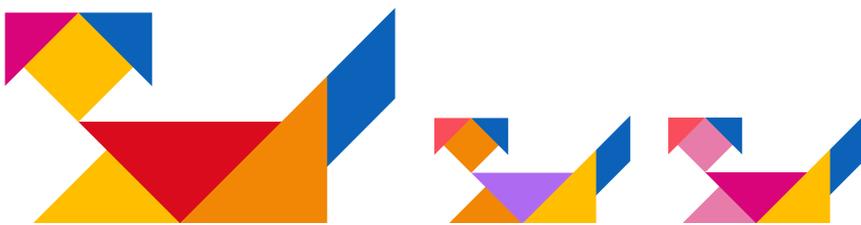
## Create a Meaningful Child Tax Credit to Support Working and Stay-at-Home Parents

Most working parents in Utah choose their child care setting based on cost (followed closely by proximity to work or home). Particularly for families with two or more children under the age of 6, the expense of child care can easily outpace monthly rent or a mortgage. At the same time, thousands of stay-at-home parents and relatives each year provide unpaid labor with countless positive benefits for Utah's communities while forgoing earnings both in the moment and in the future.

During 2021, a temporary expansion of the federal child tax credit - to \$3,600 per year per child for low- and middle-income families - reduced child poverty to historic lows within months. The vast majority of beneficiary households spent this benefit (a portion of which could be received as a monthly award) on basic needs that directly supported their children, such as housing, food, clothing, and educational expenses (37).

This expanded credit did not restrict spending to any particular category of item, and thus helped families regardless of who was caring for their children. Despite the documented success of the expanded credit, Congress allowed it to expire at the end of 2021.

The federal child tax credit has reverted to its previous limited incarnation: a partially refundable credit of \$2,000 per year per child, largely unavailable to children in families with the lowest incomes. This version of the credit can only be claimed annually when taxes are filed, making it much less helpful in covering the everyday costs of caring for children.



Fourteen states, including Utah, have some version of a child tax credit available to be claimed when state income taxes are filed. The temporary federal child tax credit of 2021 has the features of an ideal state income tax: available (at least in part) as a monthly payment; large enough to have an impact on child care or child-rearing expenses; applies to children from zero to 18 years old; and fully available to children in families with low and very low household incomes.

However, few state child tax credits share these features. Minnesota's child tax credit comes closest: it is refundable, worth up to \$1,750 per child per year, and available for children under age 18 (38).

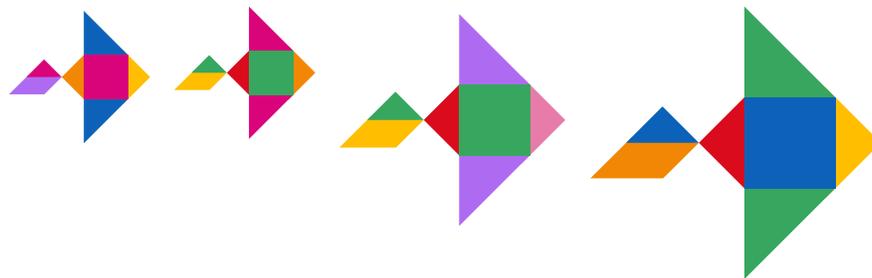
### **Utah's Child Tax Credit Leaves Too Many Families Out**

By comparison, Utah's child tax credit, established in 2023 but not available to be claimed until 2024 taxes are filed in 2025, is among the least generous of all state child tax credits. The \$1,000 per year per child credit can only be claimed for children ages 1 to 3.

It is unavailable to children in the lowest income families, due to its non-refundable nature. Because the tax credit begins to phase out for joint-filing households making more than \$54,000, there may be no families in Utah who will receive the full benefit per child. Analysis by Voices for Utah Children suggests that only about 7.3% of Utah children will benefit from some portion (but not all) of this credit.

To support as many families with young children as possible, Utah should expand its child tax credit in the following ways:

- Include children who are in the lowest income families, by making the credit refundable;
- Include all children who potentially require care while parents are working (ages 0 to 12);
- Make the credit available to middle- and upper middle-income families, by raising the income eligibility range's upper threshold to \$104,000;
- Allow taxpayers to use an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number to claim the credit;
- Increase the size of the credit from \$1,000 per child per year to at least \$2,000 per child per year; and
- Allow families to receive the credit monthly, rather than annually when filing their income taxes.



## Recommendation #3: Support the Critical Work of Child Care Providers

- 3** Child care professionals face substantial financial hurdles, with low wages and minimal benefits causing high turnover rates. Early childhood educators must be respected and compensated in the way they deserve.

### Continue Child Care Stabilization Grants with State Funding

Child Care Stabilization Grants have played a vital role in keeping child care programs open, keeping costs down for families, and raising employee wages. Hundreds of millions of dollars in federal COVID-era funding made these stabilization grants possible.

This funding will be exhausted by early 2024. In anticipation, the Office of Child Care will reduce monthly Child Care Stabilization grant amounts by 75% in October 2023. Grant amounts will continue to decrease until the grants end entirely next spring.

*“With the end of stabilization grants, I have to let my assistant go. She has been working for my daycare for a few years but I can't afford to pay her \$15/hour. I will have to raise my rates for my enrolled families. I may not continue to provide daycare moving forward, I haven't decided yet.”*

*- Provider in Clinton*

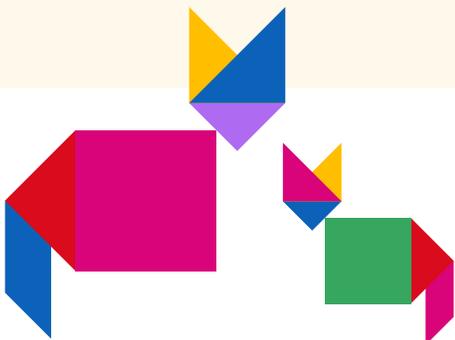
Federal, state, or local governments have so far failed to sustain this successful program with additional funding.

According to the Century Foundation, Utah is one of six states that could see half or more of all licensed child care programs statewide close with the end of the stabilization grants, unless new funding is committed to extending the program (39). Their analysis projects that 663 child care programs in Utah could close, which could leave 35,614 children without access to child care (40).

**Table 4.1 Predicted Contraction in Utah Child Care Capacity**

Source: The Century Foundation (41)

|                                   | August 2023 | After Grants End | Change      |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|
| <b>Number of Child Care Spots</b> | 54,804      | 19,190           | ↓ 35,614    |
| <b>% of Child Care Need Met</b>   | 36%         | 12%              | ↓ 24 points |



The Child Care Stabilization Grant Program has proved wildly successful, ultimately supporting care for 85,200 Utah children since its inception (42). Due to this and other programs made possible by COVID-19 emergency funds, Utah actually defied national trends by expanding the number of child care slots available by 31%. Without state intervention, these gains will almost certainly disappear when the grant program ends.

Utah legislators should fund some ongoing version of the Stabilization Grant Program, with new parameters to ensure that funding is prioritized for child care programs that service low- and middle-income children. Going forward, grants can be specifically targeted for employee compensation, as personnel costs are the greatest expense in nearly all child care programs. Multiple states - including New Mexico, Wisconsin, Maine, and Minnesota - have already committed substantial state funding to support positive developments enabled by federal COVID funding.

### **Bolster Wages for Child Care Professionals**

Wage supplement programs can help to recruit, retain and reward eligible child care professionals by using public (and sometimes private) funding to bolster the existing wages of those providers. Several states are using such programs to address severe workforce shortages and promote higher-quality care.

Similar to how the Child Care Stabilization Program has worked, wage supplement programs allow child care professionals to earn a more fair and competitive wage, without creating additional financial burdens for child care programs. Wage levels can increase based on the child care worker's level of education and experience. Wage support programs help improve the economic stability of child care professionals, enhance the quality of care they offer, and ultimately promote better outcomes for children in their care.

Similar subsidy programs have been used to bolster other critical workforces, such as farmers, trade workers, and public servants. At least 15 states including Maine (43), New Mexico (44), North Carolina (45), and Oklahoma (46) offer monthly or annual wage supplements to child care providers, and Utah should join them.

### **License All Qualified Providers**

In 2011, approximately 750 licensed home-based child care providers lost their licenses due to the Utah Immigration Accountability and Enforcement Act. This group included providers who had good standing with the state and who offered culturally competent care in communities with pressing labor needs. However, they cannot be licensed due to these regulations.

Refusing to license undocumented providers does not fix the broken immigration system. Rather, it makes child care even more inaccessible and forces active providers to perform their valuable services without oversight and technical assistance. Changes to these regulations would increase access to licensed child care, and allow more providers to access special grants, professional development opportunities, and other benefits.

## Ensure Employment Benefits for Early Educators

Without access to health care and retirement benefits, child care professionals face lifelong economic instability. Nationally, child care educators are twice as likely as the general workforce to have no form of health insurance and only one child care worker in 10 receives any retirement benefits (47).

*“Providers often make long-term sacrifices. I have a lot of health stuff that needs to be addressed and is building up. But without insurance and with the stabilization grants going away to help cover teacher time, I feel stuck and have to stick to band-aid solutions. And I need to be investing in retirement.”*

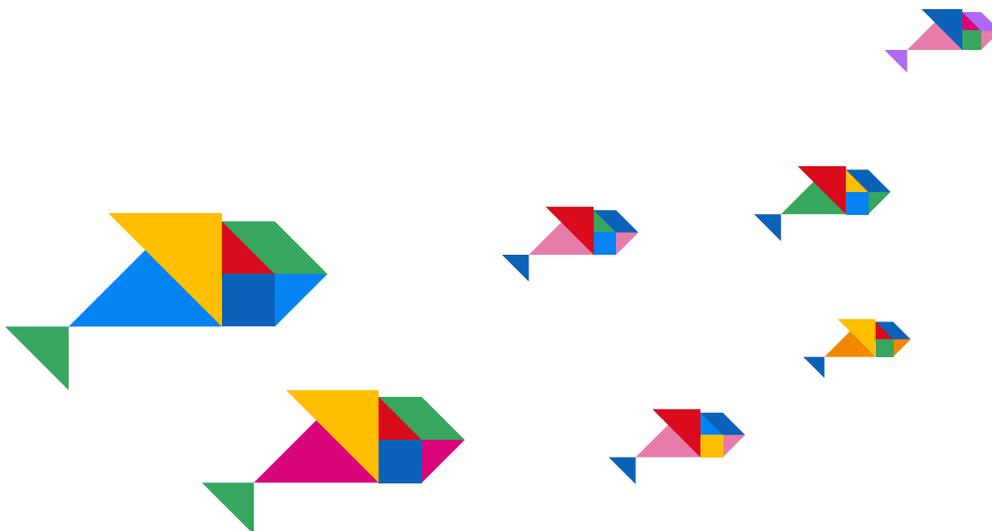
*- Provider in Cedar City*

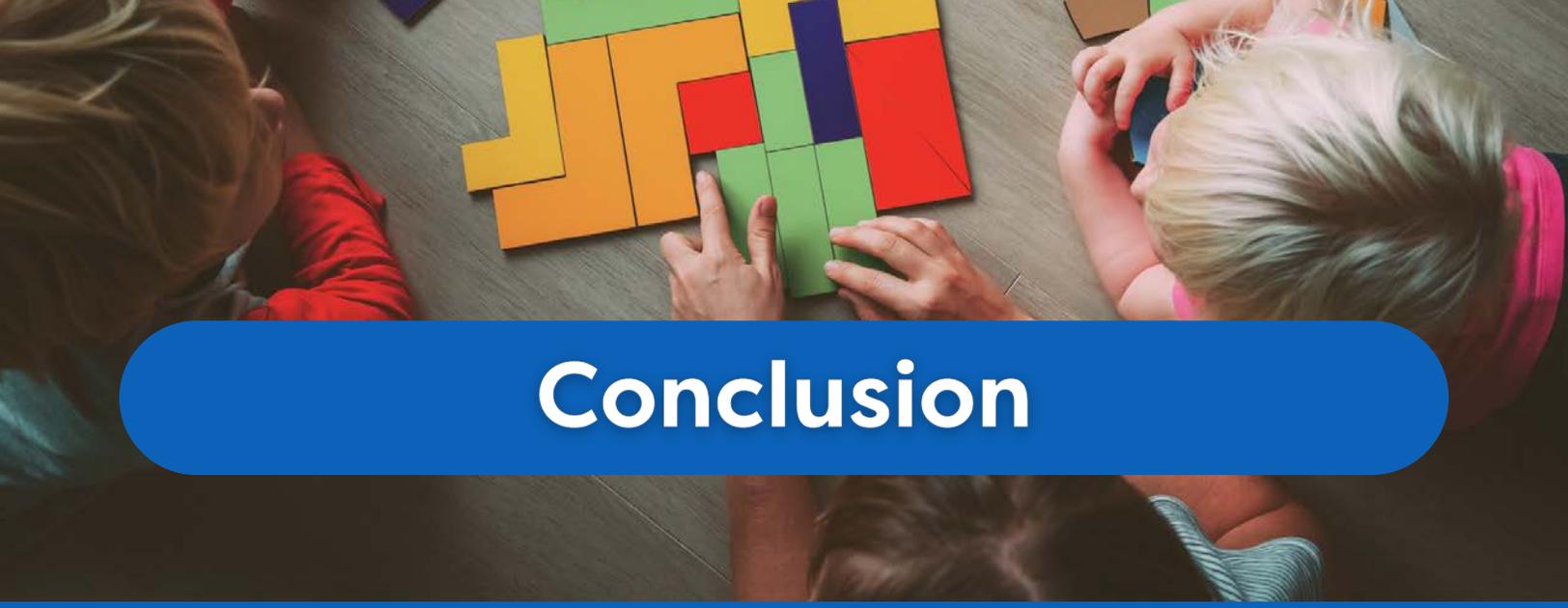
Utah can join other states stepping up to address this untenable situation. For example, Washington State covers the cost of monthly healthcare premiums for employees of licensed child care facilities (48). Public investment can also be pooled to ensure that child care professionals have access to benefits like paid time off, paid sick leave, and paid parental leave.

**Table 4.2 Share of Utah Child Care Programs That Offer Health, Retirement, and Leave Benefits to Full-Time Staff**

Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services Office of Child Care (49)

|                                       | Health Insurance | Retirement Plan | Paid Leave |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------|
| <b>Child Care Center</b>              | 42%              | 37%             | 81%        |
| <b>Home-Based Child Care Programs</b> | 2%               | 1%              | 42%        |





# Conclusion

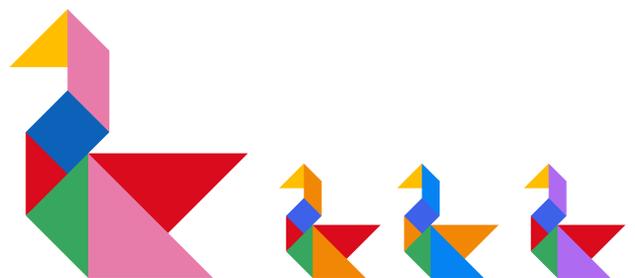
With a 64% gap in licensed child care access, Utah has a long way to go.

However, there is encouraging news: thanks to federal funding and effective state implementation, we now know there are proven ways to help make child care more affordable and accessible.

Utah's changing family demographics, with over half of all households relying on all available parents participating in the workforce, underscores the need for accessible, affordable, and high-quality child care.

Unfortunately, too many families are struggling to make ends meet. Escalating costs of housing, groceries, and child care have limited genuine choice for parents when it comes to selecting care or even deciding to expand their families. Simultaneously, the child care workforce, primarily composed of women and women of color, is suffering too. These dedicated educators deserve better compensation, benefits, and recognition for their invaluable role in nurturing and educating future generations.

**Child care is unequivocally a public good deserving of support, on par with our public education system. To bridge the gap between the cost of quality child care and what families can afford, Utah needs substantial public investment.**



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# APPENDIX A: Methodology

## ***Child Care Population***

To calculate child care need, we used American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (50) to determine the number of children with all available parents in the workforce. This data was compared to August 2023 provider and slot data, provided by the State of Utah Office of Child Care Licensing.

## ***Child Care Providers and Slots***

There are many types of child care programming regulated by the state. Not all of these programs are able to be used by working families for reliable child care on a regular basis.

In our capacity calculations, we did not include any of the following types of child care programs: drop-in care for fitness/health club members; limited before- or after-care only available to students of a particular school or organization; hourly care that can be used only on a short-term or emergency basis; out-of-school/after-hours programs for school-aged children only; and commercial preschools (defined by statute as four hours or less per day; can be offered as few as two days per week). Due to the limited hours of Head Start programming and public preschool programming, we also did not include these slots in our capacity calculations however, the data for these programs can be found in Appendix B. Data on Head Start enrollment was provided by the Utah Head Start Association. Data on public preschool enrollment was provided by the Utah State Board of Education.

We also did not include child care offered through the state’s “Friends, Family & Neighbor” (FFN) program; this program allows for care to be provided to specific children who receive child care subsidies, by a specific adult hired by the family. These child care spots are not open to all children in the community, as an FFN child care provider is only authorized to provide care for one or more designated children from a particular family. FFN data can be found in Appendix B and was provided by Utah’s Office of Child Care Licensing.

We also did not include data for children enrolled in the Utah Preparing Students Today for a Rewarding Tomorrow (UPSTART) Program. The UPSTART program, administered by the Waterford Institute, and funded by the Utah State Legislature (51), is a free, online program available to Utah children. It offers 15 minutes of daily learning through online activities with the goal of preparing children for kindergarten. Due to the short nature of UPSTART and that it still requires parental supervision, we do not consider UPSTART to be a form of child care.

For simplicity, we combined “family child care” and “residential certificate” providers into a single “home-based” category. Family child care programs are fully licensed programs that are conducted in the provider’s own home. This license is required if the provider is providing paid care for more than seven children; they may be allowed to serve as many as 16 children (as long as appropriate ratios are maintained). A residential certificate is a lower-qualification category available to providers who wish to offer care to fewer than eight children, but are still willing to be regulated by the state.

Due to statutory changes made in 2022, unlicensed care for pay can be provided to as many as six unrelated children by a single individual. This change means that residential certificates are essentially required only for providers who serve seven children (below seven, no license is needed; above seven, full licensure is required).

It is important to note that the licensed capacity of a given child care program does not necessarily indicate the program's real-time capacity. The total number of licensed child care slots presented in this report is very likely higher than the actual, usable capacity of the system. If a child care program cannot find workers, the required child-to-caregiver ratio forces programs to accept fewer children. Additionally, individual providers may have dedicated spots for infants and toddlers only, or for preschool-aged children only; this means not every spot within a provider's capacity will be applicable to a family seeking care for their child(ren). In these ways, the data on child care availability is limited.

However, we are confident that licensed capacity reflects enrollment fairly well. As of July 2023, child care programs receiving stabilization grants reported to the Office of Child Care that their enrollment was approximately 79.6% of licensed capacity.

Child care availability also exists outside of licensed care. Our report does not intend to disregard care provided by extended family members or neighbors. Oftentimes, this care can be important for social, cultural, and financial reasons. However, unfortunately, there has been no collection of data on the amount of unlicensed care in Utah. Therefore, we could not include it in this report. Additionally, it's important to acknowledge that our estimates cannot capture the number of parents who desire to offer at-home care but lack the financial freedom to exercise that choice. Likewise, we cannot estimate the number of families where one parent is offering at-home care but would prefer to be in the workforce.

Examining child care availability by county in rural areas also presents difficulties. In rural counties, it's possible that some families cross county lines to access child care.

### ***Cost of Care***

In order to determine the average annual cost of care, we used the State of Utah's Office of Child Care's Utah 2021 Child Care Market Rate Study (52). For center rates, the numbers cited are market rates listed at the 50th percentile. For home-based care, the weighted average was calculated for the 50th percentile rates of family licensed and residential certificate, weighted based on the amount of each type of care. All costs are rounded to the nearest dollar for precision and ease of interpretation. Because inflation has increased considerably since 2021, we consider our published costs of care to be conservative estimates. Our calculations for cost also do not include any additional fees such as curriculum fees, transportation fees, food/meal fees, supply fees, or event/trip fees.

To best illustrate the cost for families, we portrayed the costs for four-person families with two children, one in the infant/toddler age range (under two) and one in the preschool-age range (between two and five years old). These numbers are meant to show comparable costs for parents but do not represent every family's child care cost as many families are larger or smaller.

American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates was also used to determine median four-person family household income. We used this data to determine what cost would constitute affordability, using the 7% federal affordability benchmark determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. To compare this benchmark to the economic reality of child care cost, we determined the average percent of income a four-person family spends on child care for an infant/toddler and pre-schooler. We calculated the weighted average cost for center care, family licensed care, and residential certificate care, for each age group, and compared it to median household income.

U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics May 2022 State Occupational Employment and Wages Estimates were used to determine median provider hourly and annual wages.

To determine eligibility for Utah's child care subsidy program, we followed the criteria from the Department of Workforce Services (53) which included children under 13, households where all available parents were in the workforce, and the household income was less than 85% of the state median income (SMI). To find how the SMI changes by household size we scaled the 85% SMI of a family of four given in the table B19119 in the Census Bureau by household size, consistent with the methodology of the Department of Workforce Services, and an example can be found here (54). We then used the American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates Microdata Sample to estimate the number of children under 13 in households that met the SMI household income criteria where all available parents were in the workforce. This data was further disaggregated by child age and Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) which is the only geographic area available.

The State of Utah's Office of Child Care provided month-to-month subsidy data for children under six from 2021-2023. Due to privacy and confidentiality, any county that had actual child counts under 10 was not displayed. Of counties with less than 10 children enrolled, this includes Daggett, Garfield, Kane, Morgan, Piute, and Wayne Counties. For our calculations, those counties were counted as having five children enrolled in the subsidy program. This was chosen instead of publishing ranges, as the ranges were not large enough to change the rate of eligible children enrolled. In order to accurately depict the number of children enrolled in subsidies, we compared 2021 child counts, 2021 and 2022 average child counts, and the weighted average of 2021-2023 child counts. Because there was little variation in the three data sets, we chose to use 2021 child counts, as they are the most comparable to the 2021 data for children eligible for subsidies.

### ***Other Data***

We determined the increase in child care capacity over the 3.5-year period (which includes the months typically considered as taking place during the COVID pandemic) using data provided by the Office of Child Care Licensing. We compared aggregate numbers for licensed child care capacity from March 1, 2020, to program-by-program information about licensed child care capacity from August 22, 2023. We will continue to monitor this data for the coming months and years in order to track the impacts of the federal child care funding cliff.

# APPENDIX B: Head Start, Pre-School and Other Types of Care

## *Friends, Family, Neighbor Care*

In some states, the term “Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care” is used to describe informal, unlicensed care provided by family, friends, and neighbors. In Utah, FFN care refers to an official program through which families can use their child care assistance to pay informal providers. These providers must receive approval from the Office of Child Care Licensing, and are approved only to care for specific subsidized children. Utah FFN providers must pass a background check and be trained in First Aid/CPR. Care can be provided in either the child(ren)’s home or the provider’s home, for up to four unrelated children and no more than eight total children, with no more than two children younger than two years of age (unless all children are siblings) (55). Data from Child Care Licensing shows that the number of FFN providers in Utah has decreased by 50% since March 2020 (56).

**Table B-1 FFN August 2023 Program Data by County**

| County    | # of Providers | County           | # of Providers |
|-----------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Box Elder | 7              | Sanpete          | 1              |
| Cache     | 13             | Summit           | 1              |
| Carbon    | 1              | Tooele           | 2              |
| Davis     | 26             | Uintah           | 7              |
| Duchesne  | 2              | Utah             | 18             |
| Iron      | 2              | Washington       | 9              |
| Salt Lake | 49             | Weber            | 24             |
|           |                | <b>Statewide</b> | <b>162</b>     |

## *Head Start and Early Head Start*

Head Start (ages three to five) and Early Head Start (ages zero to three) are federally funded programs that promote school readiness among economically disadvantaged and underserved children, through the provision of educational, health, nutrition, and other social services. School districts, child cares, and nonprofits offer this high-quality programming to children of all ages, as well as programming for expectant mothers. Services are offered at no charge for children who qualify.

While participation in Head Start and Early Head Start ensures that enrolled children are in a high-quality early care and education setting during the day, few programs last for a full “traditional” work day (i.e. eight hours). The longest duration Head Start programs typically last for only 6.5 hours, five days a week; some take place for fewer hours each day, and some do not take place every day.

While Head Start and Early Head Start can provide high quality child care for working parents for some portion of the work week, programs cannot be relied upon to cover all working hours, and must be supplemented by additional child care arrangements. For this reason, we have not included Head Start and Early Head Start program slots among the available licensed child care slots in each county.

Children also must meet fairly strict federal eligibility guidelines to participate in Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Hence, slots in these programs are not fully available to all children in a community. These eligibility parameters are another reason we have not included Head Start and Early Head Start program slots in the county-level licensed child care counts.

**Table B-2 Head Start Program 2022 Statewide Data**

| <b>Number of Programs by Type</b>                               | <b># Programs</b>    |
|---|----------------------|
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>25</b>            |
| <b>Head Start</b>   | <b>9</b>             |
| <b>Early Head Start</b>   | <b>13</b>            |
| <b>Migrant and Seasonal Early Head Start</b>                    | <b>2</b>             |
| <b>American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start</b>          | <b>1</b>             |
| <b>Statewide Head Start Enrollment</b>                          | <b># of Children</b> |
| <b>Total Enrollment</b>   | <b>7,240</b>         |
| <b>Preschool Children - (HS all ages) and (MSHS age 3-5)</b>    | <b>4,996</b>         |
| <b>Infants and Toddlers - (EHS all ages) and (MSHS age 0-2)</b> | <b>2,104</b>         |
| <b>Number of Children Receiving a Child Care Subsidy</b>        | <b>237</b>           |

**Public Preschool**

Utah parents can access limited publically-funded preschool programs, for three and four-year-olds, primarily through their local school district. These programs are typically targeted at children from low-income families, those with developmental delays or disabilities, and those who may be considered at-risk of falling behind in school.

The programs' daily duration varies, from just two hours to something closer to a full school day, and attendance options ranging from one to five days per week. Program costs vary based on available funding, family income, and program duration.

Public preschool is funded by Federal Title I funding, the Federal Special Education Preschool Program, the Utah School Readiness Initiative, and Head Start. Due to this, the data on preschool enrollment may be duplicative with Head Start data.

**Table B-3 Preschool Population 2022 Data by County**

| County    | Kids Enrolled in Pre-K | County     | Kids Enrolled in Pre-K |
|-----------|------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| Beaver    | 54                     | Piute      | 26                     |
| Box Elder | 325                    | Rich       | 0                      |
| Cache     | 769                    | Salt Lake  | 4,860                  |
| Carbon    | 145                    | San Juan   | 118                    |
| Daggett   | 11                     | Sanpete    | 321                    |
| Davis     | 1,848                  | Sevier     | 179                    |
| Duchesne  | 232                    | Summit     | 225                    |
| Emery     | 150                    | Tooele     | 508                    |
| Garfield  | 71                     | Uintah     | 185                    |
| Grand     | 42                     | Utah       | 3,802                  |
| Iron      | 331                    | Wasatch    | 315                    |
| Juab      | 33                     | Washington | 930                    |
| Kane      | 93                     | Wayne      | 36                     |
| Millard   | 132                    | Weber      | 635                    |
| Morgan    | 58                     | Statewide  | 16,425                 |

## Appendix C: School-Aged Children

Afterschool programs offer supervised care and educational programming to school-age children outside regular school hours. Afterschool care provides children with safe, nurturing environments that offer learning opportunities, create community, and help working families. These programs are operated by various types of organizations and are located in schools, community centers, libraries, licensed child care programs, and recreation centers.

Most afterschool programs operate for 15-20 hours per week during the school year and six-13 weeks during the summer, while most licensed child care program operate almost every weekday. The Office of Child Care and the Utah State Board of Education administer various afterschool grants using federal and state funding. According to one 2019 report, there is nowhere near enough funding to meet need (57). 257,000 youth would participate in a program if one were available in their community (58).

Table C-1 Afterschool Program Statewide Data

| Afterschool Care Population                                       |         |
|---|---------|
| Total Children 6-12 Years in Utah                                 | 376,478 |
| Total Children 6-12 Years with All Available Parents in Workforce | 221,219 |
| Rate of Children 6-12 with Opportunities for Afterschool Care     | 59%     |
| Afterschool Program Access and Provider Population (59)           |         |
| Elementary Programs   | 148     |
| Teen Programs   | 60      |
| Total Children Served   | 22,701  |
| Full-time Afterschool Program Employees                           | 217     |
| Part-time Afterschool Program Employees                           | 1,272   |

Figure C-1 Number of Afterschool Programs by County (60)

Source: Utah Afterschool Network

