

Mapping Care for Kids: A County-Level Look at Utah's Crisis in Licensed Child Care

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Written by: Jenna Williams



Utah's family demographics have changed. 53% of Utah families have all available parents in the workforce, making child care a necessity. These days, most Utah families need two incomes to maintain financial stability. But Utah's licensed child care system struggles to meet the demand. **Licensed child care program capacity is only sufficient to serve about 36% of all children under six whose parents are working.**

To provide a comprehensive picture of Utah's current child care crisis, this report produced by Voices for Utah Children examines the availability of licensed child care across the state, and in each individual county. By conducting a detailed 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.

Download a copy of the report [here](https://heyzine.com/flip-book/utchildcare).

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County-Level Data

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Child Care Access Data Fact Sheets by County are also available on our Utah Care for Kids website. Look up child care access in your county today!

[Look Up County](#)

Statewide Data

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 Home-based Child Care for Infant/Toddler	\$8,267
Average Annual Cost Center-based Child Care for Infant/Toddler	\$11,232
Average Annual Cost Home-based Child Care for Preschool-Aged Child	\$7,311
Average Annual Cost Center-based Child	\$8,487

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Care for Preschool-Aged Child	
Number of Children Eligible for Subsidies	81,805
Number of Children Receiving Subsidies	11,665
Rate of Eligible Children Receiving Subsidies	14%

Child Care Workforce Compensation

Median Hourly Wage for Child Care Professionals	\$12.87
Median Annual Salary for Child Care Professionals	\$26,770

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 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.



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How costs play out 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 Toddler/Infant 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%

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 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% of 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

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\$2,000 per child care professional. These financial investments both expanded the enrollment capacities of existing programs as well as recruited new providers into the sector. However, with the ending of this funding in October 2023, Utah risks jeopardizing this incredible progress.

Recommendations

1. Commit to Public Investment in Child Care

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.

2. Help Parents Afford the Care They Want

Utah's current child care system doesn't promote parent choice. 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. 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.

3. Support the Critical Work of Child Care Professionals

Child care professionals face significant financial challenges. 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 early child care profession to attract and retain a robust workforce. To support child care providers, policymakers should consider measures including state funding of Child

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Care Stabilization Grants, wage supplement programs, eliminating barriers to licensure, and increasing access to employment benefits.

For questions or inquiries regarding this report, please contact Voices staff members:

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