

Voices on Oregon's limited and expensive child care

We all suffer from the child care crisis



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



Child care is hard for anyone to find. Regardless of location in Oregon, race, ethnicity or income, survey respondents overwhelmingly agree that child care is hard to find.



Some rural counties report more difficulty finding child care than the state average. Baker, Clatsop, Coos, Douglas, Jefferson, Lane, Umatilla and Union counties stand out.



Child care costs are a top concern for parents. Survey respondents repeatedly expressed in open-ended responses that they cannot afford child care, especially alongside other costs of living like housing.

Child care is an economic development, family well-being and early childhood education issue that affects all Oregonians and the future of our state. Oregon Voices survey respondents shared that availability and high cost of child care is a leading challenge in their communities. This issue brief focuses on the experience of parents of young children in particular, those who are most struggling to find child care that supports their families' well-being.

About Oregon Voices

In an increasingly urban state and nation, rural residents often find themselves unseen and unheard in the systems and decisions that affect their daily lives. Oregon Voices aims to amplify lived experiences in the state's less densely populated areas and to cultivate a sense of common cause – a first for Oregon.

This issue brief summarizes key findings from the Oregon Voices survey that focus on child care availability and the effects of its high cost.

For more information about our research methods, please visit orvoices.org.

What we know about child care in Oregon

Everyone benefits from high-quality early childhood education and the availability of affordable child care. Access to high-quality child care and early childhood education helps children's cognitive, language and social development. It boosts confidence and social skills,¹ and research shows a strong relationship between early care and education and higher college graduation rates.² Child care is crucial to parents. When it is not available, working parents may need to work shorter hours or leave their workplace, thereby limiting their income.³

Yet child care availability and access have long been challenges for Oregon families. Infant and toddler care is a crisis statewide: All but one of Oregon's 36 counties (Gilliam) are considered child care deserts for that age group. This means that for every slot available, there are three children who could fill it.⁴ Care for preschool-aged children is also scarce: 18 of 36 counties are deserts, and without public funding this number would be 33 of 36. All Oregon counties are child care deserts for school-age children. Rural and low-income census tracts are 63% of child care deserts nationally.⁵

For those who can find child care, it is largely unaffordable. Spending 7% of household monthly income is considered affordable by federal standards,⁶ but in Oregon, child care costs most families closer to 16% of their income before subsidies or 30% for low-income families.⁷ In addition, families pay more for infant and toddler care because of the higher costs of providing quality care and the number of caregivers needed. At least one caregiver is required for every four children ages 6 weeks to 24 months, whereas one caregiver can care for 15 children kindergarten age and older.⁸

KNOW THE FACTS

35

Number of Oregon counties considered a child care desert for infants and toddlers⁴

\$35,820

Median annual salary for Oregon child care providers⁹

\$1,085-\$1,860

Range of monthly cost for infant care in Oregon⁴

\$4.4 billion

Annual revenue U.S. businesses lose due to employee absences resulting from the lack of child care¹⁰

\$28.9 billion

Wages lost annually due to limited affordable child care and paid family and medical leave¹⁰

1 Melhuish, Edward et al. 2015. *A Review of Research on the Effects of Early Childhood Education (ECEC) Upon Child Development*. CARE Project: University of Oxford.

2 Bustamante, Andres S., Eric Dearing, Henrik Daae Zachrisson, and Deborah Lowe Vandell. 2021. Adult Outcomes of Sustained High-Quality Early Child Care and Education: Do They Vary by Family Income? *Child Development*. 93(2): 502-523.

3 Bauer, Lauren et al. 2021. *Ten Economic Facts on How Mothers Spend Their Time*. Prepared by The Hamilton Project for Brookings Institute.

4 Pratt, Megan and Michaela Sektnan. 2023. *Oregon's Child Care Deserts 2022: Mapping Supply by Age Group and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots*. Oregon State University, College of Public Health and Human Sciences. Prepared for the Oregon Early Learning Division.

5 National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services. 2023. *Childcare Need and Availability in Rural Areas: Policy Brief and Recommendations to the Secretary*. hhsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/advisory-committees/rural/nac-rural-child-care-brief-23.pdf

6 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2023. *New Rule Proposed to Improve Child Care Access, Affordability, and Stability*. hhs.gov/about/news/2023/07/11/new-rule-proposed-improve-child-care-access-affordability-stability.html

7 Child Care Aware. 2019. *Price of Rural Health and Human Services*. childcareaware.org/our-issues/research/ccdc/state/or/#:~:text=In%20Oregon%2C%20the%20average%20monthly,family%20with%20children%20under%206.

8 Oregon Department of Education. 2022. Rules for Certified Child Care Centers. Oregon Administrative Rules, Chapter 414, Division 300. [oregon.gov/delc/providers/OCC Forms/CCLD-0084 Rules for Certified Child Care Centers EN.pdf](https://oregon.gov/delc/providers/OCC%20Forms/CCLD-0084%20Rules%20for%20Certified%20Child%20Care%20Centers%20EN.pdf)

9 Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2023. Occupational Outlook Handbook and Occupational Employment and Wages Statistics Query System. bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/childcare-workers.htm

10 Childcare Aware of America. 2018. *The U.S. and the High Cost of Child Care: A Review of Prices and Proposed Solutions for a Broken System*. cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3957809/COCreport2018_1.pdf

While child care is expensive for families, wages for child care providers remain low. In Oregon, the annual median wage for child care workers is \$35,820, well below the threshold for meeting basic needs in any county. The challenges of low wages are compounded by the lower amounts of state funding to rural areas.¹¹

Progress was made on this issue in 2021 when the Oregon Legislature passed HB 3073, which established an alternative rate-setting structure for the Employment Related Day Care program.¹² The goal is to determine rates through a study on cost of quality care rather than a market rate survey. ERDC rates could then more accurately reflect the subsidy providers need to provide care.¹³

Who responded to the survey?

Although households with and without children responded to the Oregon Voices survey, in this issue brief we focus on those with children. The overall share of respondents in households with children (23%) is statistically similar to the share for Oregon's population (24%).¹⁵ Nearly one in 10 respondents had a child under age 5 in their home.

A greater share of Black, Indigenous, Latino/Hispanic and other survey respondents of color lived in households with children compared to white respondents. Similar shares of respondents living in urban and rural Oregon reported living in households with children.

Figure 1: **24% of Oregon Voices respondent households include children**

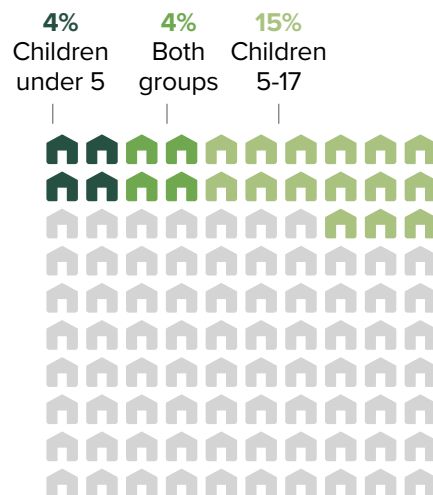


Figure 2: **More respondent households of color have children compared to white households**

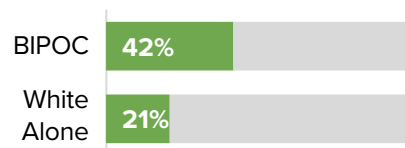
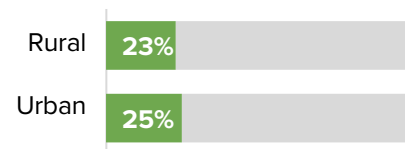


Figure 3: **About the same percent of respondents from rural as urban households have children**



¹¹ Stoney, Louise. 2020. *Child Care in Rural Oregon: Bold Approaches to Address Systemic Inequity and Rebuild Child Care*. The Ford Family Foundation.

¹² State of Oregon Early Learning Division. 2022. *Alternative Rate-setting Structure for the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) Program*. Oregon Department of Education.

¹³ This alternative structure is not yet implemented, pending completion of a technical back-end system. (Ibid, pg. 1 and 2)

¹⁴ Pratt, Megan, Michaela Sektnan, and Laurie Houston. 2022 *Oregon Child Care Market Price Study: Executive Summary*. Oregon State University, College of Public Health and Human Science.

¹⁵ American Community Survey. 2022. Table B11012: Households by Type, Oregon, 1-Year Estimates. United States Census Bureau.

What Oregonians said about child care in our state

Concerns about availability and cost showed in quantitative and qualitative survey results with agreement across geographic, race and ethnicity, household size, and income categories. Notably, the survey was administered in 2021, and respondents related their struggles to other pandemic-related challenges.



Child care is hard for anyone to find.

Survey respondents overwhelmingly agree that child care is hard to find. More than three quarters (77%) of Oregon Voices respondents with children under the age of 5 rated their agreement with the statement “In my community child care is hard to find” as a four or five.

This finding reflects the lack of child care across income brackets and geography and is supported by hundreds of survey comments regarding the insufficient supply of child care slots for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.



“Child care options are dwindling, and that puts children at risk for abuse/neglect.”

Urban household with children under 5, Asian, Lane County



“Childcare, [or] lack of, is crushing the ability to have dual earners...”

Rural household with children under 5, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Klamath County



“Young people and professionals leave because of the lack of child care and housing. It is decimating our school system and making our community poorer.”

Rural household with children aged 5 to 17, white, Umatilla County

Did you know?

More rural communities in Oregon were considered child care deserts in 2020 than were urban communities.¹⁶

Figure 4: **four out of five rural Oregon communities are child care deserts**



A place is considered a child care desert if it has three or more children for every regulated child care slot. This is calculated according to the age of the child because each age range has different needs for care.

Infants and toddlers (0-2 years old)

All but one Oregon county is a child care desert for infants and toddlers.

Preschool-age children (3-5 years old)

Half of Oregon counties are child care deserts for preschool-aged children.

School age children (6-12 years old)

All Oregon counties are child care deserts for school age children.¹⁷

16 Pratt, Megan, Bobbie Weber, Michaella Sektan, Shannon Caplan, and Laurie Houston. 2020. *Supply and Demand in Oregon: How Equitable is Child Care Access?* p 17-19. Oregon State University. health.oregonstate.edu/sites/health.oregonstate.edu/files/early-learners/pdf/research/supply_and_demand_study_in_oregon_-_young_children.pdf

17 Oregon Child Care Research Partnership, 2023. *2022 Estimated Supply of Child Care and Early Education Programs in Oregon*. health.oregonstate.edu/sites/health.oregonstate.edu/files/early-learners/pdf/research/estimated_supply_of_oregon_child_care_2022.pdf



Some rural counties report more difficulty finding child care than the state average.

We asked on a scale of one to five the extent to which respondents agreed with the statement: "In my community, child care is hard to find." Although agreement that it is difficult to find child care was high across the state, respondents in Baker, Clatsop, Coos, Douglas, Jefferson, Lane, Umatilla and Union counties reported the highest agreement rates. Indeed each of these counties is considered a child care desert for 0–5 year olds.¹⁸ The lowest reported rate of agreement (where it might be least difficult to find child care) of any county was in Washington County (27%), and 16 counties agreed at similar rates to the statewide average of 53%.¹⁹



"The community has a decent population of young families so there is a lot of potential there. The concern is the shortage of child care."

Rural household with children aged 5-17,
American Indian or Alaska Native, Umatilla County



"We are in desperate need of child care, housing, [and] higher paying jobs..."

Rural household with children under 5,
white, Coos County

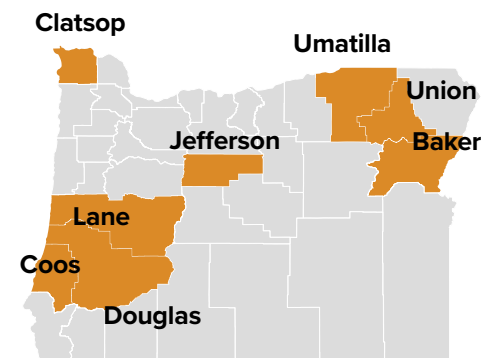


"Affordable child care and preschool opportunities were scarce, and working parents had difficulty managing either homeschool needs or the not infrequent school closures due to quarantine periods."

Rural household with children aged 5-17,
white, Wallowa County

Figure 4: Eight counties find it especially difficult to find child care.

Respondents in these counties agreed with the statement, "In my community, child care is hard to find," at a significantly higher rate than the state average of 53%.



¹⁸ Pratt, Megan and Michaella Sektnan. 2023. *Oregon's Child Care Deserts 2022: Mapping Supply by Age Group and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots*. Oregon State University, College of Public Health and Human Sciences. Prepared for the Oregon Early Learning Division. health.oregonstate.edu/early-learners/research/oregon-child-care-deserts-2022

¹⁹ 30% of respondents did not answer this question. In Benton and Washington counties, nearly 50% of respondents skipped this question.



Child care costs are a top concern for parents.

Survey respondents repeatedly expressed in open-ended responses that they cannot afford child care, especially alongside other costs of living like housing. When responding to the questions, “What is one thing that concerns you about the place where you live?” and “What else should we know about what it’s like for you to live in your community?”, respondents shared their thoughts about child care. Below are some notable quotations highlighting these concerns:



“Sería bueno tener un lugar donde puedan cuidar a niños para bajos ingresos y así las familias saldrían adelante. Porque las guarderías son muy caras para pagarse. [It would be good to have a place where low-income families could access child care. In that way families would progress because child care places are too expensive to afford.]”

Rural household with children under age 5 and children aged 5-17, Hispanic/Latino, Multnomah County



“Pandemic related child care costs really cut into our savings this past year.”

Urban household with children under 5, white, Lane County



“...Child care is impossible, even with money.”

Rural household with no children, white, Umatilla County



“My community is becoming increasingly unaffordable. It’s difficult for families to find affordable housing and child care.”

Urban household with no children, white, Clackamas County



“We need so much more child care. It costs as much as our mortgage to pay for child care.”

Suburban household with children under 5, white, Washington County

What trends do you notice in your community?

Visit **orvoices.org** to see what respondents in your county think about child care in Oregon. From the Oregon Voices homepage, navigate to “Explore the Data,” where you can see survey results for topics related to this issue brief. Use the filters to explore some of the prompts below — or create your own research questions! Let us know what you’re learning by emailing us at **oregonvoices@tfff.org**.

Community Concerns:

Do respondents in your community seem to agree that child care is hard to find? Choose a county different than your own. Are the results similar? What do you notice?

Demographics – Household Characteristics: What percentage of households in your community include children?

What leaders and community builders should know

Oregon's families are suffering from a lack of child care options where they live. Child care influences socioeconomic mobility for families and the economic health of communities and our state. Special attention should be paid to investigating and responding to access and cost issues for all counties, especially those that expressed the most concern through the Oregon Voices survey.

Oregon's leaders will also want to pay attention to child care funding. Research suggests a connection between child care availability and public funding in Oregon: Most of the very few counties that have an adequate supply of child care for preschool-aged children also have the highest percentage of publicly funded child care slots. This correlation is even stronger for rural counties than for metropolitan counties.¹⁵ Upcoming changes to the ERDC rate-setting structure discussed earlier may help adjust subsidies in rural areas that need to increase child care access.

The Biden-Harris administration announced a new rule to update the Child Care and Development Fund, limiting the amount that families should pay for child care to 7% of their household income, requiring states to make timely payments to child care providers, and streamlining the application processes for families seeking child care assistance if they've already demonstrated eligibility for another benefit program. However, these expansions in federal policy do not yet come with additional funding. This is important because the Department of Early Learning and Care reported that increased caseloads will result in a projected \$221 million budget shortfall. Without additional federal investment that can be used to comply with new federal regulations and implement ERDC changes, providers across the state may not be able to meet the moment for families in Oregon who need child care.

Newly passed laws to expand child care:

SB 1040 directed the Department of Early Learning and Care to develop a sustainable model for child care micro centers or centers that serve three to 30 children for more than four hours a day.

HB 3235 created a new, refundable child tax credit of \$1,000 per child under the age of 6 in families with income of \$30,000 or less. An estimated 55,000 children will benefit.²¹

HB 3005 creates a \$50 million child care infrastructure fund to strengthen access to physical infrastructure for child care facilities and support new facilities opening across the state.²²

SB 5701 and HB 5201 rebalanced the state budget to provide funding to critical projects in Oregon, including \$171 million toward the state's ERDC program.²³ Despite this increase in funding, the ERDC waitlist may continue until the fall of 2025 or beyond. As of Jan. 1, 2024, there were 1,360 families on the ERDC waitlist with advocates noting this number has nearly tripled by the date of this publication. Additional funding will also be needed to cover the costs of adopting the alternative methodology for rate setting.

20 House Bill 3235. Relating to a child tax credit; and prescribing an effective date. olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Measures/Overview/HB3235

21 House Bill 3005. Relating to financial assistance for early child care infrastructure activities; and declaring an emergency. olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Measures/Overview/HB3005

22 Radnovich, Connor and Hazel Tylinski. 2024. *Legislature Supports Projects, Programs Across Oregon with Millions in Targeted Investments*. Speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives. [oregonlegislature.gov/wagner/Documents/PO Investments press release 2024.pdf](https://oregonlegislature.gov/wagner/Documents/PO%20Investments%20press%20release%202024.pdf)

23 Chatterjee, Alyssa, Ali Webb, and Dorothy Spence. 2024. Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care. olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/279283

For data summaries for each county in Oregon,
more research and to explore the data on your own, visit
[orvoices.org](https://www.orvoices.org).



Research conducted in partnership with ECONorthwest and
the Regional Research Institute for Human Services at Portland State University



September 2024

Preferred citation:

The Ford Family Foundation. (2024). Voices on Oregon's limited and expensive child care:
We all suffer from the child care crisis. *Oregon Voices*. **www.orvoices.org**.

Contact: **oregonvoices@tfff.org**



@FordFamilyFound
www.tfff.org