

Child Care in Oregon is as complex as it is underfunded.

Our Children Oregon’s complete issue brief, [*Oregon’s Child Care Conundrum: Hurdles, Disparities, and Opportunities Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#), reports how across the state, a diverse array of systemically excluded communities bear disproportionate impacts due to the lack of accessible, affordable, quality child care.



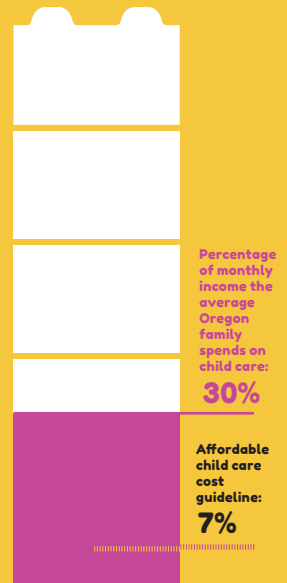
These impacts affect women, lower-income families, families of color, and families in rural and frontier regions. As the pandemic has made evident, working parents and caregivers—particularly mothers—require the flexibility that child care affords to work, live, and parent sustainably. Yet, the industry’s landscape is marked by ever-increasing demand and costs, an insufficient workforce and facilities, and disproportionate and pervasive racial and regional disparities in both access and affordability.

Quality child care costs in Oregon remain high and unaffordable

For the majority of Oregonians, the cost of child care is exorbitant and the pandemic has further worsened affordability for many whose jobs have been impacted. Even for low-income families eligible for subsidies through the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program, Oregon’s base reimbursement rate (\$1,415/month) is not enough to cover the estimated cost of base-quality care for infants (\$1,580/month). Moreover, research from Oregon State University (OSU) has demonstrated that **significant barriers remain for certain eligible families in accessing their subsidy funds.¹** This means low-income families with young children are especially hard hit, and thousands of parents and caregivers are confronting daily struggles with balancing care for one or more children while maintaining a part-/full-time job.

The average Oregon family spends 30%* of their monthly income on child care.

*According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, affordable child care costs no more than 7% of a family’s monthly income. The Build Back Better Act will expand access to child care for 229,875 eligible young children (ages 0-5) per year to meet this guideline.



Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Oregon Child Care Research Partnership, Oregon Secretary of State, Center for American Progress

“We need to make a living wage and guardians need to be able to afford care. People need support to get licensed so there are more spots available for babies.”

- Bethany S., Child care center owner, Milton-Freewater

Working parents face substantial barriers accessing limited child care slots

Not only do working parents face obstacles to accessing reasonably affordable child care but also in gaining access to the limited child care slots that are available, particularly during the pandemic. **Child care capacity in Oregon declined to about 21% of pre-COVID capacity in April 2020 and remained at 45% of pre-COVID capacity in October 2020.**² With public funding making up less than one-quarter of child care openings across the state, the majority of Oregon's child care supply remains parent-funded.³

Every county in Oregon is a "child care desert".

Both rural portions of the state as well as urban centers qualify as "child care deserts" meaning that there are not enough child care slots for the number of children eligible for care.

Source: Oregon State University, Oregon Child Care Research Partnership

Ratio of available child care slots in Oregon to eligible children



Long-standing struggles are weighing on care providers

A variety of long-standing challenges the child care industry's workers, including continued underinvestment in infrastructure and resources, low numbers of qualified staff and facilities, high rates of burnout and staff turnover, historically low wages and lack of benefits, growing demand, razor-thin profit margins to cover costs and wages, and long-standing governmental underinvestment. Notably, **women and people of color make up the majority of the child care workforce and are disproportionately impacted by material hardships, exhaustion, limited access to insurance and benefits, and food insecurity.**^{4,5}

Reasons child care educators are leaving the profession:



Low wages:
54%



Exhaustion and
burnout: 19%



Lack of benefits:
14%

Nearly 1 in 7 child care centers in Oregon are facing staffing shortages.

Source: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

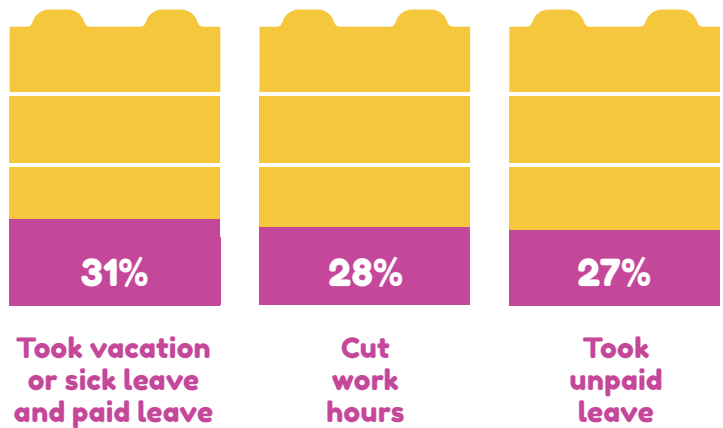
“Cities should require that each housing development provide a child care building or several homes designed for family child care. The infrastructure of our developments needs to include child care as a component. Bus line accessibility, hours of being open, etc.”

- Josephine S.,
Child care director, Corvallis

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted care arrangements for many families

The US Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey (HPS)*⁶ has captured nuanced data around weekly reported experiences amidst the pandemic, including disruptions to normal child care arrangements. **Between July 21st and October 11th, 2021, an average of 38% of Oregonian HPS respondents living with children 12-and-under reported facing disruptions to their children’s child care in the last month.** Black respondents reported over triple the rate of disruption (40%) as other race/ethnic groups (11%-13%), and an astounding 43% of households making under \$25,000 per year reported facing care-related disruptions.

Oregon HPS respondents faced a variety of disruptions to their children’s child care.



Policy Proposals

Smart local, state, and federal investments — such as those in the [Build Back Better Act](#) — can expand child care resources and reduce costs, alleviating the burdens facing children, families, providers, and the greater economy. In particular, such shifts can address the impacts that are most acutely and disproportionately felt by women and mothers, with additional barriers faced by women and mothers of color.⁷



Expand the supply of early care and education services, in particular center and home-based care, by reducing the existing financial and other barriers to establishing both small- and large-scale child care homes and care centers throughout Oregon's child care deserts



Increase stimulus and governmental funds to stabilize wages for providers and educators, bolster child-related subsidy programs (ERDC and the CTC) to offset costs for families of various income levels, and improve provider benefits, retention bonuses, working conditions, mentorship/networking opportunities, and mental health resources



Invest into greater availability of developmentally, culturally and linguistically responsive care and education services, and services that fully include children with physical and/or developmental disabilities



Expand infrastructure development standards and provide facilities funding to create child care facilities in homes, centers, as well as co-located with affordable housing, office buildings, hospitals, apartment complexes, and other large developments

Endnotes

1 Pratt, M., et al. (9/2020). *Barriers to Accessing Child Care Subsidies in Oregon*. [Report]. Prepared by Oregon State University. <https://health.oregonstate.edu/early-learners/research/barriers-accessing-child-care-subsidies-oregon>

2 Calderon, M. (2020, November). *Covid-19 Update to the Child Care Task Force*. <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/201911/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/226880>

3 Pratt, M., and Sektnan, M. (4/2021). *Oregon's Child Care Deserts 2020: Mapping Supply by Age Group, Metropolitan Status, and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots*. [Report]. Prepared for the Oregon Early Learning Division. <https://health.oregonstate.edu/sites/health.oregonstate.edu/files/early-learners/pdf/research/oregons-child-care-deserts-2020.pdf>

4 Mueller, E. (7/22/2020). "Crashing down": How the child care crisis is magnifying racial disparities." Politico. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/22/coronavirus-child-care-racial-disparities-377058>

5 RAPID-EC, University of Oregon (7/2021). *Who is Providing for Child Care Providers?* <https://www.uorapidresponse.com/who-is-providing-for-child-care-providers>

6 The Household Pulse Survey data set is deemed experimental by the Census Bureau, and as such, should be used with caution due to low sample sizes and high standard errors

7 Mueller, E. (7/22/2020). "Crashing down": How the child care crisis is magnifying racial disparities." Politico. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/22/coronavirus-child-care-racial-disparities-377058>