

# CAPITOL RESEARCH

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## THE CHILD CARE DILEMMA: AVAILABILITY & ACCESS



This is the third installment of a series of research briefs focusing on child care in the United States. The first brief provided an overview of child care, including what families with children look like today. The second brief explored the affordability of child care. This brief focuses on questions about the availability and access American families have to child care from state to state. How can families choose which setting is best for their child? How many slots are available per child in a state, and how many child care workers are there?

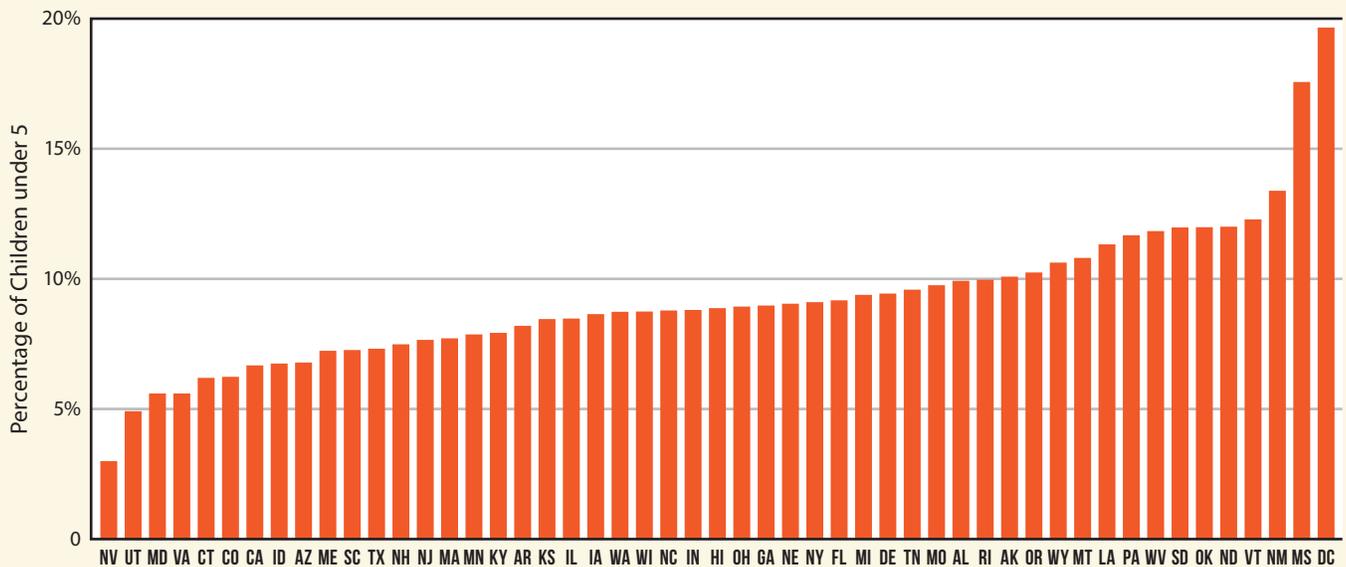
**According to data published by Child Care Aware of America, if all the guardians of children under age 5 wanted to place their child in a child care center or family care center in 2014, for the 39 states and the District of Columbia reporting, there would not be enough spaces.**

Before diving in, let's review the key takeaways related to the financial costs of child care:

- The cost of child care for one infant at a child care center, where child care is provided in a facility outside a home, represented on average between 9 percent and 35 percent of the median household income for a family with children across the states in 2014. The picture was a bit better for family care centers, where the care setting is the child care provider's home—between 1.5 percent and 25 percent.<sup>1</sup>
- For a single parent with two children living at the federal poverty level, infant child care at a child care center would eat up at least a quarter of the family's income of \$19,073.<sup>2</sup>
- In many states, child care is more expensive than public university tuition. However, the financial burden of child care decreases as children get older.<sup>3</sup>
- States receive federal dollars from the Child Care Development Fund, or CCDF, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide financial relief for low-income families in the form of child care subsidies. While there are some parameters set by federal statute, states still have some control over eligibility requirements, including income.<sup>4</sup>



## PERCENTAGE OF STATES' CHILDREN UNDER AGE 5 SERVED BY BOTH CCDF AND HEAD START ASSISTANCE



### Access to Child Care

What resources are states providing guardians needing child care to learn about what's available in their area and how particular options compare? Guardians can search for child care providers online; states have electronic provider search tools for families to peruse to find options for child care in their area, as mandated by law via the Child Care and Development Block Grant of 2014.<sup>12</sup>

There are many potential challenges to accessing care—finding a quality program is only one of several. For instance, families may struggle to find a provider that has space for their child and meets the family's financial needs. Subsidies administered by state governments from the CCDF program are one of several options available to families to access early childhood education. Others include Head Start, Early Head Start and state pre-kindergarten programs, all of which are free of charge to families of the children they serve. Some of these programs have income-level eligibility requirements, while others do not.

Adding the number of children served by Head Start programs and CCDF subsidies together, the ratio of federally funded or federally subsidized early childhood education programs comes into focus. Assuming no overlap in service utilization, the District of Columbia has the highest potential capacity in federally funded programs. In Washington, D.C., almost 20 percent of children under age 5 could have been in an early childhood education setting covered by federal funding in 2014. In addition to Washington, D.C., 13 states had ratios of federally subsidized early childhood education

programs to children under age 5 that were higher than 10 percent that year. Nevada had the lowest proportion of early childhood education program slots to children under 5 covered by federal dollars, followed by Utah and Maryland; all three states had ratios under 6 percent.

To provide access to quality, affordable early childhood education, some states have supplemented federally funded programs and offer state early childhood education options. In 2015, 42 states and the District of Columbia had some type of state-funded preschool program, and 33 of these programs had income requirements.<sup>13</sup> For example, in Vermont, 84 percent of 4 year olds and 26 percent of 3 year olds enrolled in a state pre-kindergarten program in 2014.<sup>14</sup> By law, all school districts in Vermont must provide pre-kindergarten for at least 10 hours per week for 35 weeks of the year; Vermont also has set quality standards for all pre-K operations.<sup>15</sup>

Waiting lists are also a challenge for many families. While information on the prevalence of long waiting times for preferred child care providers is mostly anecdotal, there is state-by-state data on waiting lists for child care assistance. According to a survey conducted by the National Women's Law Center in 2015, 21 states used waiting lists for child care assistance subsidies.<sup>16</sup> Of those that were able to report the number of children on waiting lists for child care assistance—some states had locally maintained waiting lists—the average number of children on a state waitlist was 10,725. Florida reported the longest waitlist, with 51,397 children waiting for child care assistance. The shortest lists were in New Mexico and Colorado, the former having a list of 126 children and the latter's list having 45 entries.

## What's At Stake for Quality Care?

Research has shown that early childhood education is important to future success. The fourth brief in this series will explore how states are assessing and impacting the quality of early childhood education experience. Keys to quality programs include an experienced and educated workforce, standard metrics measuring quality, and consumer transparency.

The fifth and final brief will bring these themes together—what does all of this mean for families making decisions about guardian workforce participation? How are states addressing the question of child care?

### RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup> Author's analysis of U.S. Census ACS 2014 estimates and Child Care Aware 2015 State Fact Sheets, showing 2014 data. See "The Child Care Dilemma: Affordability" for more information and data set.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Minton, Sarah; Stevens, Kathryn; Blatt, Lorraine; and Durham, Christin of the Urban Institute. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children & Families Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation. The CCDF Policies Database Book of Tables: Key Cross-State Variations in CCDF Policies as of October 1, 2014, [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/ccdf\\_policies\\_database\\_2014\\_book\\_of\\_tables\\_final\\_11\\_05\\_15\\_b508\\_3.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/ccdf_policies_database_2014_book_of_tables_final_11_05_15_b508_3.pdf). October 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Author's analysis of: U.S. Census ACS 2014 Estimates; and U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children & Families Office of Child Care. Characteristics of Families Served by Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Based on Preliminary FY 2014 Data, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/characteristics-of-families-served-by-child-care-and-development-fund-ccdf>. October 22, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census ACS 2014 Estimates.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children & Families Office of Child Care. Characteristics of Families Served by Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Based on Preliminary FY 2014 Data, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/characteristics-of-families-served-by-child-care-and-development-fund-ccdf>. October 22, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> All information on number of slots available comes from Child Care Aware of America's 2015 State Fact Sheets, which represent 2014 access. <http://www.usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/reports-and-research/statefactsheets/>.

<sup>9</sup> Author's analysis of Child Care Aware Fact Sheets and the U.S. Census ACS 2014 estimates.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children & Families Office of Child Care. "Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) of 2014: Plain Language Summary of Statutory Changes," <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdbg-of-2014-plain-language-summary-of-statutory-changes>. November 18, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> National Institute for Early Education Research. "The State of Preschool 2015: State Preschool Yearbook Executive Overview," <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Executive%20Summary%202015.pdf>. Pg 10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Pg 14.

<sup>15</sup> National Institute for Early Education Research. "The State of Preschool 2015: State Preschool Yearbook, Vermont," [http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Vermont\\_2015.pdf](http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Vermont_2015.pdf). 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Schulman, Karen; Blank, Helen. National Women's Law Center. "Building Blocks: State Child Care Assistance Policies 2015," [https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/CC\\_RP\\_Building\\_Blocks\\_Assistance\\_Policies\\_2015.pdf](https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/CC_RP_Building_Blocks_Assistance_Policies_2015.pdf). Table 2: Waiting Lists for Child Care Assistance. Pg 26.



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