

# Child care isn't just expensive. It's hard to find. <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Washington Post

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 28 Oct 2016

## AVAILABILITY

Read online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

An analysis of eight states released Thursday found more than half of young children in rural Zip codes live in a "child care desert," where kids under 5 years old outnumber the day-care spots by at least 3 to 1.

The problem is even worse in some urban areas, the report found. Five out of six Chicago kids younger than age 5 live in child-care deserts.

Researchers at the Center for American Progress, a left-leaning think tank, examined chunks of land they said offer a window into America's child-care shortage. Parents in Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio and Virginia grapple with the paucity of options. (The issue is likely more widespread, the researchers said; other states wouldn't provide them the data necessary to conduct a national investigation.)

"In many parts of this country, working families face a deep shortage of child care options," the authors wrote, "which are often of inconsistent quality and at a financial cost that is out of reach."

The analysis suggests that about 1.8 million babies and preschool-age children in CAP's sample live in child-care deserts:

Parents nationwide already complain about the mortgage-rivaling costs, low-quality options, long waiting lists and far drives they endure to find day care for their children. The researchers uncovered another impact: The labor force participation rate is 1.1 percentage points lower for mothers of young kids who live in a child-care desert. What that means, exactly, is complicated: The women who disproportionately opt out of work in these areas may have simply chosen to raise their kids at home, or they may not work because they can't find or afford child care.

A September report from Minnesota shined a light on that dilemma. Marnie Werner, research director for the Center of Rural Policy and Development, described the state's day-care dearth as a "quiet crisis" that stalls women's careers. "The supply of infant care spots is now squeezed to a point where it is not unusual for families expecting babies to contact dozens of providers only to come up empty or be put on waiting lists of several months to a couple years," she wrote. "This has serious implications for women who would like to go back to work after the birth of their child."

Even where child care is relatively plentiful, it's pricey. The average cost for a year of center-based infant care in Washington, D.C., is nearly \$22,000, according to a study from the Institute for Women's Policy Research. The cost is about \$14,500 in New York, \$16,500 in Massachusetts and \$11,628 in California.

As the price of child care soared, more than three-quarters of American mothers and half of fathers said they've passed up work opportunities, switched jobs or quit altogether to care for their kids, a 2015 Washington Post poll found.

The issue has become central to the presidential election, with both Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton and Republican nominee Donald Trump addressing the expense and proposing policy solutions.

Clinton said she wants to invest federal money into states to create more high-quality child-care spaces. She said her plan will keep the burden below 10 percent of a household's income and will reach that goal with a combination of tax credits and subsidies. (Clinton has not released full details on how, exactly, that would work.) Trump, breaking from his party's norms, said he'd allow parents to deduct the cost of care from their taxes.

CAP recommends creating a hefty new child-care tax credit to help parents manage the cost. When it comes to filling in the coverage gaps, however, the researchers put forth a more ambitious idea: "Just as policymakers recognize the need for long-overdue infrastructure investment in our roads, bridges, and public buildings," they wrote, "it is crucial that the nation also invests substantially greater public resources in child care infrastructure and supply."

-reprinted from Washington Post

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

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