

America's child care deserts in 2018 ^[1]

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Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Introduction and summary

This report uses the definition of child care deserts established in CAP's 2017 report, "Mapping America's Child Care Deserts," such that a ratio of more than three young children for every licensed child care slot constitutes a child care desert. This definition is derived from U.S. Census Bureau findings showing that approximately one-third of young children are regularly in the care of someone who is not a relative. When the number of licensed child care slots is insufficient to reach at least one-third of young children under age 5, the likelihood that parents face difficulty finding child care increases. This could affect employment decisions or force families to turn to unlicensed options.

Many parents face the difficult task of finding child care that is convenient to work or home and does not break the bank. This study builds on researchers' understanding of why the child care search often involves stress, waiting lists, high costs, and compromises. Understanding the supply of child care is only one piece of solving the U.S. child care crisis: In addition to geographic proximity, families consider cost, availability of child care assistance, operating schedule, facilities, and preferred characteristics of the potential caregiver. Yet, while geographic proximity is not the only factor in the accessibility of licensed child care, the absence of licensed child care in a community often means it is not an accessible option for parents. Shedding light on who lives near licensed child care can serve as a catalyst for a broader conversation about making affordable, quality child care a reality for all families.

After detailing the CAP analysis, this report considers how to address the issue of child care supply without compromising children's safety, as well as how to address the child care needs of underserved groups such as families with infants and toddlers, families with people with disabilities, immigrant families, and parents that work nontraditional hours. The report also recommends policy solutions to address access to high-quality child care options. Unfortunately, conversations about child care supply sometimes question whether safety regulations should be relaxed to lower costs and encourage more providers to enter the market. This would be a misguided approach to solving the problem; no parent wants their child in a facility that has not undergone proper inspection or in a setting with too many children present for adults to safely provide care. Instead, policymakers and advocates should identify ways to build the supply of high-quality options from which parents can choose by expanding public investment in child care and intentionally building supply across all settings.

Related link: Most Illinoisans live in 'child care deserts' report says ^[3]

Region: United States ^[4]

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Links

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