

# How child care disruptions hurt parents of color most <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Novoa, C.

**Source:** Center for American Progress

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 29 Jun 2020

## AVAILABILITY

**Access online** <sup>[2]</sup>

**Press release** <sup>[3]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

As states ease social distancing policies and call on Americans to return to work, critical questions have emerged about how to repair the nation's broken child care system for the 21.5 million workers with a child under the age of 6. This is an especially important issue for parents of color, who due to decades of occupational and residential segregation, have less access to telework and the flexibility it affords families with young children. Indeed, many workers of color across the country have worked through the pandemic in essential frontline occupations.

Without immediate action to bolster child care, too many parents of color will be forced to choose between putting food on the table and providing their children with the close supervision and enrichment they need. In addition, a lack of child care would further undermine their ability to recover financially from the pandemic's particularly devastating economic impacts on communities of color. Given the importance of child care in building prosperous communities and promoting racial, economic, and gender equity as well as child well-being, it must be a part of any economic recovery plan. Policymakers must act quickly to stabilize child care in the short term while also working toward comprehensive reform that will provide all families with affordable care and support the vital early childhood workforce.

According to a new Center for American Progress analysis, this lack of child care negatively affected communities of color before the pandemic, as parents of color were more likely than their non-Hispanic white counterparts to experience child care-related job disruptions that could affect their families' finances. If policymakers fail to act to address these disparities, this crisis will only intensify.

### Families of color struggled with child care before the pandemic

Prior to the pandemic, child care was in short supply and expensive, particularly for Black, Latinx, and indigenous families. In fact, more than half of Latinx and American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) families lived in a child care desert—an area with an inadequate supply of licensed child care. Affordability also posed a significant challenge, especially for Black families. A typical, median-income Black family with two young children would have to spend 56 percent of its income on child care, a larger share of total family income than that of any other group.

Inadequate supply paired with high costs left parents with few options: spend outside their budgets; find cheaper, sometimes lower-quality care; or reduce their labor force participation. Previous CAP research found that in the years leading up to the pandemic, more than 2 million parents each year resorted to the latter option. Now, new analysis of data from the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) reveals that before the pandemic, Black and multiracial parents experienced child care-related job disruptions—such as quitting a job, not taking a job, or greatly changing their job—due to problems with child care at nearly twice the rate of white parents.\* Hispanic and Asian American parents also experienced elevated rates of job disruptions; however, these differences were not statistically significant.

When parents are unable to find child care, their ability to work and provide for their family suffers. Given the expense and scarcity of child care—especially for infants and toddlers—it's no surprise that parents' debt increases significantly in the year following a child's birth, with Black parents experiencing the largest increases. Temporarily staying home with one's child may seem like an appealing option, but parents who leave the workforce to become full-time caregivers earn substantially less in benefits and retirement savings over their careers. As a result, parents of color are often left more vulnerable to future economic downturns, which exacerbates the racial wealth gap.

### Disparities will likely only worsen in the aftermath of the pandemic

Child care is primarily funded by parent fees. While many families struggle to afford child care, these payments still barely cover operating expenses since high-quality child care is expensive to provide. Decades of operating on razor-thin margins mean that few programs have savings to access during downturns. A previous CAP analysis estimated that nearly 4.5 million child care slots could disappear permanently as a result of COVID-19, effectively cutting in half an already inadequate child care supply. Recent data suggest that this impact is already being felt, with more than 336,000 child care providers—many of whom are immigrants, African American, or Hispanic—losing their jobs between March and April.

Although a weakened child care system will affect all families, it will particularly hurt families of color. Due to a history of discriminatory policies and sociopolitical pressures in the United States, Black, Latinx, Native American, and several Asian American subgroups own a fraction of the wealth of white families.\*\* A thinner financial cushion means full-time work—and affordable child care to support parent employment—is a more urgent necessity for many families of color than it is for non-Hispanic white families. However, despite being more dependent on full-time work and child care, parents of color are more likely to experience job disruptions that affect their bottom lines in both the short and long term—a fact that makes recovering from the economic impacts of a pandemic especially challenging.

Moreover, working from home with young children is not an option for the many parents of color who are disproportionately represented in occupations that do not allow telework. Incidentally, the inability to work remotely increases these individuals risk of exposure to the coronavirus, which partially explains racial disparities in COVID-19.

## Conclusion

With two-thirds of children having all available parents in the workforce, allowing the child care industry to flounder is simply not an option for families or the economy. A hobbled child care system would both slow the nation's economic recovery and deepen existing economic and racial inequalities.

To support parents' ability to provide for their families and power the economy, policymakers must take decisive and aggressive action. The federal government should stabilize the child care system by investing at least \$50 billion through the Child Care Is Essential Act. This would bolster all programs' ability to stay open, especially home-based providers who have struggled to access the Paycheck Protection Program. At the same time, policymakers must ensure that child care providers are able to remain safe and healthy as they perform their critical work—including by securing additional funding for protective equipment, cleaning supplies, adequate testing, and adequate paid time off so that no provider has to work while sick.

In the long term, however, the United States must build a child care system that supports providers and the critical early childhood workforce and that furnishes affordable, accessible care options for all families beginning at a child's birth. Universal child care and adequate compensation for the workforce are powerful tools for achieving racial and economic equity in the aftermath of the pandemic and beyond. Action on these fronts is critical if the United States truly wants to be a thriving and equitable society.

## Related link:

**Region:** United States <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** funding <sup>[5]</sup>

equity <sup>[6]</sup>

system <sup>[7]</sup>

---

**Source URL (modified on 30 Jun 2020):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/20/06/how-child-care-disruptions-hurt-parents-color-most>

## Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/20/06/how-child-care-disruptions-hurt-parents-color-most> [2]

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2020/06/29/486977/child-care-disruptions-hurt-parents-color/> [3]

<https://www.americanprogress.org/press/release/2020/06/29/487095/release-families-color-far-likely-suffer-child-care-related-job-disruptions/> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/equity>

[7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/system>