

The true cost of high-quality child care across the United States ^[1]

Author: Workman, S.

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AVAILABILITY

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[Interactive child care cost estimator ^{\[4\]}](#)

Excerpted from introduction

The high price of child care has long been a burden for most families, rivaling the cost of college in many states and forcing families to make difficult decisions and trade-offs. However, this high price often fails to account for the actual costs that child care providers incur, and rarely, if ever, covers the “true” cost of care—that is, the cost to provide high-quality, developmentally appropriate, safe, and reliable child care staffed by a professionally compensated workforce.

In 2018, the Center for American Progress developed an interactive cost estimation tool to illustrate the economics of child care, estimate the true cost of child care in each state, and better understand why high-quality child care is out of reach for many families. CAP is now releasing a refreshed version of this interactive, incorporating up-to-date data, adding several U.S. territories, and including the ability to estimate the cost of care in a family child care home setting. The updated interactive allows users to calculate the monthly cost of licensed child care at different ages and in different settings for each state or territory. In addition, as with the original tool, users can modify seven elements of the child care program—such as compensation levels and adult-child ratios—to better understand the impact of these variables on the cost of care.

Data from the interactive illustrate why increased public investment in child care is so necessary. On average, the true cost of licensed child care for an infant is 43 percent more than what providers can be reimbursed through the child care subsidy program and 42 percent more than the price programs currently charge families. To build and invest in a child care system that meets the needs of children, families, and the broader economy, is it critical for the federal government to provide funding at a level sufficient to cover the true cost.

Region: United States ^[5]

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