

Childcare Access and Challenges

Research Brief

Prepared at the Request of New York County Leaders
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THE PROBLEM

The childcare crisis continues to become more evident throughout the United States, especially in rural areas. The childcare crisis is extensive from the presence of “childcare deserts” in rural areas to low retention of early childhood educators.

Childcare may cost as much as \$2,600 a month or \$21,000 annually¹

Childcare Desert

A childcare desert is a geographical location that lacks affordable, high-quality childcare options, resulting in limited or no access to childcare services.² Compared to other geographical areas, early childhood care and education in rural areas rely more on home-based care and informal childcare options.³



Finding licensed childcare is a challenge for families living in rural areas. 3 in 5 rural communities lack adequate childcare options.⁴

Factors that make it challenging to provide sufficient care for young children in rural areas:⁵

- Limited transportation options.
- Low demand for childcare services in small and remote communities
- Small childcare businesses may struggle to stay open due to a lack of financial efficiency.

Child Care Workforce

U.S. childcare workers earn an average of under \$13 per hour and often lack benefits.⁶

A study interviewed 30 infant-toddler teachers to learn why they want to stay or leave their jobs and the impacts of teacher turnover. Researchers found teachers' decision-making process for leaving or staying is fluid and constantly fluctuates as teachers evaluate their personal circumstances and working conditions.⁷

Reasons why teachers leave their job include:

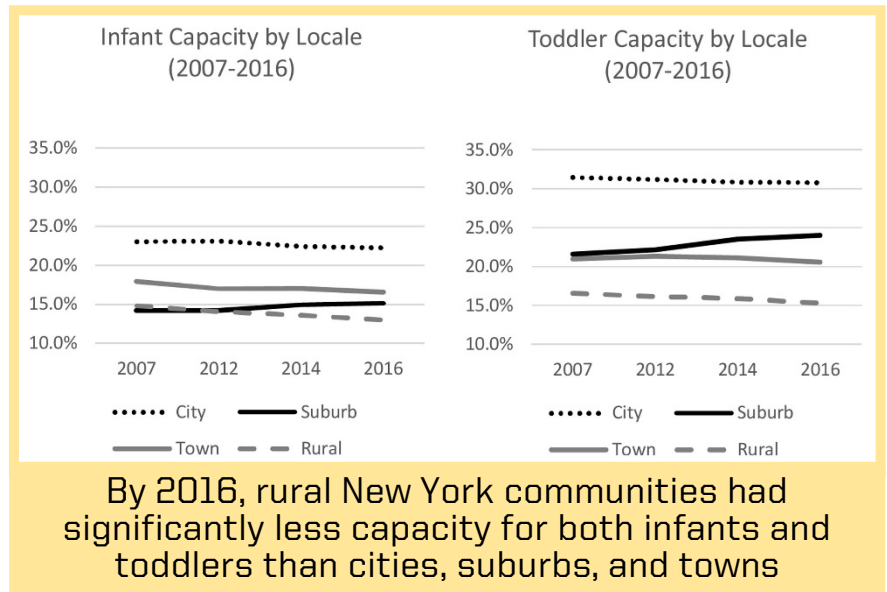
- Work stress with negative work environment factors such as tension, discomfort, and conflicts.
- Workers desire to change their positions for career advancement.
- Pay and benefits- workers can get better pay elsewhere with current qualifications.
- Some workers leave their jobs due to personal reasons – moving or spending time with children.

The childcare teacher turnover rate is between 25%-50% annually.⁷

Childcare Capacity

Childcare capacity for infants and toddlers has decreased over time, most substantially for rural communities.

Geography, finance, and the presence of prekindergarten are all related to the capacity of communities to provide state-registered, formal childcare opportunities for families with infants and toddlers across New York State.⁵



PROMISING APPROACHES

1

Prioritize childcare expansion

- Prioritize increasing the availability of care in communities OR for certain types of care that are experiencing the most significant deficits.⁸
 - **Oklahoma intends to offer start-up grants** for childcare desert areas to build more childcare facilities in underserved regions and provide special needs grants to boost the availability of childcare services for children with disabilities.⁹
 - **New Mexico amended its constitution** that allows 1.25% in additional funds from the state's land grant permanent fund to go toward education. In 2023, these distributions would be over \$211 million.¹⁰

2

Increase wages, benefits and support for childcare providers

- Increasing pay for in-home childcare non-traditional hour workers is valuable since there is a lack of federal action addressing this issue. By increasing pay, workers can be compensated for the extra challenges and demands they face and support the provision of high-quality care for children.¹¹

Teachers suggest preparation and support can be ways to prevent teacher turnover. They suggest doing so in the following ways:⁷

Provide good pay and compensation	Ensure teachers are prepared & mentored	Maintain a positive work environment
Teachers emphasized that competitive compensation is crucial in attracting and retaining qualified teachers.	Teachers emphasized providing mentoring and support to help new teachers handle difficult situations and manage stress.	Teachers emphasized the significance of establishing a positive work environment that fosters open communication, collaboration, and respect among colleagues to reduce turnover and promote a sense of belonging.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Baby Promise Pilot Program:

Launched in Fall 2021 by the Oregon Learning Division for children for infants and toddlers ages 6 weeks to 3 years old, aiming to increase the supply and quality of infant and toddler care for low-income families. In-home childcare providers help bridge the childcare gap. Care is free, including food, formula, diapers, and wipes. The initiative is funded by the federal Childcare and Development Block Grant.

<https://oregonearlylearning.com/baby-promise>

Building Bipartisan Support for Childcare Toolkit: 2023 Update:

Presented by: The Bipartisan Policy Center

<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/BPC-ECI-Bipartisan-Toolkit-2023-Update-Full-Report.pdf>

Energy Capital Cooperative Childcare (ECCC):

Opened in 2017 as an employer- assisted parent cooperative in 2017. Employers from the eight businesses and institutions were involved in developing the cooperative to ensure employees and members of the community received quality childcare in a nurturing, safe and supportive environment. Overall, ECCC was created to fill the childcare gap in rural North Dakota.

<https://energycapitalcooperativechildcare.com/index.php/about-us/>

Joint Resource Guide: Strengthen and Expand Childcare Facilities in Rural Communities:

Presented by: The U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Administration for Children and Families

https://mhsoac.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/Infogov_rd_hhs-acf_jointchildcareresourceguide.pdf

FUNDING & SUPPORT



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HEDCO Institute

This brief was completed as part of a project funded by the William T. Grant Foundation and is a joint effort of Cornell Project 2Gen, housed in the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research at Cornell University, and the HEDCO Institute for Evidence-Based Educational Practice at the University of Oregon. For more information, please contact Elizabeth Day at ead255@cornell.edu.

METHODS

Findings presented in this brief come from a literature review of academic peer-reviewed studies, as well as a review of research and findings from non-partisan think tanks, foundations, and organizations. Given the rapid nature of this search, other relevant studies may exist. In addition, please note that we did not use formal statistical methods for summarizing results and exploring reasons for differences in findings across studies.

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