



CORE MESSAGE

Early care and education experiences play a crucial role in shaping a child's future. We build a stronger workforce full of talented innovators and inspiring leaders when we prioritize young children and families. We strengthen communities and our state economy when every child in Montana has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

TALKING POINTS

Economic Impact

- Hardworking parents need access to affordable, quality programs for their children so they can work and provide for their families.
- Approximately 60,600 Montana parents are unable to fully engage in the workforce due to a lack of quality child care.
- 40% of Montana businesses say they are unable to find and retain a qualified workforce because of a lack of child care.
- Montana's annual economic loss because of a lack of access to child care totals more than \$90 million.
- Without question, early care and education is crucial to many families' economic security, to children's long-term success and Montana's economy.

Access

- Licensed child care capacity meets only 44% of estimated demand in the state.
- 59% of counties are childcare deserts – meaning supply meets less than a third of estimated demand.
- The childcare shortage is more severe for infants and toddlers under two years old. Licensed infant care capacity meets 32% of the estimated demand in Montana, qualifying the state overall as a childcare desert for infant care.
- Early childhood educators are among the most in-demand occupations in Montana according to the Montana Department of Labor & Industry 2021-2031 employment projections.
- Child care workers are among the lowest paid professionals in the state, making an average of \$13.99/hour (\$26,917 annually).

High-Quality

- 90% of the brain is developed by the time a child turns 5-years old – making early care and education a predictor for a person's lifelong health and success.
- Research shows that high-quality, birth-to-five early childhood education provides a higher rate of return than preschool alone. The [Heckman Equation](#) found that there is a 13% Return on Investment for comprehensive, high-quality, early education.

Affordability

- In 2023, Montana households averaged \$18,940 in child care expenses amounting to 28% of the state's median household income – far exceeding the U.S. Health and Human Services benchmark for affordable care (7%).

References:

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The Heckman Equation. (2020, April 20). Home page - The Heckman Equation. <https://heckmanequation.org/>.
KIDS COUNT. (2023). *Median wage for child care workers*. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/11376-median-wage-for-child-care-workers?loc=28&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/2545,1095,2048,574,1729,37,871/any/22020>.