



Mapping the Gap: Exploring Child Care Supply & Demand in Alaska



State Overview

The state of Alaska has 54,882 children under the age of 4. There are 253 center-based child care programs and 554 family child care homes in the state. These facilities provide 29,513 slots for child care, leaving a deficit of 25,369. Alaska has a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for child care centers called Learn & Grow. The CCR&Rs of Alaska participate in QRIS to ensure centers meet standards related to coaching, training, monitoring, recruitment of new programs, community outreach, and data analysis and reporting. Only 2,431 slots of the 29,513 belong to centers participating in QRIS – **8.2 percent of all slots available**. For more

information on quality child care and early learning in your state, visit our [2017 State Fact Sheet](#).

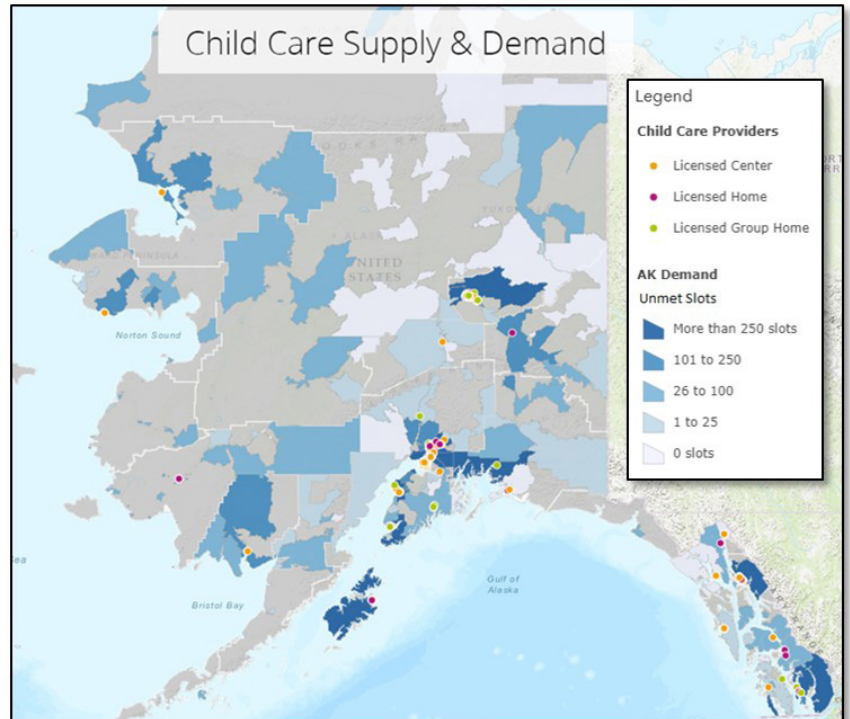
Child care in Alaska costs, on average, 10-12 percent of the household median income. Center-based child care is especially costly for single parents and parents living at the poverty line, who make 70.8 percent and 89.1 percent of the median income, respectively. The average annual cost for center-based child care in Alaska is \$11,700 and the average for home-based child care is \$10,101. The average cost of child care for an infant and four-year-old is \$22,464 for center-based child care and \$19,746 for home-based child care. For more information on the cost of care in your state, visit our [2016 Parents and High Cost of Child Care Report](#).

Mapping Child Care Supply and Demand Gaps

In Alaska, families with infants and/or toddlers really struggle to access child care. Our key stakeholders wanted to know in which areas of the state might families with very young children be struggling the most to find care for an infant or toddler. We examined the locations of child care providers and children by zip code, including county boundaries for reference.

Data & Methodology

The number of children under the age of 6 in each zip code was obtained through the most up-to-date Census data, specifically, the U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year-Estimates, B23008: Age of Own Children Under 18 Years in Families and Subfamilies by Living Arrangements by Employment Status of Parents. The licensed child care programs and the number of slots per center were obtained



using data from NACCRRAware with permission from the license holder in May 2017. Note: This map does not include Head Start, summer, or part-time programs.

Overall Findings

The points on the map show licensed child care programs. The types of programs include child care centers, family child care homes, and family child care group homes. Each area of blue on the state map represents a different zip code. The darkest blue areas represent the zip codes with the largest gap of unmet need (the difference between the number of children living in that area and the child care slots available). The gray areas indicate areas with no available data. These are largely rural areas, national parks, or wildlife preserves.

In Alaska, there are nearly 40,000 children under the age of 6 with all parents in the labor force. As mentioned earlier, there are 253 center-based child care programs and 554 family child care homes in the state, providing 29,513 licensed child care slots. Working families in Alaska face a deficit of 9,835 child care slots across the state. **This means nearly 1 in 4 children in Alaska are left without access to licensed child care when their parent or parents go to work.**

Child care programs in Alaska are largely located near more populated, urban areas, which can leave substantial gaps in more rural parts of the state. However, even in urban areas, working families may be struggling to find care. Explore this map more by zooming in and examining supply gaps.

Supply & Demand Spotlight: Juneau, AK

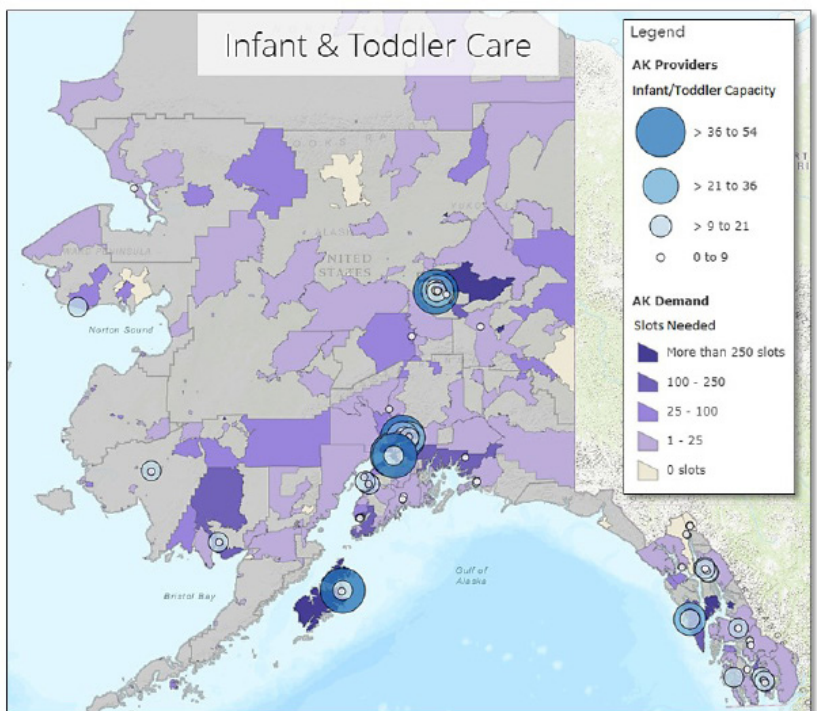
Juneau is the capitol of Alaska and the majority of residents are employed by either local, state, or federal government offices. About 60 percent of the city's economy is government-related. In addition, since Juneau is surrounded by a mountain icefield and the ocean, it is often referred to as an island community requiring transportation via air or water to reach. For this reason, residents of Juneau strictly rely on child care available on the island. Despite the 919 licensed child care slots in this area, Juneau has one of the largest supply and demand gaps in Alaska; there is an unmet need of approximately 650 slots. **Two in five children in Juneau do not have access to licensed child care while their parents are at work.**

Mapping Infant and Toddler Child Care Supply and Demand Gaps

In Alaska, we also examined gaps in the supply of child care available for infants and toddlers (children 2 years old and younger). In most states, Alaska included, providers are licensed to accept specific ratios of children by age group; this is done to ensure that each child care program has enough staff and resources to safely care for their enrollees (younger children require a higher ratio of staff). Many states track the maximum licensed capacity by age group for each provider to ensure that programs are in compliance with licensing requirements; however, most do not track the actual number of children by age group on a day-to-day basis. However, the Alaska CCR&Rs do!

Data & Methodology

Based on the CCR&Rs' tracking and record-keeping, we were able to estimate an approximate supply of infant and toddler slots throughout the state and compare that number to the number of births in 2013-2015 to women in the labor force. There are currently 458 providers with a total of 3,242 slots for infants and toddlers in Alaska. With an estimate of nearly 20,000 infants and toddlers across the state, Alaska native working families may be facing a real shortage of licensed care. **More than 80 percent of infants and toddlers in Alaska may not have access to licensed child care while their mothers are at work.**



Because we estimated supply by calculating a proportion of total licensed slots, we must point out that these slots are not exclusively reserved for infants and toddlers, but may be accessed by all ages.

Overall Findings

The regions in Alaska that have an overall gap in child care supply also show a similar gap for infant and toddler slots, as illustrated by this map. Mapping is a tremendous asset to visualizing supply and demand – but mapping is so much more than points on a map! In this map, infant and toddler supply and demand is illustrated by different shades of purple; areas with dark purple have a greater gap in infant and toddler child care supply. Provider dots have been replaced with blue circles showing different levels of capacity of child care providers. Providers who typically accept greater numbers of infants and toddlers are shown with larger, dark blue circles; providers who accept smaller numbers of infants and toddlers are shown with small, light blue circles. This is one way of indicating areas where, collectively, child care providers provide a greater bandwidth of licensed care for infants and toddlers in a given area.

In addition to prioritizing the expansion of all child care opportunities in the state of Alaska, strategic efforts must be placed on expanding infant and toddler child care, particularly in urban areas of the state. Although infant and toddler child care supply is an issue for working families throughout the state, urban areas such as Juneau and Anchorage seem to be particularly affected.

Infant and Toddler Child Care Spotlight: Anchorage, AK

The largest city in Alaska, Anchorage is Alaska's hub for communication, transportation, and industry. It is also the place with one of Alaska's larger gaps in child care supply for infants and toddlers in working families. Despite 279 licensed child care programs, Anchorage may be experiencing infant and toddler child care shortages comparable to the rest of the state. More than 80 percent of infants and toddlers in Anchorage do not have access to licensed child care slots – means that **4 in 5 infants and toddlers may not have access to licensed child care while their mothers are at work.**

Policy Recommendations

Like families in many states, those in Alaska are struggling to find child care. Gaps between licensed child care supply and demand for working families exist across the state. For working mothers in Alaska, gaps in infant and toddler child care supply can be extreme, especially for families in our spotlight areas of Juneau and Anchorage. Many working families in Alaska may not have a safe place to take the youngest Alaska natives when they go to work.

In order to address these gaps and help working families, some next steps should include:

- **Funding designated for early childhood education** – As some areas of Alaska are exploring city-level or county-level taxes in order to support public services, it is important to earmark funding for early childhood education. Nearly 1 in 4 children in Alaska do not have access to licensed care, leaving working parents without a safe place to take their children while they are at work.
- **Workforce support and recruitment** – Quality education begins early! Child care providers have a tough, but extremely important job caring for the youngest Alaska natives. Workforce recruitment, supports, and retention efforts should be targeted toward areas where the gap between supply and demand are greatest.
- **Monitor the issues** – These maps are a baseline to get a better understanding of what is happening across Alaska. Demand for infant and toddler care may be far out-pacing the current supply. As policy, strategy, and funding changes, this unique issue, as well as overall child care supply in Alaska, should be re-visited to best serve Alaskan families.

Child Care Resource & Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) are uniquely positioned to support the study of and address child care supply and demand issues across the state. In fact, CCR&Rs are specifically called out in the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014 legislation to help identify supply and demand issues and share information with the state to help target funding to address the problem. An increase in funding for CCR&Rs to do this work is crucial. The network of CCR&R agencies and staff across Alaska possess a wealth of knowledge about the regional and statewide needs of families, as well as how best to support the provider workforce. However, without funding designated for early childhood education in the state, CCR&Rs may not have the bandwidth to recruit and retain quality, licensed providers.

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