Child Care Deserts

An Analysis of Child Care Supply and Demand Gaps in Montana

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Executive Summary

Access to child care is essential to a healthy economy, allowing parents of young children to engage in the labor force and preparing the state's future workforce through high-quality early childhood education. Despite the state's reliance on child care to meet workforce needs, Montana parents and businesses have suffered from a lack of access to care. In 2025, over 58,000 Montana parents were unable to fully engage with the labor force due to family responsibilities and a lack of child care.[i]

Accurate and consistent reporting on the magnitude of the gap between the supply and demand for child care is essential to understanding the severity of the shortage, and to measuring the state's success in closing this gap. This paper provides a consistent definition of child care supply and demand in the state and therefore, a measure of the gap between the two. The definitions of child care supply and demand, and the gap analysis presented are intended to reflect the existing best practices and most current methodology. This report will be updated as new information becomes available.

Highlights include:

- Total child care capacity was just over 21,100 in 2025, growing about a quarter of a percent over the year and translating to 53 additional slots. Most of these slots were for infants less than 19 months old. Total infant capacity reached 4,960 slots in 2025, growing by 1.1% over the year. The child care supply only includes capacity for child care and early education programs licensed with the state.
- The potential demand for child care is defined as the number of children under age six who live in households where all available parents are in the labor force. In 2025, about 45,890 children under six lived in working parent households and potentially needed care.
- The gap between child care supply and demand is measured by expressing licensed capacity as a percentage of estimated demand. **Montana's total child care capacity met 46% of estimated demand and infant capacity met 33% of estimated demand in 2025.**
- Sub-state analysis demonstrates the prevalence of the child care shortage throughout the state, with licensed capacity undersupplying potential demand in every county. The most significant unmet demand occurs in the more rural areas of the state. County-level analysis provides the most consistent and easily accessible information on sub-state area gaps in child care supply and demand, despite limitations.
- A child care desert is defined as any geographic area where child care supply meets less than a third of the potential demand. Nearly 51% of Montana's counties are classified as child care deserts, including four counties without a single licensed provider. Approximately 20% of children under age six live in a county designated as a child care desert.

The definitions and analysis presented here provide policymakers with the most updated and comprehensive understanding of the magnitude of the child care shortage and how the unmet need for child care varies across the state. Expanding equitable access to affordable, high-quality child care will enable more parents to participate fully in the workforce and support continued economic growth.

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Introduction

The lack of affordable, high-quality child care in Montana has prevented many parents from fully participating in the labor force, thus further exacerbating the state's workforce shortage. In 2025 an estimated 58,100 Montana parents were unable to fully engage in the workforce due to family responsibilities and a lack of child care. Accurate and consistent reporting on the magnitude of the gap between the supply and demand for child care is essential to understanding the severity of the shortage, and to measuring the state's success in closing this gap.

Recognizing the importance of accurate and consistent reporting on the state's child care needs, early childhood education (ECE) researchers from various state agencies and external stakeholders have coalesced around a single methodology to measure the severity of the child care shortage in Montana. The methodology presented in this report reflects the most current research adopted by state agencies and ECE researchers to measure the child care gap in Montana and will be updated as more information becomes available. The analysis that follows details the methodology, assumptions, and limitations of the child care gap analysis.

Supply of Child Care

In Montana, child care is provided in a variety of ways. Large centers, small family and group home settings, neighbors or close family friends, before and after school care, summer camps, and nannies are all examples of child care. While all these forms of child care provide important support for Montana families and the economy, only licensed child care providers and some Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers are considered a part of child care supply for this analysis due to data availability.[ii]

Provider Types Included

Licensed Family, Group, and Center-based providers are included in child care supply, as well as relative care and FFN caregivers receiving state assistance. Relative care exempt (RCE) is narrowly defined as individuals caring for close relatives, such as a brother, sister, nephew, niece, grandchild, or great grandchild. The table below provides detailed information on the capacity limits for each provider type, as well as the prevalence of each type in Montana.

Figure 1. Child Care Provider Capacity by Type in 2025

Provider Type	Total Capacity	Infant Capacity	Percent of Providers	Percent of Capacity
Centers	16 or more	Up to 12	33%	71%
Group	9 to 15	Up to 6	35%	21%
Family	3 to 8	Up to 3	19%	6%
Family, Friend and Neighbor	Up to 4	NA	5%	1%
Relative Care Exempt			8%	1%

Source: DPHHS CCUBS database as of 1/26. RCE and FFN total capacity based on the number of children from different families or sibling sets. RCE and FFN providers do not have total capacity limits for children within the same sibling set. NA = Not applicable because age limits are not placed on FFN or RCE providers. Provider capacity by type defined in 52-2-703 MCA.

About one-third of Montana's licensed child care providers are group homes that care for between nine and fifteen children. Group homes remain the most common provider type in the state, though their numbers declined over the past year. Center-based programs make up another third of providers and have expanded, accounting for a larger share of Montana's licensed child care capacity. By 2025, more than 70% of the state's licensed child care capacity was provided by center-based programs.

The child care supply used in these calculations doesn't include capacity for child care and early education programs not required to be licensed with the state. Head Start provides preschool to children under age 5. Not all Head Start programs in Montana are licensed with the state, and Head Start is only included in the child care supply if the program is licensed. Additionally, some programs may be licensed or registered with a tribal nation located within Montana. Capacity for these programs is only included in the child care supply for programs that are dually licensed with both the state and the tribal nation.

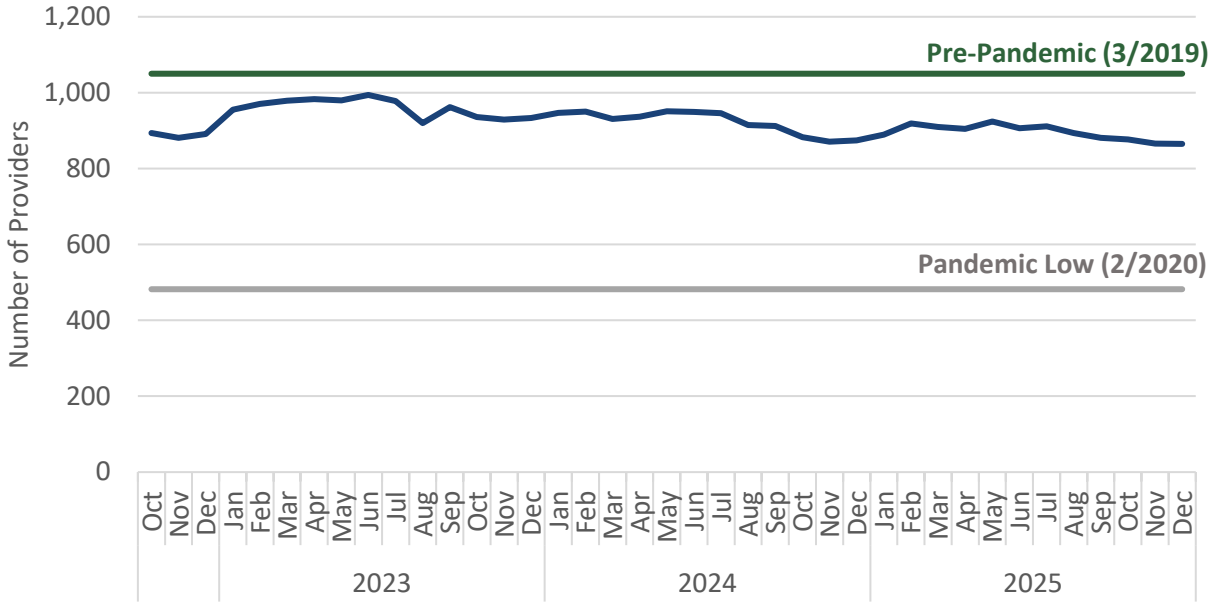
Child care providers in Montana may operate home daycares without registering with the state ("legal unlicensed") if they have six or fewer children. Legally operating unlicensed care is an important element of child care supply, especially in rural communities and communities with a significant shortage of licensed child care. However, data on unlicensed care is very limited because it is not tracked through the child care licensing database. Therefore, this type of unlicensed care is not included in child care supply. Illegal unlicensed care may be cause for concern. When a child care business is licensed, parents can have reasonable assurance that certain health and safety criteria are met and monitored by the state.

Out-of-school time care, including after-school care, is delivered in a variety of ways and is currently exempt from child care licensing regulations. This includes after-school care offered through public schools, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA programs, and youth centers. These programs may choose to be licensed with the state as child care centers to receive Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship payments. Out-of-school time care providers licensed with the state are included in this analysis.[iii] Child care programs licensed by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) may include school age children in their programs as well. A licensed facility may choose to serve children up to age 13.[iv] Legally operating unlicensed school-age care is not included in this analysis of child care supply.

Montana created a new out-of-school-time child care licensing category specifically for school-age care during before-/after-school and other out-of-school-time hours, with requirements tailored to older children. This change is intended to decrease barriers for after-school providers to become licensed and expand families' access to child care subsidies for school-age children.

Only providers located in Montana, and those with an active license/certification are included in child care supply. Figure 2 shows the number of licensed providers in the state over the last three years relative to historical levels. There was an average of 896 licensed child care providers operating in Montana in 2025, which represents a small decline relative to the prior year.

Figure 2. Number of Licensed Child Care Providers in Montana



Source: MTDLI analysis of child care licensing data provided by MT DPHHS.

Number of Children per Provider

Licensed capacity is used to estimate the number of children served by each provider. A provider may care for more total children than their license capacity if they offer part-time care but may not exceed their capacity in the facility at one time. The actual number of children served by each facility can vary daily depending on staff availability, parental preferences, public health guidelines, among other things. Capturing the actual number of enrolled children served by each provider is not possible within the existing data systems. Therefore, licensed capacity is used as a proxy.

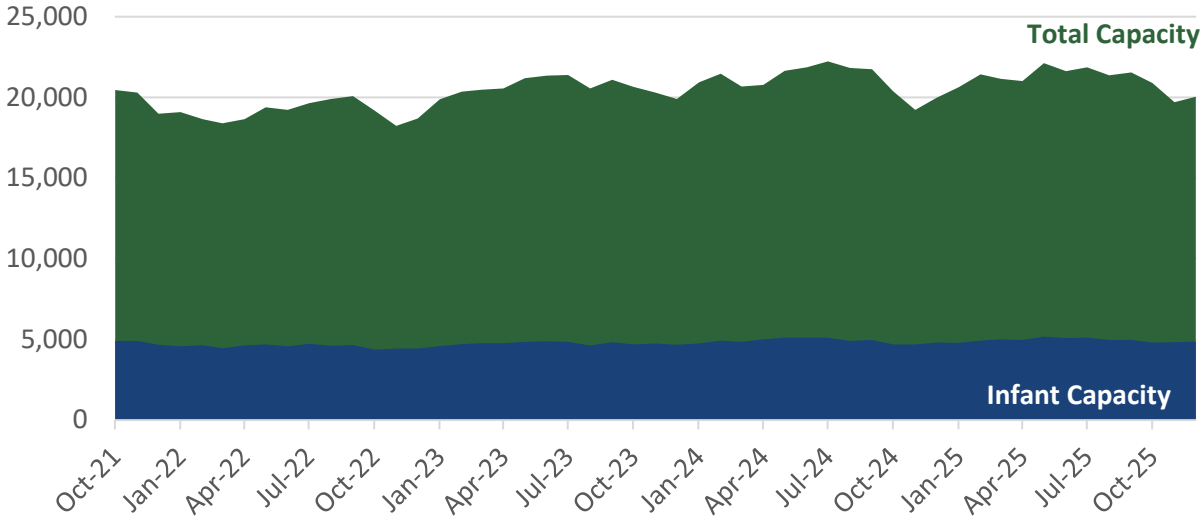
Within the total licensed capacity of a facility, a child care provider may be licensed to care for a certain number of infants/toddlers. Children under the age of 19 months must be cared for by a provider who is licensed to care for infants/toddlers.[v] Infant capacity is a subset of the total capacity of the child care provider and varies by provider type, as shown in Figure 1. The supply of infant child care is calculated as a subset of the total supply of child care in Montana.

Licensed Child Care Capacity – the number of children the facility is licensed to serve at one time.

Number of Children Enrolled – The total number of children who are served by a single facility. Differs from licensed capacity due to part-time care, staff availability, parental preference, or public health guidelines.

The total capacity and infant capacity data are provided monthly from MT DPHHS child care licensing database. Figure 3 shows the change in monthly child care and infant capacity in Montana over the last three years. Annual capacity is calculated as the 12-month average to reflect the capacity over a given time-period instead of a point-in-time estimate.

Figure 3. Licensed Child Care Capacity in Montana Over-Time



Source: MTDLI analysis of child care licensing data provided by MT DPHHS. Capacity refers to number of children the facility is licensed to care for at one time. Infant refers to children under 19 months old.

Total child care capacity reached an average of 21,116 slots in 2025, an increase of approximately 0.3% over the year. This increase translates to roughly 53 additional licensed child care slots, most of which were for infants less than 19 months old. Total infant capacity reached 4,960 slots in 2025, growing by 1.1% over the year.

Demand for Child Care

Many Montana parents rely on some form of child care to engage in the workforce before their children are school-age. However, the actual demand for licensed child care in Montana is difficult to measure. For example, not all working families need child care due to their preferences, work schedule, or access to other caregivers. This analysis uses the potential child care demand from working families as a proxy for actual child care demand. The potential demand for child care is defined as **the number of children under age six who live in households where all available parents are in the labor force.**[vi] When there is adequate licensed child care supply to meet potential demand, then parents can choose the type of care that fits their needs, rather than having that choice determined by cost or availability.

Actual Demand for Child Care – The number of children whose parents would like them to attend a licensed child care facility.

Potential Demand for Child Care – The number of children under age six who live in households where all available parents are in the labor force.

The actual demand for child care extends beyond just children living in households with all available parents working. Approximately 11% of people who are not in the workforce cite family responsibilities as the reason they are not looking for work.[vii] Some of these individuals would likely enter the labor force if they had access to child care. Additionally, families who have chosen to have a parent stay home as a full-time caregiver may still need some level of child care, even on a part-time basis. This estimate of potential demand for child care also only captures children under age six; however, school-age

children may also need child care before or after-school and during the summer. While access to high-quality child care benefits the state's workforce, it also provides benefits to children and families. Parents who choose voluntarily to exit the labor force to care for their children may still prefer that their children attend a child care facility to experience the benefits of a structured learning environment. Access to high-quality early childhood education promotes the development of key social-emotional skills, which supports a child's ability to continuously engage in learning environments, manage their own behaviors, and get along well with others.[viii]

An alternative measure of child care demand is the total number of children under age six, which captures the total number of children who could potentially need child care. Using total population as an estimate of demand overcomes the limitation that more parents may work if child care was more accessible. However, not all families need or choose to use child care due to their own circumstances. Using the total population of children under six as an estimate of child care demand would likely overestimate the actual demand for child care.

Changes in the proportion of full-time versus part-time employment influence the actual demand for child care. Children in households with full-time working parents typically require more hours of care than those with part-time or fewer working hours. This analysis measures demand as the number of children needing care, not total care hours, so changes in the mix of full-time and part-time care needs are not reflected. Over the past year, Montana parents have worked more hours on average, indicating increased full-time employment and likely higher child care demand not captured in this measure.[ix]

Methodology and Data Sources

The potential demand for child care in Montana is estimated using data from the American Community Survey (ACS) and Population Estimates Program (PEP) produced by the U.S. Census Bureau. The ACS estimates the number of children under six years old living in households where all available parents are in the labor force. These data are available for all counties in Montana using 5-year estimates, which use survey responses collected over a span of five years.[x]

The U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program (PEP) are used to adjust the ACS 5-year estimates to reflect the most recent population counts. The PEP data is available by single year of age and can be used to calculate the population under age six and under two by county in Montana each year. The percentage of children under the age of six who live in households where all available parents are in the labor force is multiplied by the PEP population data to generate estimates of the total demand for child care and the demand for infant care in Montana. More detailed information on the child care demand calculation is available in appendix A1.

Calculating potential child care demand in this way allows demand to reflect changes in the population of children under six. However, this methodology does not adjust for any changes in the percentage of children under six living in working parent households over time. This percentage is held constant over the ACS 5-year timeframe. The ACS data also does not estimate the number of children under two in working parent households. Therefore, the demand for infant care is estimated assuming the percentage of children under two living in households where all available parents are in the labor force is the same as the percentage of children under six living in working parent households.

Child Care Gap Analysis

The child care gap refers to the difference between the supply of licensed child care in Montana and the estimated demand for care. **To measure the gap between the supply and demand for child care, the licensed child care capacity in the state is expressed as a percentage of estimated demand.** The denominator reflects the potential demand for child care and the numerator is the licensed child care capacity in Montana. Therefore, any gap measurement under 100% is considered undersupplied. More detailed information on the child care gap calculation is available in appendix A1.

Using this calculation of the child care gap, **Montana's total child care capacity currently meets 46% of estimated demand and infant capacity meets only 33% of estimated demand.**[xi] Figure 4 shows the estimated demand for child care from children under age six and two compared to the average annual capacity at licensed child care facilities in 2025.

Figure 4. Statewide Child Care Supply and Demand Analysis in 2025

Age Category	Children Needing Care	Average Child Care Capacity	Percent of Demand Met by Capacity
Under Six	45,889	21,120	46%
Under Two	14,910	4,960	33%

Source: MTDLI analysis of child care licensing data provided by MT DPHHS. U.S. Census Bureau 2024 Population Estimates Program (PEP) data provided by Montana KIDS Count and 2020-2024 American Community Survey (ACS) data. Average child care capacity for children under two reflects infant capacity. Data are rounded to the nearest ten.

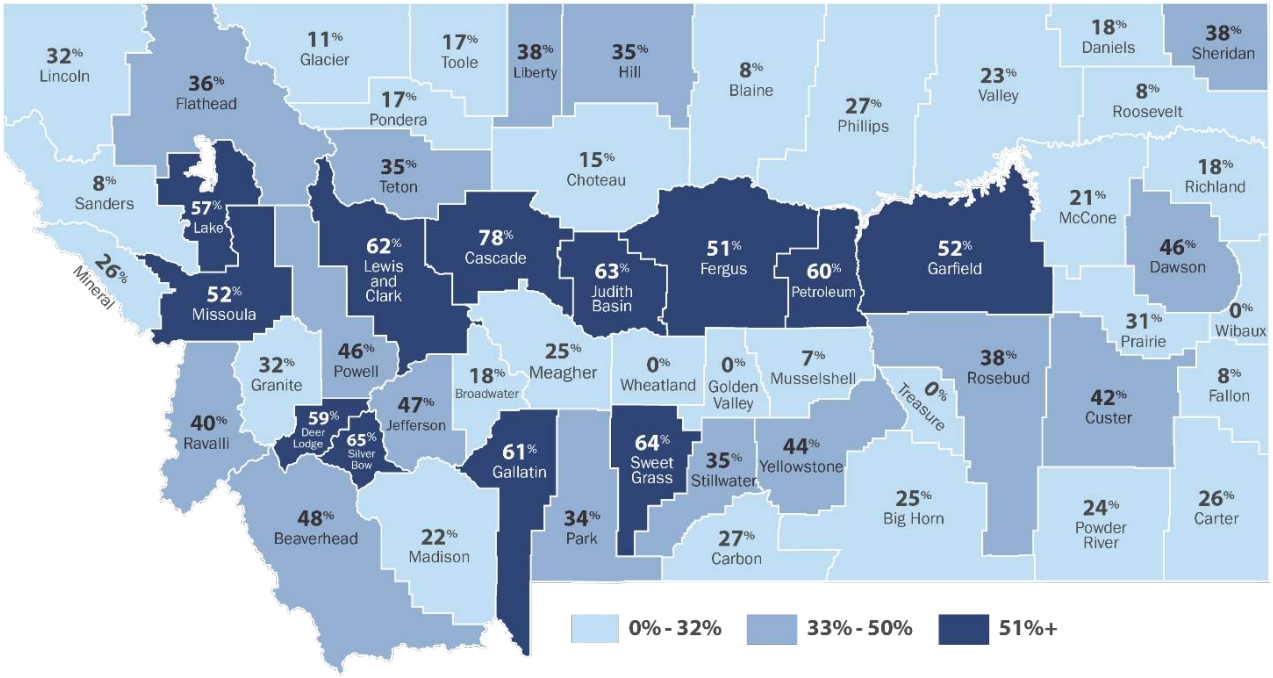
Sub-State Geographical Area

The availability and demand for child care varies across the state. Understanding critical need areas is essential for targeting efforts to increase child care access in Montana. A county-level analysis provides a more detailed picture of how the child care gap varies across the state. Child care gaps by county are calculated by comparing the capacity of licensed providers in the county to the number of children in the county who live in working parent households. This analysis assumes that parents prefer to find child care within their own county, and that providers are only serving families in the county. A county-level analysis best identifies critical high-need child care areas in Montana when parents' search areas and provider service areas roughly match county boundaries.

Figure 5 shows total child care supply as a percentage of potential demand in each county. The county-level analysis reveals the widespread nature of the child care shortage in Montana. License capacity is undersupplied in every county relative to potential demand, and four counties do not have a licensed provider. County-level estimates below 46% indicate a more significant shortage of licensed child care relative to the statewide average.

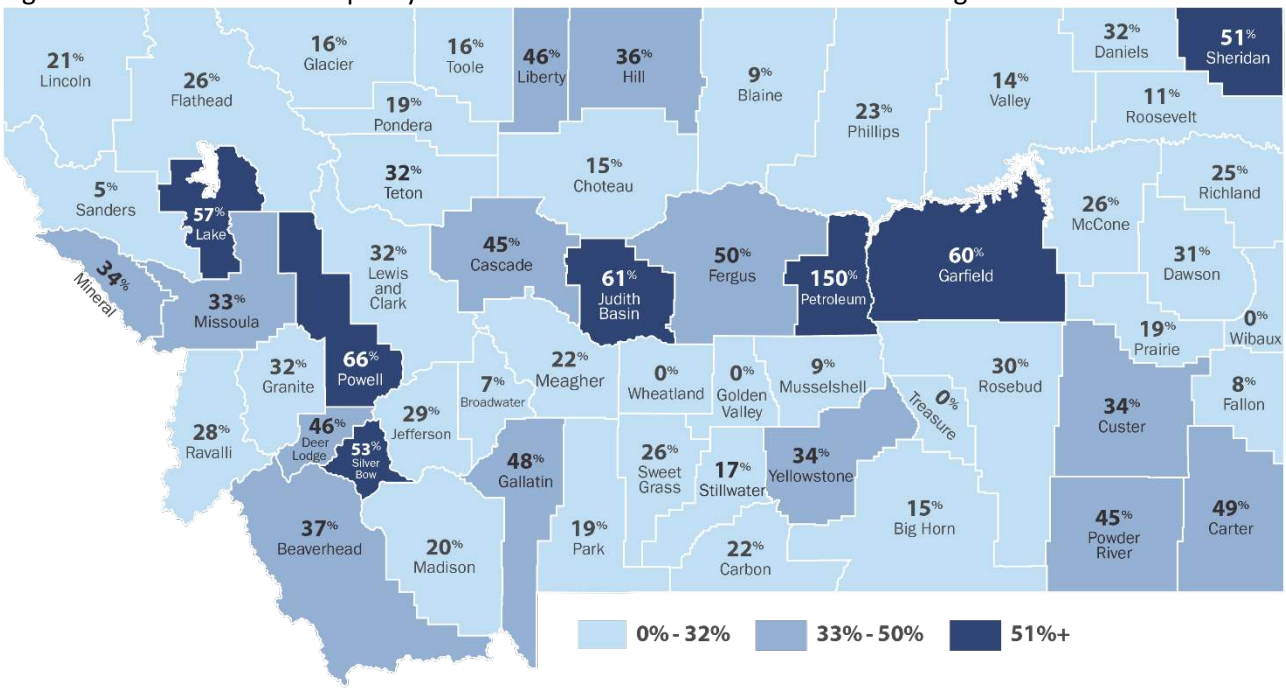
Infant child care capacity as a percent of potential demand is also broken out by county in Figure 6. Infant capacity is more significantly undersupplied than total child care capacity, with capacity in all but eight counties meeting less than half of potential demand. Across Montana infant capacity met only 33% of estimated demand in 2025. Counties with estimates below the statewide average have a more significant shortage of licensed infant care.

Figure 5. Child Care Capacity as a Percent of Demand from Children Under 6 by County in 2025



Source: MTDLI analysis of child care capacity data provided by MTDPHHS through 12/2025. MTDLI child care demand calculation based on U.S. Census Bureau 2024 Population Estimates Program (PEP) data provided by Montana KIDS Count and 2020-2024 American Community Survey (ACS) data produced by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 6. Infant Child Care Capacity as a Percent Demand from Children Under Age 2 in 2025



Source: MTDLI analysis of child care capacity data provided by MTDPHHS through 12/2025. MTDLI child care demand calculation based on U.S. Census Bureau 2023 Population Estimates Program (PEP) data provided by Montana KIDS Count and 2020-2024 American Community Survey (ACS) data produced by the U.S. Census Bureau.

A limitation of using a county-level analysis is that parents do not restrict their child care choices to the boundaries of their county. A distance-based approach to researching the child care supply gaps allows for a more realistic representation of parental search areas and child care provider service areas, by eliminating arbitrary geographical boundaries. However, a distance-based approach is more time and resource intensive, and the results do not significantly change the state's understanding of how child care gaps vary across Montana. Nearly all areas of the state are identified as having inadequate access to child care regardless of research methodology. Therefore, an area-based analysis of child care gaps at the county-level remains the preferred sub-state methodology. For more information on a distance-based approach to estimating child care supply and demand gaps, see appendix A2.

Child Care Deserts

Nationally, the term "child care desert" is used to describe a geographic area with extremely limited access to child care. However, there is no formal threshold for the classification of an area as a child care desert. The most common threshold used is defined by the Center for American Progress (CAP) as a census tract that contains either no child care providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots. According to this definition, 20% of Montana children under six were living in a child care desert in 2025.[xii]

Based on the definition from the CAP, **a child care desert is defined as any geographic area where child care supply meets less than a third of the potential demand.** Stated another way, a child care desert is any area in Montana where over 66% of children living in working parent households cannot access licensed child care. According to this definition, 52% of Montana counties (29 of 56) are considered child care deserts in 2025.

Child Care Desert – any geographic area where licensed child care capacity meets ***less than a third*** of potential demand.

Infant child care deserts are defined using the potential demand for infant care and licensed child care capacity for children under the age of 19 months. Any geographic area where infant capacity meets less than a third of potential demand is considered an infant child care desert. Infant care is the most significantly undersupplied form of care in the state, meeting only 33% of estimated demand in 2025.[xiii]

One limitation of using child care deserts to identify areas with the greatest unmet need for child care is that the analysis does not consider other demographic or socioeconomic characteristics impacting a family's ability to access care. Other areas of the state may also have significant levels of unmet child care demand due to income or demographic barriers that prevent Montana families from accessing care. More information about barriers families face in accessing child care can be found in appendix A3.

Appendix

A1. Child Care Gap Analysis Calculation

The demand for child care in year (y) is calculated as follows:

Total Child Care Demand

$$(1) \quad DemandTot_y = PrctCWP_{y-4,y} \times PopU6_y$$

Infant Care Demand

$$(2) \quad DemandInfant_y = PrctCWP_{y-4,y} \times PopU2_y$$

$$(3) \quad PrctCWP_{y-4,y} = \left(\frac{CWP_{y-4,y}}{TotChild_{y-4,y}}\right)$$

Where,

$PopU6_y$ = the total number of children under age six in year (y) from the US Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program (PEP).

$PopU2_y$ = the total number of children under age two in year (y) from the US Census PEP data.

$CWP_{y-4,y}$ = the number of children under six who live in households where all available parents are in the labor force from US Census ACS 5-Year estimate.

$TotChild_{y-4,y}$ = the total number of children under age six from ACS 5-Year estimate.

The demand for child care is then compared to the licensed child care provider capacity to estimate the child care gap. The gap in total child care capacity and infant capacity in year (y) is calculated as follows:

Total Child Care Gap

$$(4) \quad TCGap_y = \frac{TotLC_y}{DemandTot_y} \qquad TCGap_y = \begin{cases} < 1, then\ undersupplied \\ = 1, then\ meets\ demand \\ > 1, then\ oversupplied \end{cases}$$

Infant Child Care Gap

$$(5) \quad ICGap_y = \frac{InfantLC_y}{DemandInfant_y} \qquad ICGap_y = \begin{cases} < 1, then\ undersupplied \\ = 1, then\ meets\ demand \\ > 1, then\ oversupplied \end{cases}$$

Where,

$TotLC_y$= Total Licensed Capacity reported by MTDPHHS in year (y), where annual capacity is calculated as the 12-month average.

$InfantLC_y$= Infant Licensed Capacity reported by MTDPHHS in year (y), where annual capacity is calculated as the 12-month average.

Data from the ACS 5-Year estimates is updated in December for the previous five years. The U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program (PEP) data by single year of age are published annually in July by Montana Kids COUNT for the previous year. The potential child care demand calculation is updated once per year in January to reflect all updated data. The most recent data available for 2025 is 2020-2024 ACS 5-Year estimates and 2024 U.S. Census vintage 2024 PEP population estimates.

A2. Distance-Based Approach

The distance-based approach to measuring child care supply and adjusting for nearby demand was introduced in a 2019 article published in the journal Early Childhood Research Quarterly.[xiv] This approach differs from an area-based analysis in that it is centered on family locations and assumes families are interested in nearby providers whether or not they are located in the same census tract or other administrative area unit. This new approach in the original journal article uses an enhanced two-stage floating catchment area method (E2SFCA). In stage one of the two-stage calculation, a weighted capacity-to-population ratio is generated for every child care provider in the data set. Stage two of the methodology determines the quantity of local child care supply for each family location, based on the total capacity of nearby providers adjusted for their nearby young-child population.[xv]

The American Community Survey 5-year estimates are used to determine family location. However, it is important to note a limitation of using ACS data in a distance-based approach. The data do not provide exact household locations and can only be geographically disaggregated down to the level of census block group. Thus, it is not possible to calculate each household's exact distance from a provider. Additionally, the distance-based approach considers only the distance from home to a child care provider and does not consider to proximity of the child care facility the caregiver's work.

The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) recently conducted a distance-based analysis by census block that incorporated drive time to measure the child care gap in Montana — the number of children who potentially need child care but whose families cannot reasonably access formal care facilities by driving. Each census block group was assigned to a service area of a specific radius, based on driving distance. Potential child care need within the block group was proportionally allocated to the child care providers within the service area. A complex matrix balancing operation was used to balance the allocations from each block group to achieve the maximum allocation of children possible.[xvi]

Across all fifty states, BPC analysis found a child care gap of 28.2% - meaning 28% of children below the age of six with all available parents in the workforce did not have access to formal child care. In Montana, the child care gap was 47.1%, ranking 6th out of all the states for largest percentage gap in child care capacity. The BPC analysis found rural areas of the state were far more underserved than urban areas, even after using the distance adjustment for families in rural communities, and even though urban communities had a much higher potential need for child care.

The BPC also analyzed the child care gap in opportunity zones within Montana. Opportunity zones were established under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, which created tax incentives for investors to support low-income communities. There are 25 opportunity zones identified in Montana, and BPC estimates the child care gap in these zones is higher than the statewide average. BPC analysis finds a 49% gap in child care capacity within Montana's opportunity zones.

A3. Other Barriers Families Face in Accessing Care

The cost of care is the most cited obstacle to care in the Early Childhood Family and Service Provider Survey.[xvii] In Montana, the average cost of full-time daycare for an infant or toddler in center-based care is $15,080 per year.[xviii] The annual cost of care for one child is more expensive than in-state tuition for a four-year public college and costs more than the median contract rent.[xix] Costs grow exponentially for parents of multiple young children. Child care for two children—an infant and a 4-year-old—costs $29,380. A typical family of four in Montana would have to spend 27% of their income on child care for an infant and a 4-year-old. [xx]

Certain Montana families experience additional barriers to accessing child care – including families with children who are enrolled tribal members or reside on tribal land, children for whom English is not the primary language spoken at the home, children with disability or special health care needs, and children involved in the child welfare system.[xxi] Montana DPHHS 2025 early childhood needs assessment found 98.5% of families who do not speak English at home were unable to find child care staff who spoke their language. Families of children with disabilities also reported facing additional challenges due to a lack of spots open to children with disabilities or developmental concerns.[xxii]

[i] MTDLI analysis of Current Population Survey microdata from IPUMS through December 2025. Reported as 12-month average from January 2025 through December 2025.
[ii] Only FFN caregivers who receive child care assistance are captured in the data collected by MT Dept of Health and Human Services and are included in child care supply.
[iii] There are an estimated 1,570 licensed child care slots for children age 5 and older included in this analysis, potentially overstating the supply of licensed capacity for children under the age of six.
[iv] MCA 52-2-703. Child means a person under 13 years of age or a person with special needs, as defined by the department, who is under 18 years of age or is 18 years of age and a full-time student expected to complete an educational program by 19 years of age.
[v] Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 37.95.102 (24).
[vi]The labor force is defined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) as the number of people who are employed or who are unemployed and actively seeking work.
[vii] Current Population Survey microdata from IPUMS through December 2025. Estimates are 12-month average.
[viii] McCoy DC, Yoshikawa H, Ziol-Guest KM, et al. Impacts of Early Childhood Education on Medium- and Long-Term Educational Outcomes. Educational Researcher. 2017;46(8):474-487. doi:10.3102/0013189X17737739
[ix] IPUMS ACS Data, 12-month moving average of hours worked per week by parents. January 2025-Dec 2025
[x] The data are contained in table B23008 published by the American Community Survey.
[xi] DPHHS child care licensing data through 12/2025. 2020-2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates. US Census Bureau 2024 Population Estimates (PEP) by county provided by Montana Kids Count. Infant is defined as a child less than 19 months old.
[xii] Ibid.
[xiii] Ibid.
[xiv] Elizabeth Davis, Won Fy Lee, and Aaron Sojourner, "Family centered measures of access to early care and education," Early Childhood Research Quarterly 47 (2) (2019): 472–486.
[xv] Rasheed Malik, Won F Lee, Aaron Sojourner, and Elizabeth Davis, "Measuring Childcare Supply Using the Enhanced Two-Stage Floating Catchment Area Method," Center for American Progress. 2020. https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2020/06/18081719/Child-Care-Deserts-Methodology.pdf
[xvi] Linda K. Smith, Anubhav Bagley, and Benjamin Wolters. "National and State Child Care Data Overview" February 5, 2026. Bipartisan Policy Center. https://bipartisanpolicy.org/article/state-child-care-data-2025-update/ Methodology description found here - https://childcaregap.org/MappingMethod.pdf
[xvii] Montana's Early Childhood System: A 2025 Statewide Needs Assessment, Montana Department of Health and Human Services
[xviii] Child Care in America: 2024 Price & Supply, Child Care Aware, May 2025.
[xix] 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table B25058.
[xx] Child Care in America: 2024 Price & Supply, Child Care Aware, May 2025.Median household income for family of four reported by LIHEAP IM 2025-02 Federal Poverty Guidelines and State Median Income Estimates.
[xxi] Montana's Early Childhood System: A 2025 Statewide Needs Assessment, Montana Department of Health and Human Services
[xxii]Montana's Early Childhood System: A 2025 Statewide Needs Assessment, Montana Department of Health and Human Services