



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

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LAWMAKERS CAN ADDRESS THE CHILD CARE ACCESS SHORTAGE

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OLYMPIA – Affordable, high-quality child care is out of reach for the majority of Washington families, according to a first-of-its-kind survey of parents statewide.

The survey, part of a [recent report](#) by the state Department of Commerce's Child Care Collaborative Task Force, finds that:

- 49 percent of Washington parents find it difficult to find, pay for and keep child care;
- 27 percent quit their jobs or left school or training because of a lack of child care;
- 9 percent were fired or dismissed because of child care issues.

These problems negatively impact productivity and economic stability, costing the state economy \$6.5 billion in gross domestic product this year.

“Child care is not just a working parent issue, it’s an economic issue,” said Department of Commerce Director Dr. Lisa Brown. “In addition to hurting children and families, the lack of access to quality, affordable child care impacts employers, weighing on the economic vitality and growth that strengthens communities throughout the state.”

Child care costs have outpaced other increases in the cost of living, and waitlists to find quality care in a setting families prefer are long. The cost burden is greatest for kids and families in communities of color, which often face discrimination in jobs with low pay and little flexibility.

Uninterrupted access to high-quality care—the kind that surrounds children with a safe, stimulating learning environment—helps boost lifelong achievement.

“Babies and children learn best through consistent relationships with the adults in their lives—whether from parents or other caregivers,” said Allison Krutsinger, early learning policy director at Children's Alliance. “That's how they build a strong foundation for all the learning that comes later.”

The Child Care Collaborative Task Force, of which Children's Alliance is a member, will use these and other data to craft a plan to achieve accessible, affordable child care for all Washington families by 2025.

In the meantime, state lawmakers can take a few key steps to address the child care shortage.

Working Connections Child Care is a state program that pays a portion of child care costs, but it doesn't cover the full cost of high-quality care. Only 9 percent of families surveyed say they receive this or another form of financial assistance.

Expanding the program's limited eligibility rules, and raising reimbursement rates to better support licensed child care providers, would connect more families with quality care. These investments would also stabilize the child care workforce, which is disproportionately composed of working women of color.

Tacoma mother Kelly Blucher knows firsthand how hard it is to find and keep child care. Upon getting a job in August 2017, her hourly wage qualified her to enroll in Working Connections. She called 49 centers in the Pierce County area to find a place that would accept the subsidy. She found two separate facilities, necessitating a cross-town drive twice daily to drop her young children off, then pick them up again.

Last year, because of limited eligibility rules, her child care payments doubled after a raise of just \$3 per hour. If her wage rose by just \$1, she'd be disqualified from Working Connections, and her child care payment would rise by more than \$1,300 monthly.

"I want to work harder, get further and seek another promotion, but I cannot," she said. "We need to put more money into child care subsidy and raise the eligibility rate."

The Early Learning Action Alliance, a coalition of more than 70 community organizations across Washington state, is calling on lawmakers to connect more families with quality care by investing in access for families through Working Connections Child Care when the legislature convenes in January.

Read the [Mounting Costs of Child Care](#) report (PDF).

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About CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

The Children's Alliance works to effect positive change in public policies, budgets and programs at the state and federal levels. It partners with the national-level policy organization [ZERO TO THREE](#) for *Think Babies™* to place an emphasis on policy solutions for babies, toddlers and new parents. For more information and to join, please visit childrensalliance.org, go to facebook.com/childrensalliancewa, or follow [Children's Alliance](#) on Twitter.