



# **Parachute to Aspen Early Childhood Care and Education Status Report:**

**Data as of Fall 2024**

## Summary

Licensed child care providers in the Parachute to Aspen region were able to serve 2,272 children as of fall 2024 based on licensing regulations and staffing levels. This number is a 13% increase from 1,988 children in 2023, yet it is still only sufficient to serve 44% of the population of children under age 5 who live in the region and only 58% of those estimated to have all parents in the labor force.<sup>1,2</sup>

It is important to note that the number of child care slots includes some part-time slots; the number of slots able to serve children full-time is even more limited than what the numbers above illustrate.

Between fall 2023 and fall 2024, eight new licensed providers opened programs in the region: four child care centers and four family child care homes. Three programs closed during this timeframe (two child care centers and one family child care home), and one program changed operators.

Other key findings include:

- At the regional level, the Colorado River Valley continues to experience the most acute shortage of licensed child care. As of fall 2024, there was only enough staffed child care capacity in the Colorado River Valley's licensed settings to serve 29% of all children under 5 and 40% of young children with all available parents in the labor force.
- At the county level, Garfield County has the largest estimated shortage of licensed child care slots. Staffed capacity in Garfield County was only sufficient to serve 37% of all children under 5 and 52% of young children with all available parents in the labor force.
- Infant care remains especially limited, despite an increase in slots for infants under 12 months from 2023. As of fall 2024, staffed capacity for infants in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys was only sufficient to serve approximately 18% of babies born in the region in 2023.

## Methods

The survey of licensed child care providers in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys was conducted between September and November 2024 via SurveyMonkey. All licensed providers from Parachute to Aspen were first contacted via e-mail and asked to complete the survey. The CECE Coalition Director and members of the coalition conducted follow-up efforts via e-mails and phone calls to providers. By November 2024, 75 of 78 providers responded to the survey. Two providers declined participation, and one did not respond to follow-up efforts.

Capacity data for the providers that did not participate in the survey were pulled from the Colorado Licensed Child Care Facilities Report for September. Each provider who completed the survey received a \$25 gift card in appreciation for their time.

Population estimates for children under 5 were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. These estimates were the most recently available data at the time of drafting.

## Notes

The demand for child care at the community level is difficult to quantify. This report aims to provide an estimate of the share of children under 5 in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys who could be served in a licensed child care setting, while recognizing that families with young children have varying

needs and preferences for child care. The report uses staffed capacity in child care centers, family child care homes and preschools as rough estimates of the number of children who can access licensed care. Staffed capacity is defined as the number of children licensed providers reported being able to serve based on their staffing levels as of fall 2024. This method likely overestimates the share of young children who can be served in a licensed setting due to the nuances of providing child care and shortcomings of existing data systems.

To reflect the reality that not all families with children under 5 will want or need licensed child care for their children, this year's report also includes data on the estimated number of children living in households where all parents were in the labor force. These children will most likely need some form of non-parental child care at some point during the day.

Aspen Ski Company's licensed child care capacity was excluded from capacity calculations in this report due to the unique nature of their program and the fact that a portion of their slots serve tourists.

## Acknowledgments

This report was prepared for the Confluence Early Childhood Education (CECE) Coalition by Sarah Hughes, Principal Consultant at Groundswell for Good, LLC.

The CECE Coalition is deeply appreciative of its coalition members and extends special thanks to members and supporters who offered their expertise on this survey and dedicated their time to following up with providers:

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- Claire Winchester, Growth Early Childhood Behavior Coaching

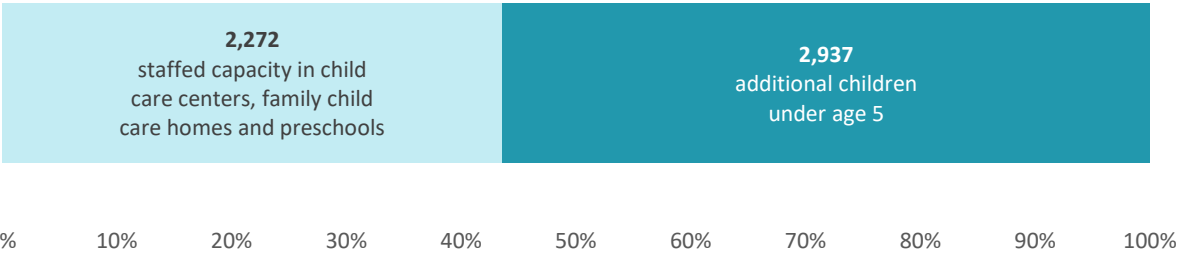
# Child Care Capacity in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys

Finding consistent, affordable child care can be an enormous stressor for families with young children. Waitlists are long (particularly for infant and toddler care), slots are limited, and costs for parents and providers are high. When faced with challenges finding affordable care for their children, some families either choose to or are forced to reduce working hours or drop out of the workforce entirely. Across Colorado, one in eight children ages birth to 5 lives in a family in which someone had to quit a job, not take a job or change their job due to problems with child care.<sup>3</sup>

Although staffed capacity in the region’s child care centers, family child care homes and preschools increased by 13% between 2023 and 2024, the amount of licensed care available to families remains too low to meet the needs of families in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys.

Data collected via this year’s survey indicate that **fewer than half of all children under 5 (44%) in the region can be served in a licensed setting in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys based on staffing levels in fall 2024.** As of fall 2024, providers could serve approximately 2,272 children based on licensing regulations and staffing levels—far short of the more than 5,200 children under 5 who call the region home. Even when calculating a more conservative estimate of the number of young children who need care (the estimated number of young children with all parents in the labor force), capacity remains insufficient to meet demand. **An estimated 3,940 children under 5 live in families with all available parents working, meaning there is only enough staffed capacity to serve 58% of children in this group.**<sup>4</sup>

Staffed capacity in the region's child care providers was only sufficient to serve 44% of children under 5 as of fall 2024.



It is important to note that staffed capacity in licensed child care settings is an overestimate of the actual number of children who can access licensed child care for a couple reasons:

- **Exclusion of 5-year-olds not yet in kindergarten:** The child population estimates used for this calculation do not include 5-year-olds who are not yet in kindergarten. If it were possible to obtain and include data on the number of 5-year-olds still in need of child care, the gap between staffed capacity and the young child population would be even larger.
- **Part-time vs. full-time slots:** Staffed capacity numbers include both part-time and full-time slots. Part-time slots are likely insufficient for many working families.

## Access to Child Care: Why It Matters for Families and Communities

Decades of research have established the importance of the earliest years of life. During this formative time of brain development, children need nurturing, responsive caregivers and stable environments. Most young children live in families where all available parents are in the labor force—especially in communities with a high cost of living where two incomes are often needed in order to make ends meet—and these children will likely need some form of child care during the day.<sup>5</sup> Child care providers nurture children’s social, emotional and cognitive development, working with parents and families to equip children with a strong foundation.

Child care is also critical infrastructure that allows parents to work to support their families. The data in this report show that access to child care in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys is insufficient to meet the needs of all families who would choose it. When families are unable to access the child care they need, many are forced to reduce their work hours, take unpaid leave from work, or drop out of the workforce entirely to care for children. The shortage of child care throughout the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys is almost certainly making it more difficult for families to maintain stable employment and harder for employers to find and keep the talent they need.

### The Vital Role of Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Providers

Family members, friends and neighbors who care for children other than their own (often referred to as FFN providers) are a crucial part of the child care landscape. National research indicates that FFN care is the most common form of non-parental child care, and many families prefer this form of care for its cultural relevance, flexibility, familiarity or affordability. FFN providers also fill a critical gap for families who are unable to access licensed care in their communities.

Although surveying FFN providers was outside the scope of this child care survey, it is reasonable to assume that they provide child care for a sizable portion of young children in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys based on existing data. According to the 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, approximately 76% of young children in the region live in households where all parents are in the labor force, meaning they likely need care provided by someone other than a parent at some point during the week. Applying this percentage to the population of children under 5 in the region, it is estimated that more than 3,900 young children in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys are in need of child care at some point while their parents work. **With only 2,272 staffed child care slots in licensed child care settings, many of the remaining 1,600 children who have all parents in the workforce but cannot be served in a licensed setting are likely cared for by an FFN provider—nearly one-third of all young children in the region.** Ensuring that FFN providers can access training, resources and support is essential to creating and sustaining a strong child care system in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys.

Sources: Park, M. & Peña, J.F. (2021). The invisible work of family, friend, and neighbor caregivers and its importance for immigrant and dual language learner families. Migration Policy Institute. Nevins, et al. (2023). Understanding the strengths of family, friend and neighbor child care. Home Grown and Mathematica.

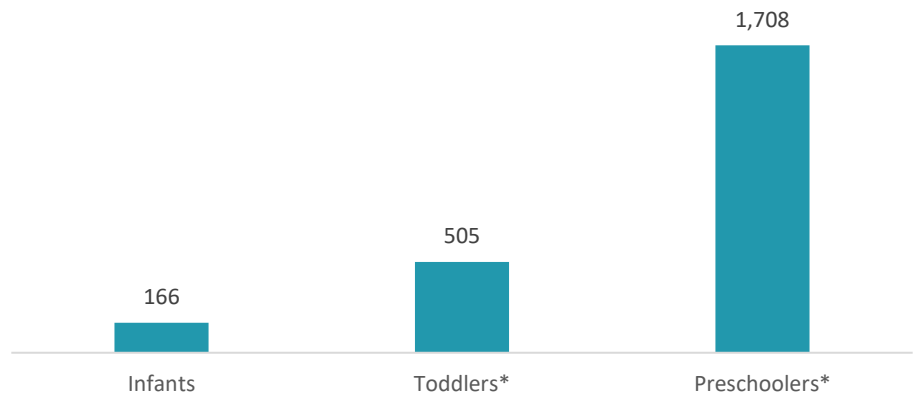
## Child Care Capacity by Age Group

Infants and toddlers require lower child-to-staff ratios than preschool-aged children, so slots are typically far more limited for children in these very young age groups. Infant care is especially scarce: from Parachute to Aspen, there were only 166 staffed slots for infants in fall 2024.

Although population estimates are not available for infants at the regional level, **birth data from the**

**Colorado Department of Public Health indicate that nearly 900 babies were born to Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valley residents in 2023 – more than four times the number of staffed child care slots for infants in the region.**<sup>6</sup> Capacity for infants increased between 2023 and 2024, driven by the opening of two new child care centers serving infants and new family child care home providers. Slots for toddlers and preschoolers also increased between fall 2023 and fall 2024.\*

Staffed Child Care Capacity by Age Group\*,  
Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valley Total: Fall  
2024



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\*There are important caveats to capacity data by age group. State licensing rules use overlapping age ranges to allow for flexibility in the classrooms in which children are served based on their developmental stage. For example, the licensing age range for infants is birth to 18 months, while the licensing range for toddlers is 12 months to 36 months. Licensing for family child care homes does not distinguish between slots for toddlers and preschoolers. The capacity numbers reported above for toddlers and preschoolers will contain duplicated slots in family child care homes that could be used to serve either toddlers or preschoolers. Therefore, the number of slots by age range should not be summed to calculate total capacity.

## Child Care Capacity by Location

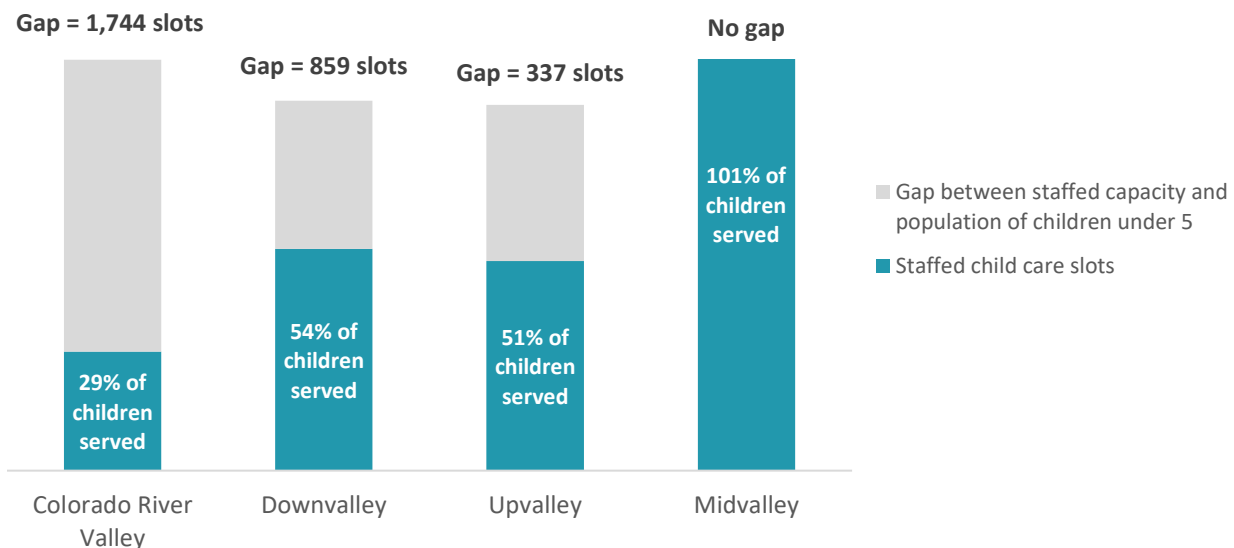
Staffed child care capacity varies substantially across the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys. The following sections examine capacity by region (defined as the Colorado River Valley, Downvalley, Midvalley and Upvalley), as well as by county. These data are provided with the recognition that the river valleys are economically and socially interconnected in ways that cross these geographic boundaries. Many residents travel from one part of the region to another for work or school and thus may choose a child care provider in a different area than the one in which they reside. However, the data in the following sections can still provide valuable insights into the availability of child care options within each community.

## Child Care Capacity by Region

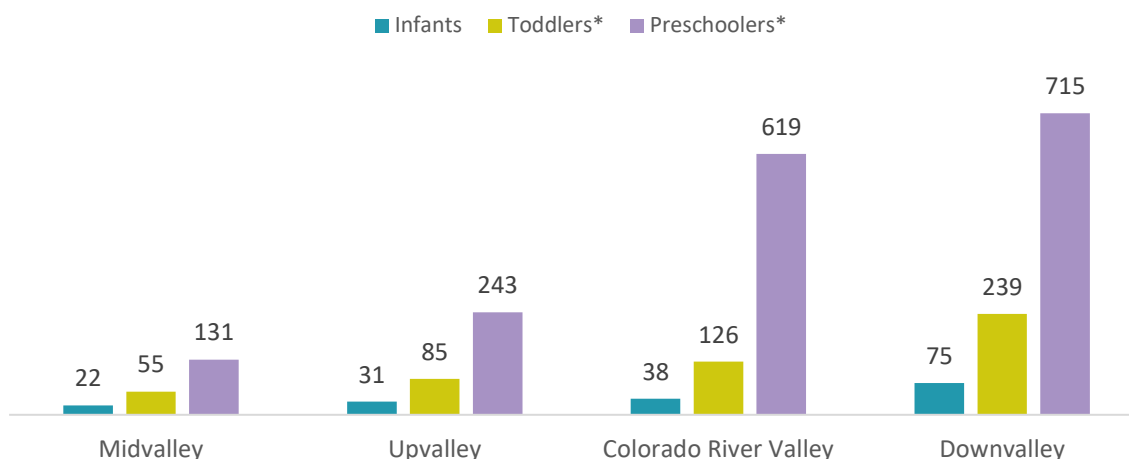
Child care capacity and population data by ZIP code were aggregated to create a regional picture of child care availability for four regions in the area: the Colorado River Valley, Downvalley, Midvalley and Upvalley. See the table below for a breakdown of how ZIP codes were assigned by region.

| Region   | ZIP Codes Included                |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Colorado River Valley</b> (Parachute to New Castle) | 81635, 81647, 81650, 81652        |
| <b>Downvalley</b> (Glenwood Springs to Carbondale)     | 81601, 81623                      |
| <b>Midvalley</b> (El Jebel/Basalt)                     | 81621                             |
| <b>Upvalley</b> (Old Snowmass to Aspen)                | 81611, 81612, 81615, 81654, 81656 |

The share of children under 5 who could be served by staffed child care slots ranges from 29% in the Colorado River Valley to 101% in Midvalley.



Slots for preschool-aged children far outnumber slots for infants and toddlers in every region.



\*Licensing for family child care homes does not distinguish between slots for toddlers and preschoolers. The capacity numbers reported above for toddlers and preschoolers will contain duplicated slots in family child care homes that could be used to serve children in either age group. Therefore, the number of slots by age range should not be summed to calculate total capacity.

### Colorado River Valley (Parachute, Battlement Mesa, Rifle, Silt, New Castle)

**Licensed providers:** 31 (13 child care centers, preschool programs or mobile preschools | 18 family child care homes)

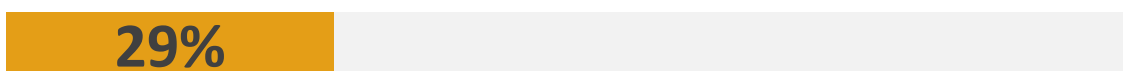
**Staffed child care capacity:** 715 slots (38 infant slots | 126 toddler slots | 619 preschool slots)

**Staffed capacity as a percent of children under 5:** 29%

**Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5 with all available parents in the labor force:** 40%

**Gap between staffed child care capacity and population of children under 5:** 1,744

Staffed child care capacity in the Colorado River Valley is



of the population of children under 5.

**The Colorado River Valley faces the most acute shortage of child care in the region.** Staffed capacity was only sufficient to serve 29% of children under 5 (715 slots for nearly 2,460 kids) and 40% of the estimated number of children with all available parents in the labor force. Infant slots were particularly limited, with only enough infant slots to serve 9% of the babies born in the area in 2023. Family child care homes make up the majority of licensed providers in this region, and four new family child care homes opened between fall 2023 and fall 2024, bringing much-needed capacity to the area.



## Downvalley (Glenwood Springs, Carbondale)

**Licensed providers:** 31 (22 child care centers, preschool programs or mobile preschools | 9 family child care homes)

**Staffed child care capacity:** 993 slots (75 infant slots | 239 toddler slots | 715 preschool slots)

**Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5:** 54%

**Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5 with all available parents in the labor force:** 76%

**Gap between staffed child care capacity and population of children under 5:** 859

Staffed child care capacity in the Downvalley region is



of the population of children under 5.

**The Downvalley region had enough staffed slots in fall 2024 to serve approximately 54% of all children under 5 in the area (993 slots for 1,852 kids) and 76% of the estimated number of young children with all available parents in the labor force.** The shortage of infant slots was more severe. There were only 75 staffed infant slots for 323 babies born in 2023, or enough slots for approximately 23% of babies born in 2023. Child care centers and preschools make up the majority of licensed providers in the Downvalley region. Two new child care centers opened in the region between 2023 and 2024.

## Midvalley (Basalt)

**Licensed providers:** 5 (4 child care centers or preschools | 1 family child care home)

**Staffed child care capacity:** 220 slots (22 infant slots | 55 toddler slots | 131 preschool slots)

**Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5:** 101%

**Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5 with all available parents in the labor force:** 101%\*

**Gap between licensed child care capacity and population of children under 5:** 0

\*This estimate is based on American Community Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau on the share of young children living in households where all available parents are in the labor force. The estimate for the Midvalley region has a large margin of error; thus, this data point should be interpreted with caution.

Staffed child care capacity in the Midvalley region is

**101%**

of the population of children under 5.

**The number of staffed slots as a percent of the population of children under 5 is highest in the Midvalley area, with staffed capacity exceeding the estimated number of children under 5 in the region.** Given the interconnected nature of the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valley region, however, children who live outside of the Midvalley region also attend care there. The region saw an increase in infant capacity between 2023 and 2024, and staffed infant slots in the area could now serve 42% of babies born in the Midvalley region in 2023. Child care centers and preschools make up the majority of licensed providers in the Midvalley region. One new child care center opened between 2023 and 2024, and one closed and combined with another provider.

## Upvalley (Aspen, Snowmass Village, Woody Creek)

Licensed providers: 10 (10 child care centers or preschools)

Staffed child care capacity: 344 slots (31 infant slots | 85 toddler slots | 243 preschool slots)

Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5: 51%

Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5 with all available parents in the labor force: 54%

Gap between licensed child care capacity and population of children under 5: 337

Staffed child care capacity in the Upvalley region is



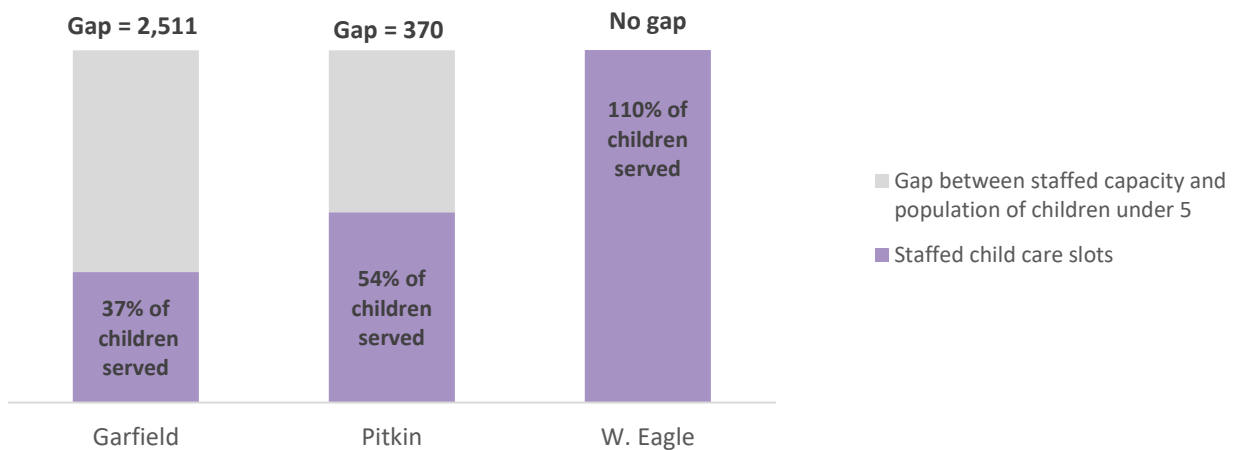
of the population of children under 5.

**Staffed child care capacity in the Upvalley region was approximately 51% of all children under 5 (344 slots for 681 kids) and 54% of the estimated number of children with all available parents in the labor force.** Staffed capacity for infants was sufficient to serve approximately 38% of babies born in 2023. All licensed providers in the Upvalley region were child care centers or preschools; there were no licensed family child care homes in the Upvalley area as of fall 2024. One new child care center opened in the Upvalley region between 2023 and 2024, and one center closed.

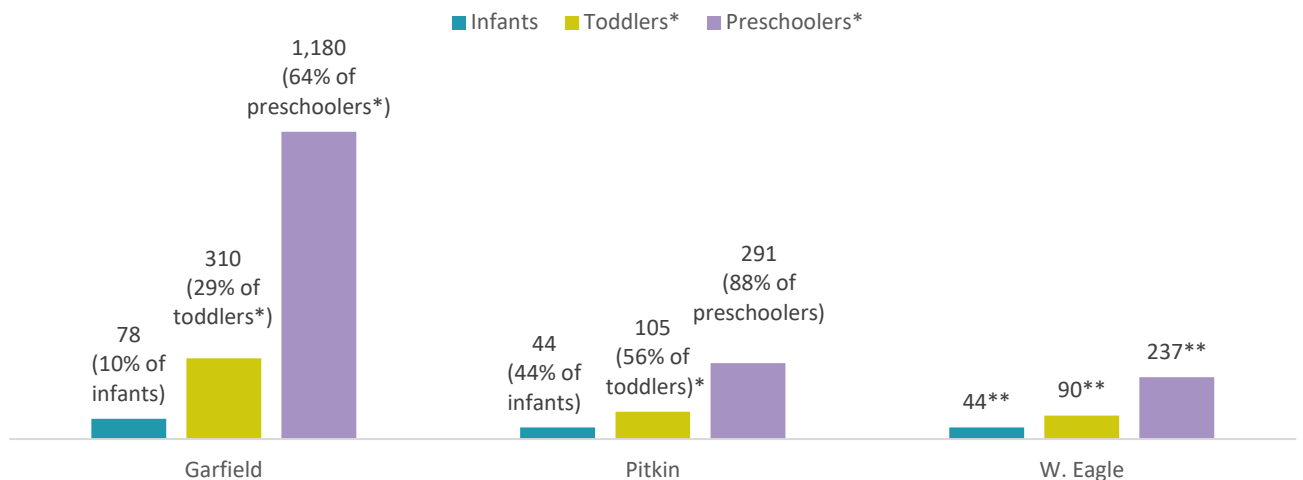
## Capacity by County

The Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys encompass Garfield County, Pitkin County, and a portion of western Eagle County. Staffed child care capacity as a share of the population of young children varies significantly across counties. Again, it is important to consider that some families are likely to cross county lines to access child care, but these numbers can help illuminate places where capacity is most limited relative to the population.

Among the counties in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys, Garfield County has the most acute shortage of staffed child care slots.



Slots for preschool-aged children comprise the majority of staffed capacity in each county.



\*Licensing for family child care homes does not distinguish between slots for toddlers and preschoolers. The capacity numbers reported above for toddlers and preschoolers will contain duplicated slots in family child care homes that could be used to serve children in either age group. Therefore, the number of slots by age range should not be summed to calculate total capacity.

\*\*Population estimates by single year of age are not available for W. Eagle County.

# Garfield County

Licensed providers: 57

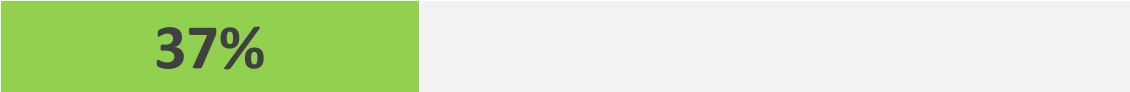
Staffed child care capacity: 1,464 slots (78 infant slots | 310 toddler slots | 1,180 preschool slots)

Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5: 37%

Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5 with all available parents in the labor force: 52%

Gap between staffed child care capacity and population of children under 5: 2,511

Staffed child care capacity in Garfield County is



of the population of children under 5.

**Among the three counties in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys, Garfield County continues to have the lowest percentage of children under 5 who could be served in a staffed child care slot.** As of fall 2024, there were 1,464 licensed slots in Garfield County’s child care centers, family child care homes and preschools – enough for about 37% of the nearly 4,000 children under 5 who live in Garfield County and 52% of those in households where all available parents were working. The number of staffed slots for infants was only 10% of the estimated number of infants in the county. Between 2023 and 2024, one new child care center and four new family child care homes opened in Garfield County, and one family child care home closed.

## Pitkin County

Licensed providers: 14

Staffed child care capacity: 437 slots (44 infant slots | 105 toddler slots | 291 preschool slots)

Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5: 54%

Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5 with all available parents in the labor force: 58%

Gap between staffed child care capacity and population of children under 5: 370

Staffed child care capacity in Pitkin County is



of the population of children under 5.

**The number of staffed child care slots in Pitkin County was sufficient to serve slightly more than half of the population under 5 – higher than the average across the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valley regions.** Staffed capacity was sufficient to serve approximately 58% of children living in households where all available parents were in the labor force. As in other counties, infant care is more limited. Pitkin County had 44 staffed infant slots as of fall 2024, about 44% of the estimated number of infants in the county.

## West Eagle County

Licensed providers: 6

Staffed child care capacity: 371 slots (44 infant slots | 90 toddler slots | 237 preschool slots)

Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5\*: 110%

Staffed child care capacity as a percent of children under 5 with all available parents in the workforce\*: 152%

Gap between staffed child care capacity and population of children under 5\*: 0

\*Population estimates for West Eagle County were derived by applying the portion of Basalt's total population that lives within Eagle County to the child population of Basalt to create an estimate of the number of children under 5 living in the portion of Basalt that is within Eagle County. This number was then added to the population of children under 5 living in El Jebel.

Staffed child care capacity in W. Eagle County is

**110%**

of the population of children under 5.

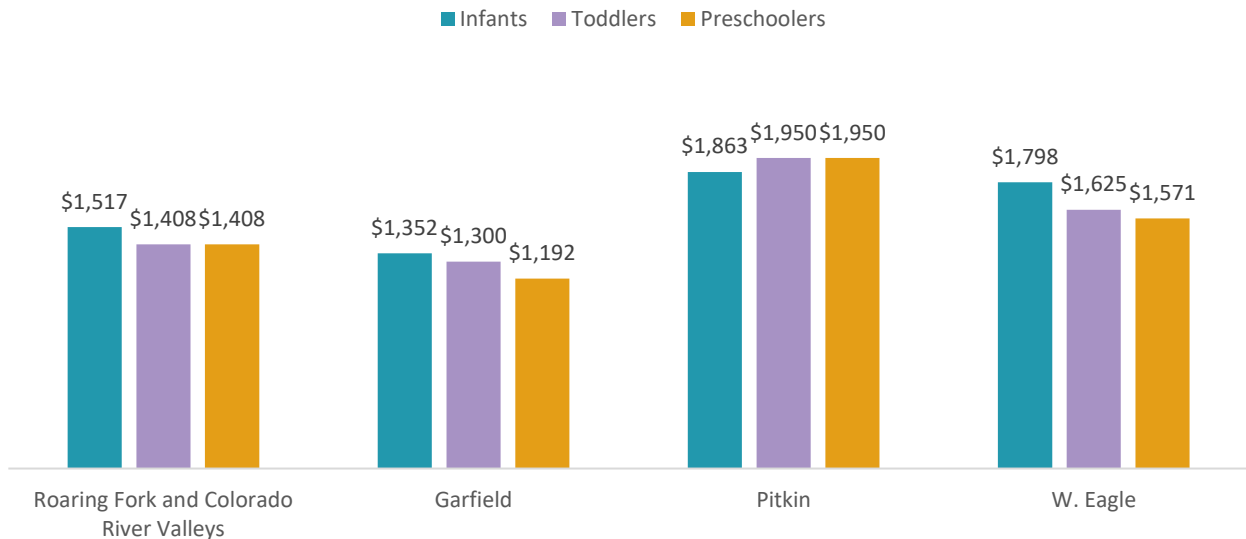
**Staffed capacity at providers located within the small portion of western Eagle County that is part of the Roaring Fork Valley exceeded the estimated number of children under 5 in the region.** Given this area's proximity to nearby Garfield and Pitkin County communities, many children who reside in the other two counties attend providers in Eagle County and vice versa. The West Eagle portion of the Valley is also a very convenient location for parents to drop their children off at child care on the commute Upvalley, so providers in this area serve children from across the region.

## Cost of Care

Even when a child care slot is available, many families are unable to afford the cost of child care. **In the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys, the median monthly tuition for full-time child care ranges from nearly \$1,200 for preschoolers in Garfield County to nearly \$2,000 for toddlers and preschoolers in Pitkin County.** Families with multiple children in child care could easily face child care costs that exceed \$3,000 per month.

The federal government considers child care affordable when costs do not exceed 7% of a family's income. **The median cost of care for one infant ranges from 17% of the median family income in Garfield County to 19% of the median family income in Eagle County – more than double the affordability threshold.**<sup>7</sup>

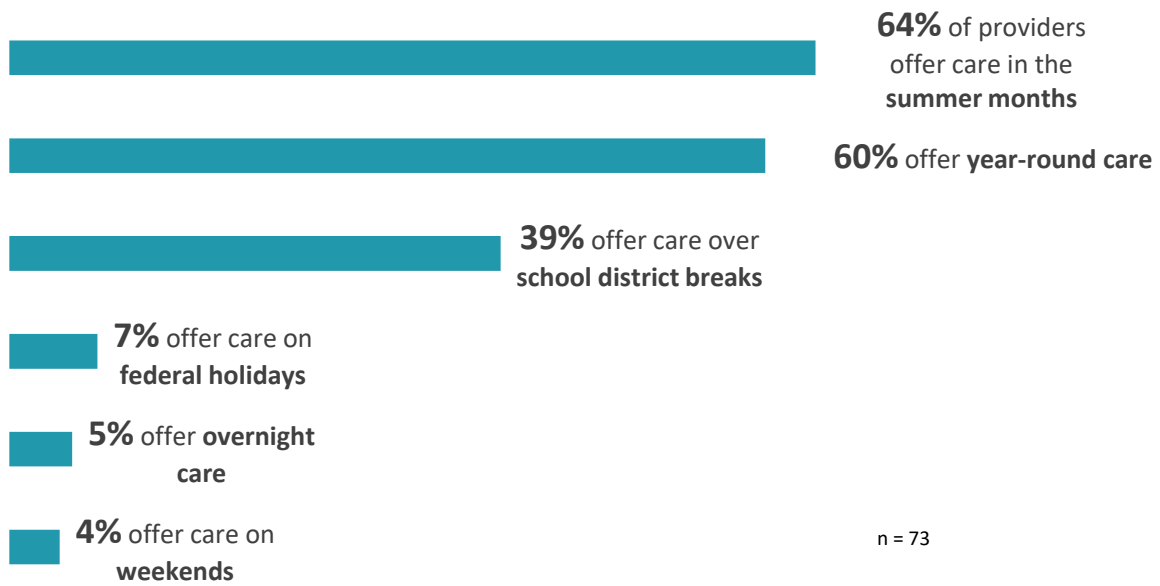
Median full-time monthly tuition ranges from nearly \$1,200 for preschoolers in Garfield County to nearly \$2,000 for toddlers and preschoolers in Pitkin County.



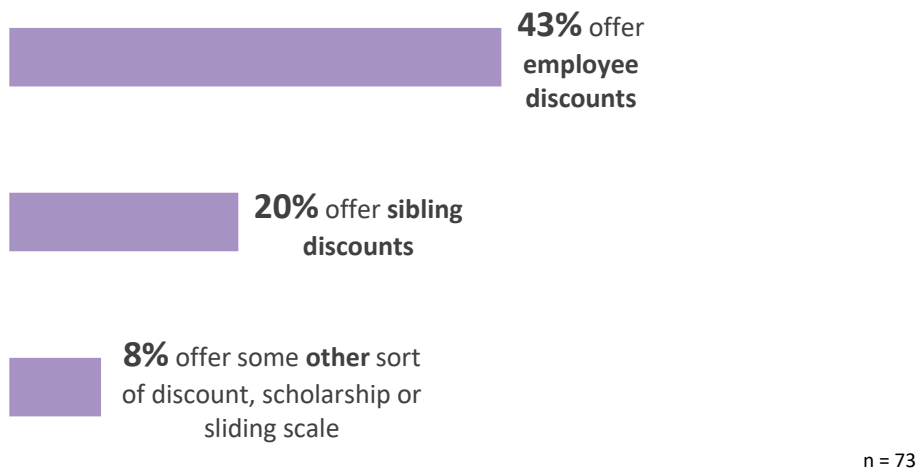


# Provider Characteristics

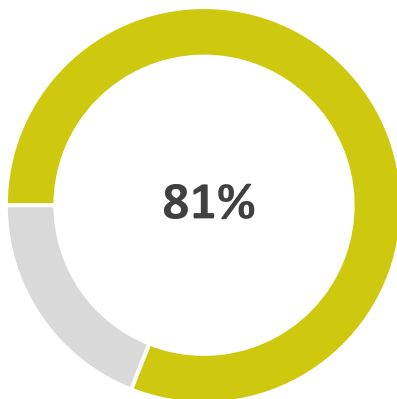
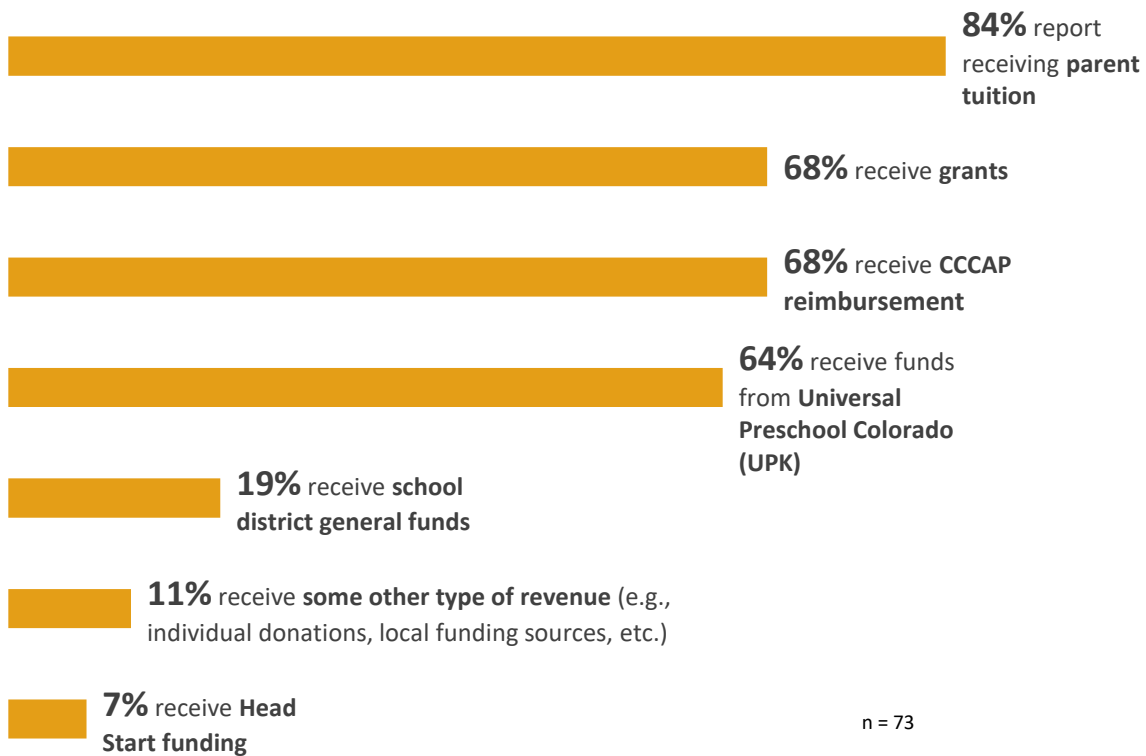
## Timeframe Care is Provided



## Discounts



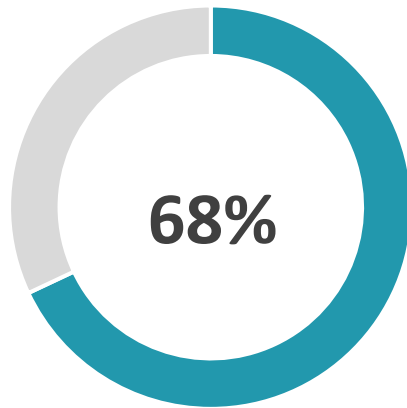
## Revenue Sources



of providers report they have a **fiscal agreement or contract with the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP)**. CCCAP helps families who meet income eligibility guidelines and who are working, searching for work, in school, or homeless afford child care.

In total, providers who have a fiscal agreement with CCCAP reported **servicing 184 children who receive CCCAP**, up from 160 in fall 2023. The **average number of CCCAP children served** per provider who accepts CCCAP was **3.2**.

## Among Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valley providers surveyed...



n = 74

report **participating in Universal Preschool Colorado (UPK)**. UPK provides 15 hours of free preschool for every Colorado 4-year-old who attends a program that participates in UPK in the year before kindergarten. This tuition credit equates to about \$624 per month. The median cost of full-time preschool in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys was \$1,408, meaning families who participate in UPK still need to cover a significant portion of preschool expenses. Four-year-olds with certain risk factors qualify for 30 hours of free preschool, and 3-year-olds with risk factors can receive 10 hours of free preschool. The 2024-2025 school year is the second year UPK has been in place in Colorado.

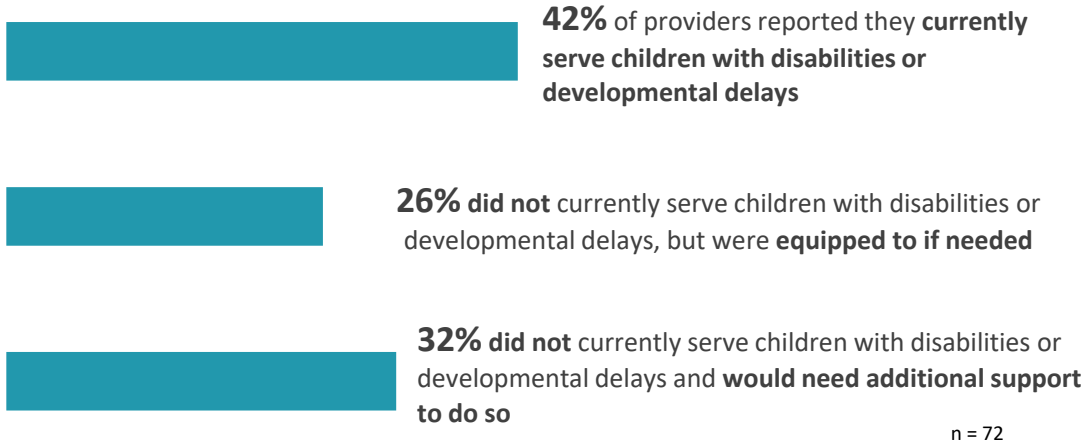
Data from the Rocky Mountain Early Childhood Council indicate that **701 4-year-olds** in the region received preschool funding through UPK in the 2024-2025 school year. **Complete data on 3-year-olds receiving UPK funding were not available.** UPK is designed to increase affordability of preschool for children in the year before kindergarten and **does not address the acute shortage of early care and education opportunities for infants and toddlers.**

**More than 18% of providers** reported **changing the number of children they serve because of UPK.**

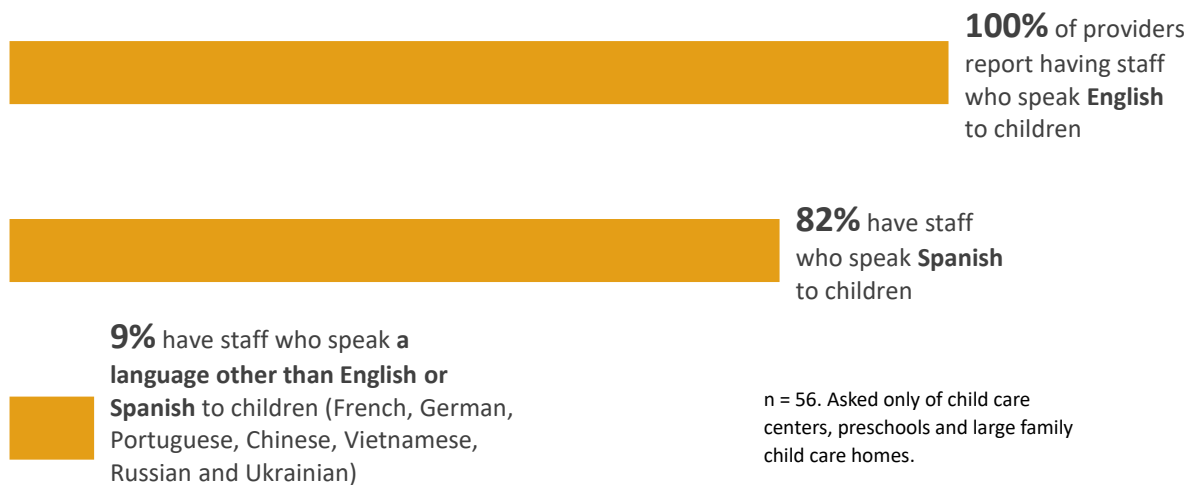
Among those providers who provided more detail about how they changed capacity, all reported they had increased their capacity for preschoolers. No providers reported serving fewer infants and toddlers due to UPK implementation. One provider mentioned that an unintended consequence of replacing the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP, which previously only served children with risk factors known to impact school readiness) with UPK was that children in families who had previously qualified for full-time preschool through CPP did not meet the eligibility requirements for receiving 30 hours per week of UPK.

When asked if and how UPK participation had benefited them or the families they serve, providers frequently cited **improved affordability for families**, the **ability to purchase new materials and supplies** for their program, and being able to **increase salaries, provide bonuses, or cover teachers' professional development costs.**

## Care for Children with Disabilities or Developmental Delays



## Languages Spoken to Children by Staff

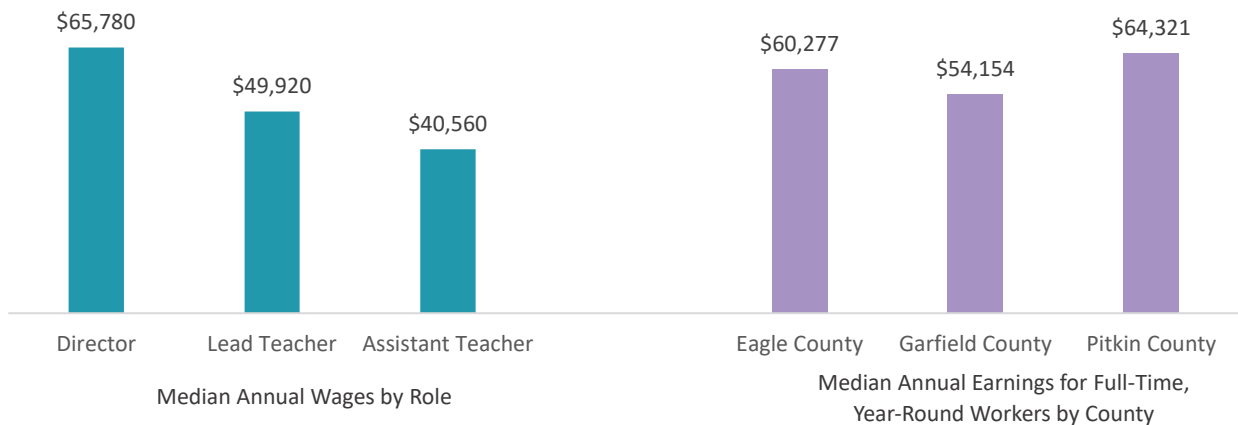


## Provider Wages and Benefits

Wages for child care providers are significantly lower than wages for other professions. In 2022, Colorado’s median wage for child care teachers was only about half of the median earnings for full-time, year-round workers in Colorado.<sup>8,9</sup> Insufficient wages and benefits were commonly cited among Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valley providers as barriers to remaining in the child care workforce.

**Median annual wages for child care providers in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys range from \$40,560 for assistant teachers to \$65,780 for directors. Median wages for teachers and assistant teachers fall below the median earnings for full-time, year-round workers in each of the three counties in the region.**

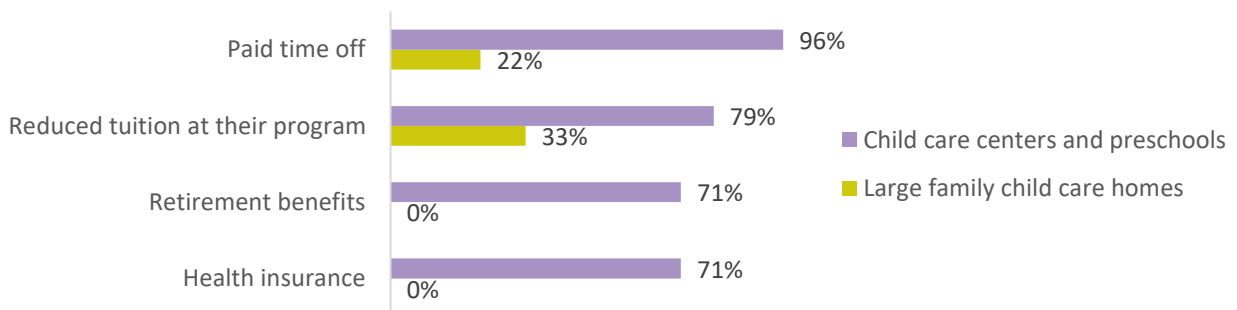
*Median Annual Wage by Staff Role and Median Earnings for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers by County\**



\*When providers reported hourly wages, these hourly wages were converted to full-time annual wages. Some programs do not operate in the summer, however, so many teachers are earning below the median annual amounts reported here. The median hourly wages for each role are: Director, \$31.63; Lead Teacher, \$24.00; and Assistant Teacher, \$19.50.

**Most child care centers, preschools and mobile preschools report offering benefits such as paid time off and health insurance. Benefits are less common among large family child care homes that typically employ few staff.**

*Benefits Offered by Provider Type*

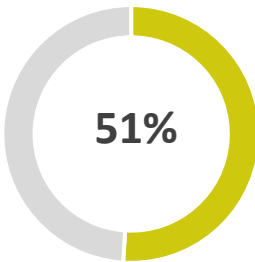
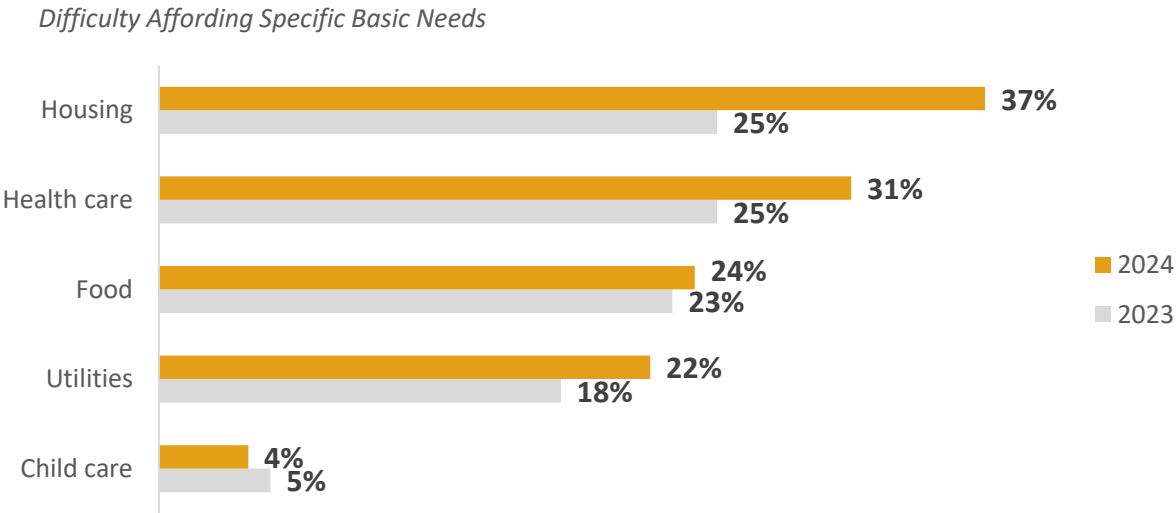


# Provider Experiences and Challenges

Many child care providers or staff report that it is difficult to pay for their own basic needs.

**1 in 6** respondents to the survey reported it was **hard or very hard** for their household to **afford basic needs** in the previous month, on par with 2023 data.

The share of providers reporting difficulty paying for housing and health care increased between 2023 and 2024.

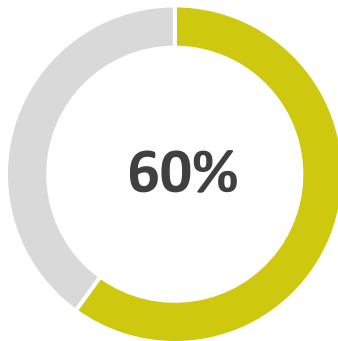


of providers reported that they have **considered leaving the field of early care and education** at some point. Burnout, exhaustion and low wages were commonly cited as reasons providers considered leaving.

*"[I consider leaving the field] all the time. As a professional child care provider, small business owner and mother, I feel extremely undervalued. Not to mention the low salary, which makes covering basic, life-sustaining needs difficult."*

*"There isn't enough pay for me to have an affordable life and also the flexibility on taking days off."*

## Challenges with Hiring or Retaining Staff



of child care centers, preschools and mobile preschools reported facing barriers to recruiting or retaining qualified staff. Barriers reported by providers included **low pay**, a **lack of benefits** like health insurance and retirement plans that larger employers can offer, and a **shortage of housing** that is affordable for child care providers.

### In their own words: Providers describe barriers to hiring and recruiting

“Our **teacher wages** are the biggest barriers. Many people go into nannying because the starting pay is \$30 per hour.”

“Challenges in early childhood education staffing stem from **competitive income opportunities elsewhere**, as well as our **inability to offer benefits** like health insurance and 401k matching that larger district programs provide. Attracting qualified staff is difficult when grocery stores offer comparable hourly rates with less stress and responsibility. Additionally, our location puts us at a disadvantage, as we are unable to provide housing stipends, unlike neighboring communities. Our proximity to these areas means our staff is aware of the more attractive compensation packages offered just a few miles away, making housing costs a significant barrier to retaining and attracting talent in our program.”

“Hiring staff in general [is hard]. We are short three teachers this school year. We **had to close a classroom.**”

“We do not have very many applicants to start with. We also do not have benefits and of course **I wish we could pay teachers more.**”

**When asked about the biggest barriers they faced to remaining in the early childhood field, providers said...**

“Cost of living. All aspects of running a program have increased in cost, yet programs are expected by families and state programs to remain affordable.”

“Looking my staff in their eyes and telling them this job does not pay well nor does it provide good benefits, but the payoff is the love for the children and the impact we make. Even though this is a huge part of being a teacher it is eating on me as a director knowing the cost of living has gone up so much that my staff is not able to stay in this valley. We can receive all these grants for parent scholarships but if we don't have teachers we won't have child care.”

“Not getting consistent pay, no benefits and never having a paid day off.”

**When asked about the why they stay in the field, providers said...**

“Early childhood is needed, and where would families go? Our waitlist is still there. We are there to support our young children and help build the future of this country.”

“Because of the impact we have on these young children and helping shape them into who they are going to be.”

“I've been in the field more than 15 years working with children of all ages and I just love my job. Being around the kiddos makes me happy.”

“I believe it is the most important job in the world.”

“My admiration for young children and their families and the importance of providing them with early opportunities that will have lasting impacts on their development and quality of life.”



## When asked **what would make them feel most valued** for their work, providers said...

“Benefits and higher pay.”

“Being recognized and valued more.”

“Better pay and fewer barriers to maintaining my license.”

“More recognition of the importance of early childhood education, more government subsidies/grants to raise pay to a livable wage for directors and teachers.”

“Getting acknowledgment, and being seen.”

“Commitment from the community on the elevation of early care and education work.”

“Wages and flex time that reflect the amount of time and energy I have devoted to ECE.”

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<sup>1</sup> This number is lower than was reported in the 2023 CECE Licensed Provider Survey report. The 2023 capacity number was adjusted downward slightly to reflect duplicate numbers reported by some providers for certain age groups.

<sup>2</sup> For small geographies like those used in this report, the share of children with all parents in the labor force can have a large margin of error. Please interpret these estimates with caution.

<sup>3</sup> Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. 2022 National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) data query. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

<sup>6</sup> Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Vital Statistics Program.

<sup>7</sup> Median family income data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

<sup>8</sup> Colorado Department of Labor and Employment. (n.d.). 2022 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics Program.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.