



# OKLAHOMA

## Solving America's Child Care Crisis

Finding and affording quality child care and early learning options shouldn't be the reason parents choose not to work. Yet for years, the high cost of quality care and the limited supply across the country have created insurmountable challenges for too many families. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, a staggering [majority of Americans](#) faced challenges finding quality child care options in their community and affording the care once they found it. Now, as families return to work, they are finding these child care challenges still exist and, in many cases, have only gotten worse - holding back families and Oklahoma's economy. There is no question [child care is an integral pillar](#) supporting Oklahoma's economic recovery and that families need a stronger system of care that works.

Wells Fargo economists, using labor market data, [calculated](#) that the historic drop in child care employment from pre-pandemic levels is affecting over 460,000 families nationwide—with a measurable impact on the U.S. workforce, particularly women.

**Oklahoma Parents Struggle to Find and Afford Quality Child Care.** In Oklahoma, many parents at every income level are unable to enter, return to, or remain in the workforce due to child care challenges, while others are forced to settle for unsafe, low-quality care arrangements they would never otherwise choose for their children, in order to work.

According to data from the [Center for American Progress](#):

- 55% of people in Oklahoma live in a child care desert.
- A child care desert is any census tract with more than 50 children under age 5 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.

Parents in Oklahoma spend an average of [\\$9,041 for center-based infant care and \\$7,236 for home-based infant care each year](#), putting quality child care options out of reach for many families.

**Pandemic relief provided by Congress prevented the industry's collapse, but didn't address systematic shortcomings that have plagued families, child care providers, and our economy for years.** The existing structure of America's child care market is unsustainable. While most parents can't find or afford quality child care options, child care providers can only charge what families in their area can afford, which often leads to near-poverty wages for early educators and ultimately an untenable business model overall.

[According to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment](#):

- In 2019, the median wage for child care workers in Oklahoma was \$9.26. For preschool teachers, the median wage was \$12.44.
- Oklahoma early educators with a bachelor's degree are paid 15.8% less than their colleagues in the K-8 system.
- The poverty rate for early educators in Oklahoma is 23.2%, much higher than for Oklahoma workers in general (10.8%) and nearly 8.9 times as high as for K-8 teachers (2.6%).

**Current Federal and State Programs [Only Serve a Fraction of Oklahoma Children](#).** Existing public investments currently only serve 93,566 children out of a total population of 287,218 under the age of six, leaving families to pay high prices out of pocket or with no care options at all. New investment from

Congress would allow Oklahoma to expand its reach to ensure that families can find and afford quality child care options that meet their needs.

- Head Start  
*Children Enrolled: 13,717 | Income Eligible Children Served: 33.31%*
- Early Head Start  
*Children Enrolled: 3,435 | Income Eligible Children Served: 5.49%*
- CCDBG and Mandatory Funds  
*Children Served: 20,164 | Income Eligible Children Served: 10.2%*
- [Oklahoma State Pre-K Program](#)  
*Children Enrolled: 42,683 | Eligible 4-Year-Olds Served: 70% | Eligible 3-Year-Olds Served: 5%*

**Voters View This as a Priority, and [Polling Shows Overwhelming Bipartisan Support](#) for Congressional Action to Address the Child Care and Early Learning Crisis:**

- 78% of Republicans, 83% of Independents, and 93% of Democrats support making child care more affordable by providing financial support to help working families pay some or all of the cost of quality care.
- 73% of Republicans, 84% of Independents, and 95% of Democrats support making preschool more available by providing it to all three- and four-year-olds whose parents want to send them.
- 79% of Republicans, 83% of Independents, and 93% of Democrats support making child care more affordable by providing all working parents, regardless of how much they pay in federal income taxes, with a tax credit to help pay for child care.

**Congress Can Help Oklahoma Families Facing Child Care Crisis:**

- Ensure families have access to high-quality, affordable child care and early learning programs that is available when and where they need it, regardless of where they live, by investing in a mixed-delivery birth through five system
- Build the supply by making smart investments in the physical infrastructure of child care facilities
- Invest in the child care workforce to expand access to quality
- Continue tax credits to support families' inability to pay for quality care