FIRST FIVE YEARS FUND

2026 STATE FACT SHEET

Child Care & Early Learning in **Nebraska**

In Nebraska, federal and state early learning opportunities serve more than **31,522** children,[1] or **21%** of children ages 5 and under.[2]

High-quality child care and early learning programs support children's healthy development while giving parents peace of mind as they work or attend school.

While several federally funded programs help working families access quality child care, limited funding leaves many eligible children unserved. These challenges not only affect families but also employers and the broader economy. Each year, child care shortages across the country impose significant economic costs on families, businesses, and state tax revenues.

Nebraska's early learning landscape operates through a mixed-delivery system of diverse programs, each with distinct eligibility requirements, funding structures, and service delivery models designed to maximize parental choice.

NEBRASKA AT-A-GLANCE

NEED

151,459
Children 5 & Under[3]

72%
Children 5 & Under with All Available Parents in the Workforce[4]

15%
Gap in Supply of Child Care vs. Potential Need[5]

COST

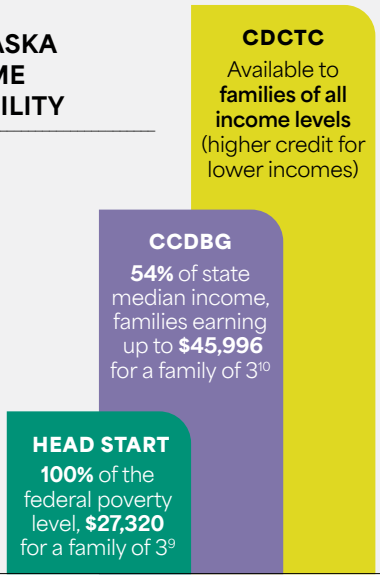
$15,080
Annual Price of Center-Based Care ($1,257 per month)[6]

$9,750
Annual Price of Home-Based Care ($813 per month)[7]

IMPACT

$1.0B
Estimated Annual Economic Impact of the Child Care Crisis[8]

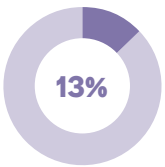
NEBRASKA INCOME ELIGIBILITY



NEBRASKA PROGRAM REACH

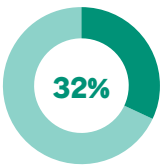
Existing federal child care and early learning programs, combined with state-funded pre-K, form a mixed delivery system that aims to meet children's individual needs. However, at current funding levels, only a fraction of eligible families are served.

CHILD CARE & DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CCDBG)
41,548 CHILDREN 5 & UNDER ELIGIBLE[11]
5,456 CHILDREN 5 & UNDER SERVED[12]



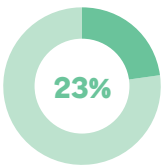
ELIGIBLE CHILDREN 5 & UNDER SERVED[13]
Based on federal eligibility (85% SMI)

HEAD START PRESCHOOL
9,921 CHILDREN ELIGIBLE[14]
3,176 CHILDREN ENROLLED[15]



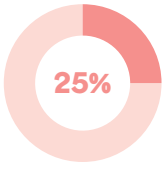
ELIGIBLE CHILDREN SERVED[16]

EARLY HEAD START
9,921 CHILDREN ELIGIBLE[17]
2,249 CHILDREN ENROLLED[18]



ELIGIBLE CHILDREN SERVED[19]

STATE-FUNDED PRE-K
12,594 CHILDREN ENROLLED[20]



3-& 4-YEAR-OLDS SERVED[21]

IDEA PART C
(EARLY INTERVENTION)
2,341 CHILDREN SERVED[22]

IDEA PART B, SEC. 619
(PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION)
4,845 CHILDREN SERVED[23]

MATERNAL, INFANT, & EARLY CHILDHOOD HOME VISITING (MIECHV)
861 CHILDREN SERVED[24]

CHILD & DEPENDENT CARE TAX CREDIT (CDCTC)
49,090 FAMILIES RECEIVED[25]

NEBRASKA

FUNDING SNAPSHOT

This section reflects the most recent funding data available, including federal funding, federally required state matching funds, and state Pre-K spending. It does not capture the full range of state investments in early learning and care.

STATE INVESTMENT

$26.5M	State-Funded Pre-K[26]
$10.6M	CCDBG State Match[27]
$1.2M	PDG B-5 State Match[28]

FEDERAL INVESTMENT

$78.6M	CCDBG and Mandatory Funds[29]
$41.1M	Head Start Preschool[30] (includes AIAN when applicable)
$37.2M	Early Head Start[31] (includes AIAN when applicable)
$4.0M	PDG B-5[32]
$2.8M	MIECHV[33]
$3.3M	IDEA Part C[34]
$2.5M	IDEA Part B, Sec. 619[35]
$0	TANF Early Care and Education[36]
$14.4M	TANF Transferred to CCDBG[37]

CCDBG

CCDBG allows states to provide child care assistance to low-income working families with children under age 13, helping parents access child care in a setting of their choice.

- Income eligibility: **54% of state median income** (**$45,996 per year** for a family of 3)[38,39]
- Monthly cost of center-based infant care
  - No subsidy: **$1,257**[40]
  - Maximum copayment with subsidy: **$290**[41]
  - Potential savings: **$967**
- **1,520** child care providers accept CCDBG subsidies[42]
- Child care workers' median wage: **$15.71 per hour** (**$32,670 per year**)[43]

States must establish child care licensing requirements, including staff-to-child ratios, to ensure children are cared for in safe, quality environments. Different rules may apply depending on the setting (e.g., center- or home-based), and some providers may be exempt from licensing requirements (e.g., faith-based programs).

The state has set the following ratios for licensed center-based care:[44]

INFANT	1:4
TODDLER	1:6
PRESCHOOL	1:10 for age 3 1:12 for age 4

Scan or click the QR code for full references and links at www.ffyf.org/factsheet26. For more information contact FFYF at mail@ffyf.org.

EARLY HEAD START/HEAD START

Early Head Start and Head Start provide high-quality early learning and comprehensive services – including health, nutrition, and family support – at no cost to eligible families. Programs are federally funded and locally administered.[45] Children are eligible based on family income, if they receive TANF, SNAP, or SSI benefits, or if they are in foster care or experiencing homelessness. Head Start programs must reserve at least 10% of enrollment slots for children with disabilities.

- Income eligibility: at or below the federal poverty level (**$27,320** for a family of 3)[46]
- In Nebraska: **21 Head Start grants** fund **141 program sites**, serving **5,425 children**.[47, 48, 49]
- This includes **57 children** through Migrant and Seasonal Head Start and **361** through American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start.[50]

PDG B-5

To date, Nebraska has been awarded **$39 million** in funds through Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5).[51]

PDG B-5 is a competitive federal grant program designed to improve states' early childhood systems. Nebraska's PDG B-5 accomplishments include:[52]

- Providing training to family child care providers on small business fundamentals, and supporting them in attaining licensure and procuring liability insurance.
- Piloting Early Childhood Community Coordinators (ECCCs) to support providers in the licensing process and connect families to key resources.

CDCTC

In 2022, **49,090** Nebraska families claimed the CDCTC.[53]

The CDCTC directly helps working parents offset the cost of child care. In 2025, the CDCTC was permanently updated for the first time since 2001. Many filers could see their credit increase by as much as $450 (for one child) or $900 (for two or more children) in tax year 2026.[54]