Child Care Supply, Demand, and Cost in Whatcom County

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Introduction

"Alice" is a single mother of two boys, ages 10 months and 2 years old. She works at a retail store in Ferndale, making \$30,000 a year. As a mother with a full-time job, Alice depends on a licensed family child care provider, "Janet," to look after her children during the week.

Janet charges \$850 per month to care for Alice's toddler and \$950 per month to care for her infant, or \$1,800 in total. Alice qualifies for the Working Connections Child Care state subsidy program, so she does not pay the full cost of care for her boys. However, even with the subsidy, she must cover a co-pay of \$180 each month, or more than \$2,000 out-of-pocket child care expenses per year. Child care remains one of Alice's largest financial responsibilities.

Janet recently raised the possibility she may retire, which would leave Alice with the difficult task of locating a licensed child care in an area with few appropriate openings. Alice constantly worries she will be forced to take time off work if she cannot find a new provider.

Alice's story is common; data confirms many families face challenges related to child care cost and availability. In a 2015 *Washington Post* survey, 77% of mothers and 50% of fathers reported having passed up an employment opportunity or switched jobs to allow more time for their children. In a survey by Care.com, 74% of working parents said child care problems affected their jobs, including by missing work, falling behind, and losing pay. This employee turnover due to child care issues also creates large costs to employers, as studies find it is increasingly expensive to replace employees in the service economy.

Research has increasingly found child care plays a significant role in a child's development. Quality child care is closely connected with the "soft skills" children build—or their social, emotional, and cognitive development—which greatly impacts their well-being later in life. Survey results show businesses seek employees who are good communicators, collaborators, and problem-solvers, meaning there is high demand within the labor market for people who possess these essential soft skills.^{iv}

Children who have experienced quality early childhood education not only make more desirable future employees; they also perform better in school, are healthier, earn higher incomes, and are less likely to be convicted of a crime. James Heckman, a University of Chicago economist and Nobel Laureate, found every dollar spent on a high-quality early childhood education program in North Carolina produced a benefit to society of \$7.30, after calculating the effects reduced unemployment, crime, and poor health. Investment in high-quality care yielded a return of 13% per year—a higher return than most stocks, as Heckman noted in an interview. Additionally, low-income children tended to benefit the most from high-quality child care by improving their school performance and earning higher-than-expected incomes.

Increasing the availability of high-quality child care also expands economic opportunity today. Among nonworking individuals with low-incomes raising young children, 70% list

"taking care of home/family" as the reason they don't seek employment. Many parents fall into poverty when they cannot find a safe, affordable, quality environment for their children while they work. When high-quality care is accessible, parents are freed up to join the workforce or pursue higher education.

As a recent US Chamber of Commerce report argues, supporting high-quality child care is "wise investment in America's future," because it helps parents move up the economic ladder today and puts children on the path to success tomorrow. Child care in Whatcom County is expensive and difficult to find, and working families like Alice's need their community's help.

Child Care Supply and Demand in Whatcom County

There are 11,578 children under five years old in Whatcom County, and 7,724 of those children have parents who work full-time.* Working families need somebody to take care of their children during the day, a responsibility that is often entrusted to a licensed child care provider.

However, with 41 child care centers, 44 family child care providers, and 24 school-age only providers in Whatcom County, there are only 3,260 licensed child care slots available to children—and only 2,903 of those slots accept some form child care of subsidy.*i This means that 4,464 children in Whatcom County, or about 58%, are potentially left without the option to attend licensed child care when their family members go to work. This trend is worsening, as Whatcom County child care capacity dropped by 8% from 2012 to December of 2017.*ii

Due to this shortage, many families spend months—and sometimes years—on waiting lists. In 2017, over 300 children were on the Whatcom YMCA's waiting list between its two locations.

Outside of home based- or center-based licensed care, many young children in Whatcom County receive care from family, friends, or neighbors (FFN). Different national studies estimate between 33–53% of children under 5 with working parents or family members receive care through FFN, or other informal ways.xiii However, many families lack the option of bringing their children to FFN care. Though estimating the disconnect between child care supply and demand is difficult, it is clear there is low capacity in Whatcom County.

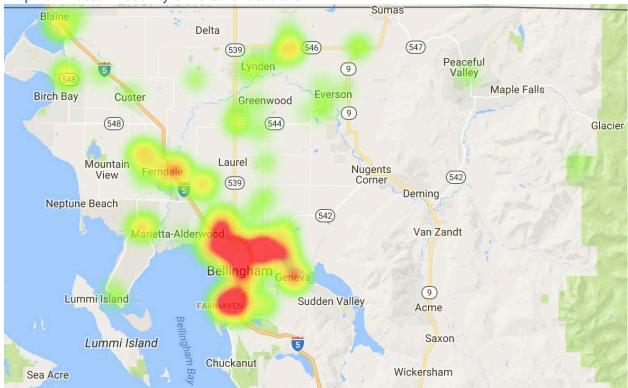
Families in Whatcom County also struggle with the high cost of child care. A recent report by Child Care Aware of America ranked Washington as the third most expensive state in the United States for home-based infant child care, and Whatcom County follows this trend.** In 2017, the median cost of enrolling an infant in family home-based child care in Whatcom County was \$910 monthly, about 20% of the area household median income.** For families with two or more young children the financial burden is even higher. The data provided in the section below highlights the fact that infant child care remains prohibitively expensive and rare in Whatcom County.

Parts of Whatcom County, especially rural areas, may be classified as child care deserts, defined by Child Care Aware of America as "areas or communities with limited or no access to quality child care." xvi

Mapping the Gap

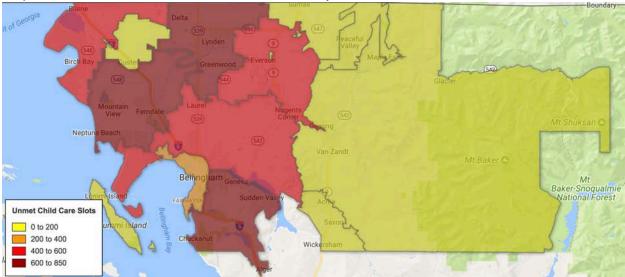
This report identifies areas in Whatcom County that most lack child care capacity. Maps A-G show child care supply and its costs, and leave no doubt that Whatcom County is unaffordable and inaccessible for many families.

Map A: Whatcom County child care locations



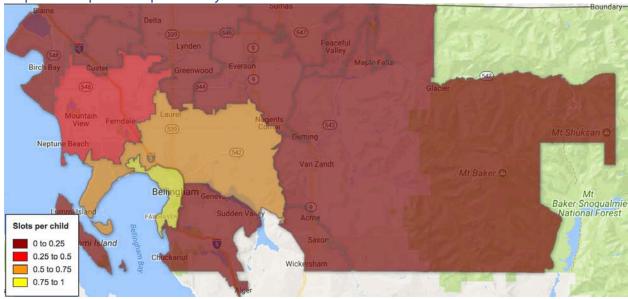
Map A shows a heat-map of current locations of child care centers and family child care homes in Whatcom County. Most providers are clustered in Bellingham, Whatcom County's most populous city.





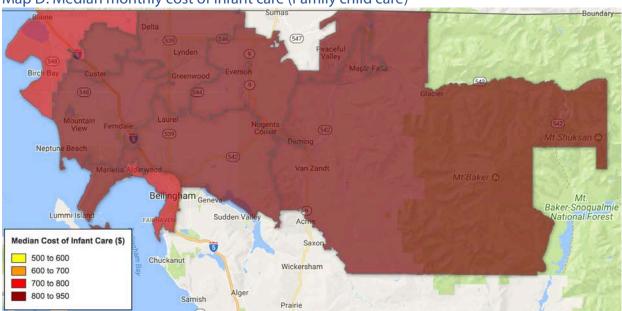
Map B shows the estimated number of unmet child care slots for each zip code in Whatcom County: the darker the area, the higher number of unmet slots. This metric was calculated by subtracting total child care capacity, including centers and family-home based care, from the total number of children whose available parents are in the labor force. This metric may underestimate child care need in lowly populated, rural areas. For instance, the zip code that includes Sumas (98295) has zero child care locations, but is yellow on the map because there is a smaller population of children in the area. It should also be noted this metric does not account for family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) providers.





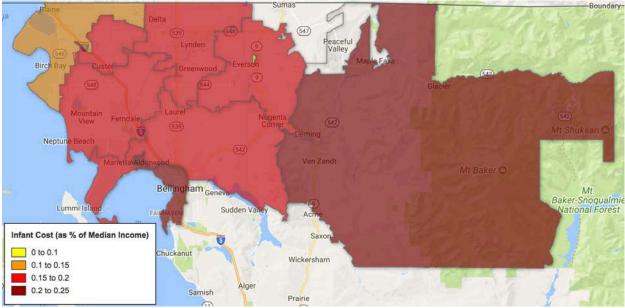
Map C shows the child care slots available per child with all parents in the labor force: the darker the zip code, the lower the average slots available per child. Dark red zip codes show areas that have between 0–.25 slots available per child, and are most in need of increases in child care capacity. This map demonstrates there are four children for every licensed child

care slot in many parts of the county. A further analysis of these data would account for drive times, as it is likely many families from rural parts of Whatcom County find child care within Bellingham. FFN providers are also not accounted for in this metric.



Map D: Median monthly cost of infant care (Family child care)



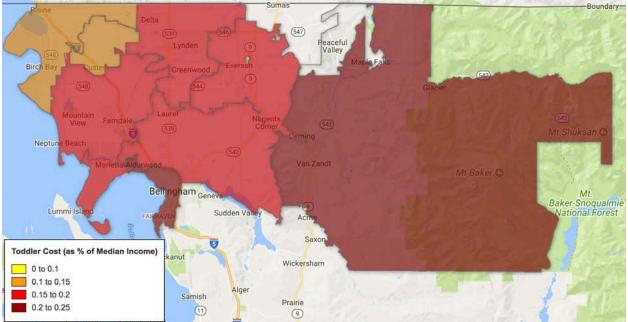


Maps D and E show the median cost of family home infant care for each zip code that cost data was available. The first map shows raw cost data, while the second map compares that cost data to area median incomes. Receiving infant care from a family home provider usually costs over \$800 monthly, or around 15–20% the area median income.



Map F: Median monthly cost of toddler care (Family child care)





Maps F and G highlight the cost of family home child care for toddlers in each Whatcom County zip code where data was available. Map F shows raw data for the cost of family home toddler care, while Map G compares those costs to local median incomes. In most parts of Whatcom County, family home toddler care costs more than \$800 per month, more than 15% of the area median income.

Economics of Child Care: Providers

In 2017, Child Care Aware of Washington referred 387 Whatcom County families with 541 children to licensed child care providers; 68% of those children were seeking providers that accepted Working Connections state subsidy.*vii While Working Connections is an essential program for parents to access child care, the subsidy is lower than market rates, which presents challenges to providers. The Department of Early Learning is currently conducting a survey to help determine subsidy rates in the future.

Monthly cost of child care - Whatcom County, 2017xviii

Center	Median rate	State subsidy rate ¹	Difference	
Infant	\$997	\$986	(\$11)	
Toddler	\$914	\$822	(\$92)	
Preschool	\$819	\$710	(\$109)	
School age	\$555	\$350 (half-day rate)	(\$205)	

Monthly cost of child care – Whatcom County, 2017

Family home	Median rate	State subsidy rate	Difference
Infant	\$910	\$928	\$18
Toddler	\$823	\$785	(\$38)
Preschool	\$771	\$785	(\$14)
School age	\$386	\$323 (half-day rate)	(\$63)

For example, consider a center that charges standard market rates. If that center takes three toddlers and one preschooler who receive the Working Connections Child Care subsidy, it would potentially lose \$385 in revenue per week. Over the course of the year, that cost (\$19,250) is comparable to the average compensation of a child care center teacher (\$26,316). In other words, if the Working Connections subsidy matched market rates, that center could afford to hire an extra teacher at least 30 hours per week.xix

Low subsidy rates may be one reason why many providers may choose not to accept state subsidy—a situation that further limits options families who use the Working Connections program. Child care is difficult for any family to find, but it is especially challenging for families

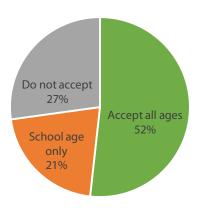
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¹ State subsidy rates include Washington State's contribution, as well as a family's co-pay. For example, if the infant subsidy rate is listed as \$986 and a family has a co-pay of \$65 per month, a child care provider would receive \$921 from the state and \$65 from the family. Families that earn 0%–82% the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) have a \$15 co-pay per month. The Working Connections co-pay increases as a family's income rises, until the subsidy begins to phase out at 201% the FPL.

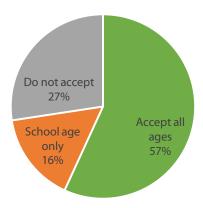
who receive subsidy. According to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, there is a gap of 253 infants and toddlers in the Bellingham School District who are eligible to receive subsidy, but are not currently being served.^{xx}

While there are 3,260 licensed child care slots available to children in the County, only 2,903 of those slots accept some form child care of subsidy (including local subsidies and other forms of financial assistance). Just 52% of providers in Whatcom County accept the Working Connections Child Care state subsidy for children of all ages, which is 5% lower than the statewide numbers.^{xxi}

Providers that accept state subsidy - Whatcom County



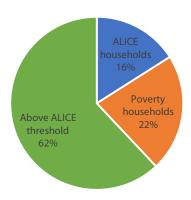
Providers that accept state subsidy - Washington State



Economics of Child Care: Working families

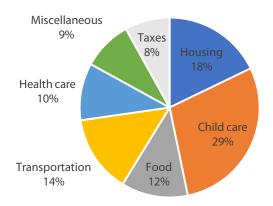
United Way of Whatcom County's 2014 ALICE report reveals a difficult picture for working families. **xiii* ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed and refers to a large proportion of the population that earns more than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but not enough to afford a basic household budget. Added together, the number of poverty and ALICE households equals the total population that struggle to meet basic needs.

ALICE Households - Whatcom County



The ALICE report determines a family with two adults, one infant, and one toddler needs to earn an income \$59,520 per year to meet their basic needs. Child care is the largest expense these families face each month.

ALICE Survival budget for a family of four - Whatcom County



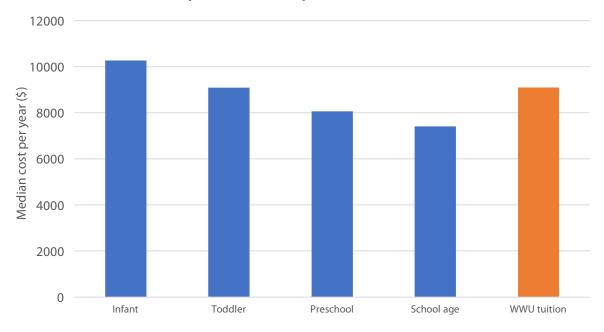
More recently, a 2017 report by the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County calculated a "self-sufficiency standard" for various Whatcom County family structures. The report reveals that most families must earn well-above the minimum wage to afford their basic needs. Child care constitutes the largest cost each month for many families with young children—and the financial situation is even more difficult in single parent homes.

The Self Sufficiency Standard – Whatcom County, 2017

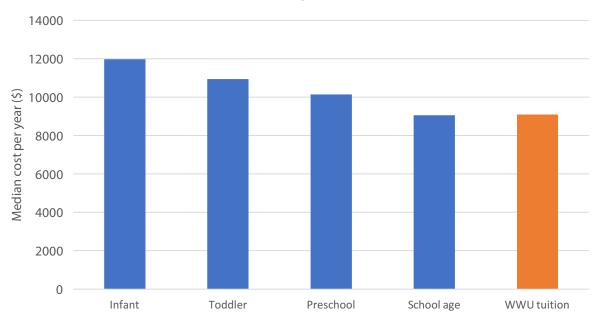
Family type	Monthly child care	Total monthly costs	Self-sufficiency wage
	costs		
Adult, preschooler	\$838	\$3,625	\$20.59/hour
Adult, infant, preschooler	\$1,769	\$4,910	\$27.90/hour
2 adults, infant	\$931	\$4,340	\$12.33/hour per adult
2 adults, infant, preschooler	\$1,769	\$5,472	\$15.54/hour per adult

The cost of college tuition is often mentioned in discussions of rising economic inequality. However, the yearly cost of child care is often more expensive than the aggregate cost of tuition, books, and fees at Western Washington University. **xiv*









"We meet families every day that struggle with child care. I know of one parent who lived in Bellingham and drove all the way to Mount Vernon for child care because she wasn't able find anything locally. Increasing access to safe, high-quality early learning environments improves the lives of all families, helps local businesses, and improves our schools. It's an economic investment that pays off." – Mike Riber, Community Service Administrator at Washington State DSHS, Bellingham office

Quality of Care: Early Achievers

Child care accessibility is not simply about cost or supply; it is also about quality.

Early Achievers is Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which gives coaching, technical assistance, scholarships, and other benefits to child care providers to improve the quality of their care. The Early Start Act, which was passed by the Washington State Legislature in 2015, requires child care providers who accept children under age five on Working Connections to join Early Achievers.

Child care providers that participate in Early Achievers are given a rating on a scale of one to five stars. At Levels 1 and 2, child care providers participate in quality improvement activities. Facilities can achieve Levels 3 through 5 by demonstrating a quality level of care through an on-site evaluation.**

A Washington state study funded by the Department of Early Learning and the Gates Foundation investigated the impact of coaching on child care quality. According to Ryan Pricco, Policy and Advocacy Director of Child Care Aware of Washington, "The biggest

takeaway [of the study] is that using a coaching approach—where programs have a coach on site with them, working hand in hand with them to make daily improvements to their interactions with kids or simple improvements to their environment—very quickly and efficiently improved the quality of care."xxvi

As of March 2018, **76% of Whatcom County's providers were enrolled in Early Achievers,** including 72% of family-home providers and 80% of child care centers.

The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) observes and records kindergarten readiness through six domains: social-emotional, physical, cognitive, language, literacy, and mathematics. As James Heckman's research shows, children who experience high-quality child care—or those who attend programs that receive Early Achievers coaching—are more likely to be prepared to enter kindergarten on-grade level.

Whatcom County Child Care Trends

The overall trends are clear: the Whatcom County child care market is characterized by high costs and low capacity of high-quality care. In particular, infant care is expensive and difficult to find.

Child care capacity has declined 8% since 2012, when there were spots for 3,555 children, compared to the 3,260 licensed spots today. In 2016, there were 110 providers in Whatcom County, compared to 147 providers in 2012—more than a 25% drop in four years. Capacity for children who receive the Working Connections state subsidy is even lower, with only 1,751 spots available for children of all ages.

While more child care locations are needed throughout the county, Ferndale, Lynden, and the southern edge of Bellingham in particular suffer the most from a lack of child care capacity. Rural households face especially difficult challenges in terms of child care locations and expenses. Parents in rural areas often have to travel far distances to find care for their children, and low competition in unpopulated areas drives up costs.

Most zip codes in Whatcom County have fewer than .25 slots for every child that may need care. In these areas, there are four children with working parents for every one licensed child care slot. In Lynden and its surrounding area, there is one slot for every five children with all available parents in the labor force. In the county as a whole, 58% of children with all parents in the workforce are potentially left without a licensed child care slot (though some of these children are cared for by family, friends, or neighbors).

Lack of access to child care is made worse by the fact that care is unaffordable where it is offered. As the most recent United Way ALICE report on Whatcom County reveals, child care is the biggest expense many families face. In particular, families who must pay the full cost of care because they are not income eligible for the Working Connections Child Care subsidy sometimes allocate around 30% of their budget to child care expenses. Overall, the yearly

cost of child care—which is more expensive than tuition at Western Washington University—is unaffordable, even for many middle-class families.

Working families in Bellingham experience the highest child care costs, but child care is prohibitively expensive throughout the County, with costs for family home-based infant care hovering around one-fifth of the median income in most areas. The median cost of infant care from a family child care provider was over \$800 per month in 7 of the 9 zip codes this report analyzed. In 8 of those 9 zip codes, the cost of infant care from a family home provider exceeded 15% of the area median income.

The median cost of toddler care is slightly lower than the cost of infant care, but is still expensive. Throughout Whatcom County, the cost of putting a toddler in family home-based care was more than 10% of the median income. In 7 out of the 9 zip codes analyzed, the cost of care for one toddler exceeded 15% of median income. These statistics only reflect the price of family home child care—and center-based care tends to be even more expensive.

The Opportunity Council and its community partners should prioritize increasing child care capacity—particularly infant care—in Lynden, Ferndale, the southern outskirts of Bellingham, and rural parts of Whatcom County, such as Sumas. Child care is increasingly expensive and difficult to find, and Whatcom County working families need relief.

Recommendations to Increase Child Care Access

A Child Care Action Team was convened in October of 2017 during Generations Forward, a conference organized by the Whatcom County Public Health Department. The Action Team's goal is to increase child care affordability, access, and capacity in Whatcom County, and it includes members from local nonprofits, child care centers, the Department of Early Learning, and the Department of Social and Health Services, among others.

Increasing child care access will require collaboration between various community partners, including parents, providers, private, and businesses. This section includes recommendations of ways the Child Care Action Team and others in the Whatcom community can effectively increase high-quality, affordable child care capacity throughout the County.

Public and private investment in early childhood education – Investments in early childhood education at the city and state level could help alleviate the high costs of child care for working families. University of Chicago economist, James Heckman, has proven public investment in early childhood improves public schools, reduces crime, and develops healthier, more skilled workers in tomorrow's workforce.xxvii

The Imagine Institute—a non-profit 501(c)(3) developed jointly through a collective bargaining agreement with the Department of Early Learning and SEIU 925—is a good example of a public investment that builds high-quality child care capacity. The Institute facilitates mentorships and financial incentives for potential family-home providers who

agree to accept the Working Connections Child Care subsidy. The Opportunity Council is exploring possible collaborations with the Imagine Institute

The Capital Budget recently signed into law by Governor Inslee includes \$15.5 million in grants and funds to build or modernize early learning facilities for programs that participate in Early Achievers, including school districts. These funds present an opportunity for private providers to use public funds to increase the quality of their programs.

The Washington State Legislature reviewed additional ways to support child care and early learning during the 2018 legislative session. Some possible solutions to increase child care access include:

- Creating loan repayments and scholarships for individuals who pursue early childhood education and agree to provide early learning services once their education is complete.
- Convening a taskforce of business leaders, child care providers, and policymakers that examines the business of child care and potential solutions to raise capacity.
- Funding and designing business training modules and professional development opportunities to help providers expand their businesses.
- Making the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) a fully funded entitlement program, and raising the income eligibility for ECEAP to 185% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Community leaders can enhance Whatcom County's economy and increase the supply of child care by promoting workforce development for child care providers. With a low supply of providers and a high demand for child care in Whatcom County, now is the time to invest early childhood education.

Job training and workforce development to increase the number of child care businesses –

Opening a child care business offers a path to economic self-sufficiency. A 2011 study by the University of Connecticut analyzed a project that provides technical support to home-based child care businesses. The benefits were significant: by the second-year half of participating providers increased their earnings by at least \$10,000, and by the third year almost 90% of providers raised their earnings by \$5,000. Over three years, almost a third of providers moved to a larger apartment or house to expand their business.

Both center- and home-based child care businesses substantially contribute to the local economy. Child care tends to have large multiplier effects—the indirect impact on employment, earnings, and other economic factors—in a local area. According to a recent US Chamber of Commerce report, "The regional impact of [child care] spending is amplified because the production, delivery, and consumption of child care are entirely local." For instance, a 2013 study in Missouri found that for every dollar spent on child care, an additional \$1.87 was generated within the state, and concluded "early care and education offers one of the smartest ways to create additional buying power for consumers and help local companies stay in business."

Business supports to child care – Research and survey data confirms child care concerns affect the productivity, happiness, and reliability of workers. In a 2015 *Washington Post* survey, 77% of mothers and 50% of fathers reported having passed up an employment opportunity or switched jobs to allow more time for their children. Whatcom County business leaders can help grow the local economy and benefit their workers by offering child care vouchers for their employees, or by voicing their support for early childhood education to elected officials and the wider community.

The apparel company, Patagonia, provides on-site child care at its corporate headquarters and distribution center. Over the past five years, turnover among Patagonia employees who use its child care program is 25% lower than the turnover rate of the company's overall workforce. After tax benefits and employee retention, engagement, and happiness are accounted for, Patagonia's CEO estimates a 115%–125% return on investment on their child care program. Other companies find similar results: JP Morgan Chase Bank, N.A. has estimated a return of 115% on its child care program.

Top employers in Whatcom County include St. Joseph Hospital, BP Cherry Point, T-Mobile, and retail businesses, such as Haggen and Fred Meyer. XXXIII By supporting child care, these employers can improve employee productivity and retention, while building a strong workforce in the future. As a recent US Chamber of Commerce report demonstrates, "For American business, advancing high-quality child care is a winning proposition."

Top Priorities

Solutions are needed to strengthen child care access in Whatcom County. Community partners and the Generations Forward team can work towards increasing child care capacity and affordability in the County by:

- Collaborating with the Imagine Institute to recruit and train individuals who show an
 interest in opening family child cares that would accept state subsidy. This includes
 finding parents or FFN providers who are curious about becoming fully licensed
 providers.
- Investigating how local school districts can support child care. The newly available \$15.5 million in early learning grants present an opportunity for school districts to become more involved in early childhood education.
- Continuing to collect data on the state of child care in Whatcom County. The
 Opportunity Council is currently collaborating with the Bellingham-Whatcom
 Chamber of Commerce to survey businesses about their employees' child care
 concerns. Community partners can help market this survey, and ask their
 organizations respond.
- Creating connections with businesses that show interest in supporting child care.
 Community partners can work with private business to explore voucher systems,
 dependent spending accounts, or the possibility of on-site child care. Patagonia
 provided the Opportunity Council with an "On-site Child Care Toolkit" that can be
 distributed to interested employers.

• Utilizing resources developed by the Department of Early Learning, including the ECEAP Pathway Toolkit, a child care training module and handbook.

Data and Methodology

Using survey data of providers collected by Child Care Aware of Washington, this report examined different measures of child care supply, the current locations of center and family child cares, and the cost of family home-based care for infants and toddlers compared to the median income per zip code. The number of children under age five and median income for each zip code was found through the Census 2012–2016 American Community Survey five-year estimates. Maps were created using Google Fusion Tables.

This report examined child care supply in Whatcom County using two different metrics: unmet child care slots and unmet slots per child. The number of unmet slots was calculated by subtracting total child care capacity from the total number of children whose available parents are in the labor force in each Whatcom County zip code. Slots per child in need of care was calculated by dividing the number child care of slots by the number of children with all available parents in the labor force.

The methodology used to find the number of unmet slots per zip code and slots per child in need followed the methods used in "Mapping the Gap: Examining Child Care Across the County," a report issued by Child Care Aware of America that analyzed child care capacity in Alaska and Massachusetts. The introduction and the recommendations section drew heavily from the US Chamber of Commerce report, "Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Child Care," authored by Katharine B. Stevens.

Clusters of supply or demand on the border of a zip code boundary may distort the calculations of both the number of unmet slots and the average slots per child in need of care. Many children may live near Lake Padden (98229), but go to a child care provider located in downtown Bellingham (98225 and 98226). A more in-depth estimate of child care supply in the future might include an analysis of drive times in Whatcom County.

Zip code boundaries differ slightly from county boundaries. This report used data from each zip code that would at least partially be included in Whatcom County. Data was unavailable in some zip codes for the maps showing child care costs.

scaling-back-at-work-to-care-for-their-kids/2015/08/06/c7134c50-3ab7-11e5-b3ac-8a79bc44e5e2_story.html?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.903ae533a20b

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