

Child Care Supply, Demand, and Cost in Whatcom County



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Revised by Rae Larson, Year 2 Small Business Development VISTA
Email: Rae_Larson@oppco.org
Original research by Josh Peck, Year 1 Small Business Development VISTA

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Introduction

Melissa is a single mother of two children, an 8-month-old girl, *Sara*, and 2.5-year-old boy, *Toby*. She manages a retail store in Bellingham, making \$45,000 a year. As a mother with a full-time job, Melissa depends on a licensed family child care provider, *Kathrine*, to look after her children during the week.

Melissa pays Kathrine \$860 per month to care for Sara and \$975 per month to care for Toby, or \$1,835 in total. Her yearly cost of child care is \$22,020 or a whopping 49% of her yearly budget. Melissa is just barely making ends meet. There are many times in which her other bills suffer as a result of this high cost, and she is concerned that her power may be shut off due to late payments. Visits to the food bank help stretch her food dollars, but she will often skip breakfast or dinner to make sure her children have enough to eat. A new grinding sound from under the hood of her car fills her with dread, and she has no idea how she will manage without transportation. As Melissa survives paycheck to paycheck, she continually seeks ways to make sure her children have the best child care possible because she knows that safe and nurturing early learning experiences will impact them now and for the rest of their lives.

Melissa and her family are not alone, in fact they are part of a large number of ALICEⁱ families in this community. Finding and paying for child care in Whatcom County is extremely difficult and the number of quality licensed child care slots is limited and overwhelmingly expensive.

Access to child care and early learning is both a family issue and a broader economic concern, and as such, it should be addressed both at national and local levels. This is a sizable and interconnected challenge that impacts everyone in our community, not just families who currently have small children. Local investment in child care capacity supports the economic interests of the community as well as individual families like Melissa's.

According to a recent Ready Nationⁱⁱ national survey "[a]most two-thirds of parents facing child care struggles report leaving work early and more than half report being distracted or missing full days of work."¹ 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 children². In a survey by Care.com, 74% of working parents said child care problems affected their jobs, including missing work, falling behind, and losing pay.³ 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.⁴

ⁱ ALICE is an acronym defined by the United Way which stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed. This is a large percentage of the population that earns more than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but not enough to balance a needs-based household budget. ALICE families are sometimes known as "the working poor".

ⁱⁱ Ready Nation is the business sector of the Council for a Strong America, which is a national, bipartisan nonprofit organization that brings together law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes to promote solutions to domestic public health issues.

Notably, neurological and sociological research has increasingly found child care plays a significant role in a child's development. Quality child care is closely connected with soft skills children build—or their social, emotional, and cognitive development—which greatly impacts their well-being later in life.⁵

Survey results, such as those of the National Association of Colleges and Employers, show that 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.⁶ This also coincides with an increased focus on executive functions in the educational and business communities.

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.⁷

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.⁸ Investment in high-quality care yielded a return of 13% per year—a higher return than most stocks, as Heckman noted in an interview.⁹ Additionally, according to this research, children from families experiencing low incomes, compared to children from other income brackets, tend to benefit the most from high-quality child care by improving their school performance and earning higher than projected future incomes.

Increasing the availability of high-quality child care also cultivates economic opportunities for families and businesses today. Among individuals raising young children who are experiencing low incomes and are currently outside of the workforce, 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.¹⁰ When high-quality care is accessible, families are able to join the workforce or pursue higher education. However, when licensed child care is difficult to access, families struggle to stay employed or enrolled in school.

As a 2017 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.¹¹ In addition, Ready Nation’s survey and analytical data calculates “substantial economic losses when families of children under 3 do not have adequate child care.” They found that for families with young children, the impacts of work-time commitment issues, reduced productivity, and long-term career stagnation translate into sizable economic burdens for the families themselves, employers and their firms, and the overall tax system.¹²

Child Care Supply and Demand in Whatcom County

Licensed Child Care

Licensed child care as defined by the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) are providers that follow foundational quality standards called the Washington Administrative Code (WAC). These standards are “...set by the state to ensure children in licensed care are in safe, healthy, and nurturing environments.”¹³

Based on census data, there are 13,308 children five years old or younger in Whatcom County,¹⁴ and 8,070 children of that age group for whom all the parents in their households work full-time.¹⁵ Working families need somebody to take care of their children during the day, and frequently during nights and weekends as well. This care is a responsibility that is often entrusted to a licensed child care provider.

However, as of September 2019, with 51 child care centers, 42 family child care providers, and 23 school-age providers in Whatcom County, there is only a total capacity of 3,608 licensed child care slots.ⁱⁱⁱ Overall, 4,462 children in Whatcom County, or about 55%, are potentially left without the option to attend licensed child care when their family members go to work. Additionally, **only 3,199 of those slots accept some form of child care subsidy.¹⁶** Although, from January 2013 to December of 2018, the child care capacity of Whatcom County increased by 7%, this increase has not increased enough to meet the needs of Whatcom County’s population.¹⁷

Child care for shift-work with non-traditional hours and overnight care is also a concern for working families. There are **0 centers** in Island, San Juan, Whatcom, Snohomish, and Skagit Counties that offer overnight care. Moreover, **only 3 centers in the entirety of Washington State offer this service.** In comparison, there are 23 **family child care providers** that are licensed for overnight care in the NW Region, but only 15 of them are currently posting hours after midnight. **None of these providers are in Whatcom County and the majority are in Snohomish County.**

Due to this shortage, many families spend months—and sometimes years—on waiting lists. **For example, over 200 children were on the Whatcom YMCA’s waiting list between its two locations in 2019.**

ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, many child care centers accept lower enrollment to decrease the ratio between student and teacher. In Whatcom County, this means that although there are 3,608 total licensed child care slots, there is only an accepted capacity of 3,318 slots. This reduces the number by 290. These numbers are self-reported, as compared to the total licensed capacity, which is determined by DCYF licensing regulations.

Alternative/Unlicensed Child Care

Family, friends, or neighbors (FFN) care is an alternative to licensed child care. According to DCYF, “FFN providers are unlicensed and not regulated by the state, although some FFN providers can receive child care subsidies for the care they provide.”¹⁸ Access to FFN as a resource is dependent on pre-existing relationships. A number of national studies estimate **between 33–53% of children under five with working parents or family members receive care through informal means, including FFN.**¹⁹

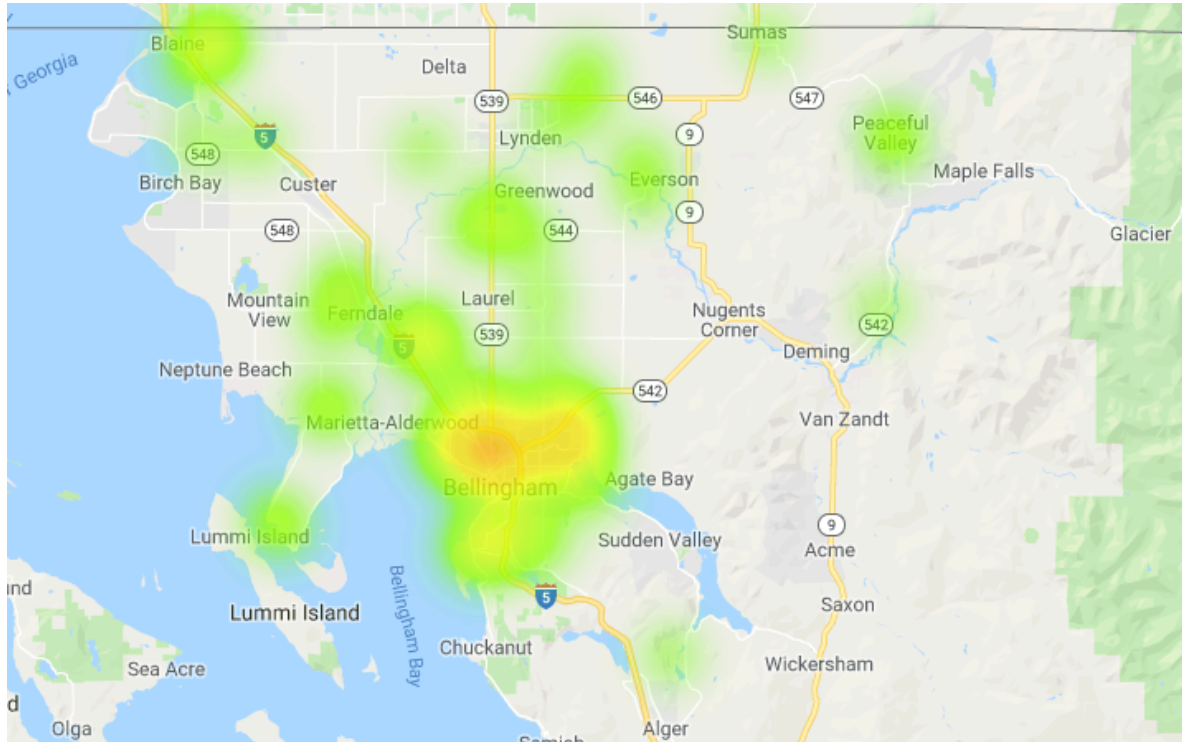
However, many families lack the option of using FFN care because they do not have a preexisting relationship with an available caregiver. Without a trusted friend or family member to turn to, some parents without access to licensed child care are forced to cobble together alternatives that can potentially lead to unsafe situations, instability, lost wages, and unemployment. Moreover, it is difficult to assess and improve the quality of informal and unlicensed child care. As a result, children may not be in optimal learning environments to reach development milestones. A lack of quality within an early learning environment can have detrimental impacts on children and have disastrous effects on their kindergarten readiness.



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Mapping the Gap in Whatcom County

Map A: Location of Child Care Providers in Whatcom County



Map A is a heat map of the current location of child care centers and family child care homes in Whatcom County as of September 2019. Most providers are clustered in Bellingham, Whatcom County's most populous city.

The Whatcom County child care market is characterized by high costs and low availability of high-quality care. **In particular, infant care is expensive and difficult to find.**

In Whatcom County, the number of child care providers has risen from 109 with a total licensed capacity of 3,260 (2018) to 116 providers with a total licensed capacity of 3,608 (2019).²⁰ However, it is important to note that the supply of licensed child care slots has not increased enough to meet the needs of Whatcom County's population of young children with families that work full-time (8,070). Moreover, not all existing capacity is sustainable under the current child care financing dynamics.^{iv}

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.

^{iv} See the Economics of Child Care: Providers subsection for more information.

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 face distinctive barriers. Parts of Whatcom County, especially rural areas, are classified as child care deserts, defined by the Center for American Progress as “areas with an insufficient supply of licensed child care”, or “... a ZIP code with at least 30 children under the age of 5 and either no child care centers or so few centers that there are more than three times as many children under age 5 as there are spaces in centers.”²¹

Most Whatcom County zip codes have less than .25 slots per child. This means that in these areas, **there are four children with working parents for every one licensed child care slot**. This number is even more dramatic in areas like Ferndale and Lynden.

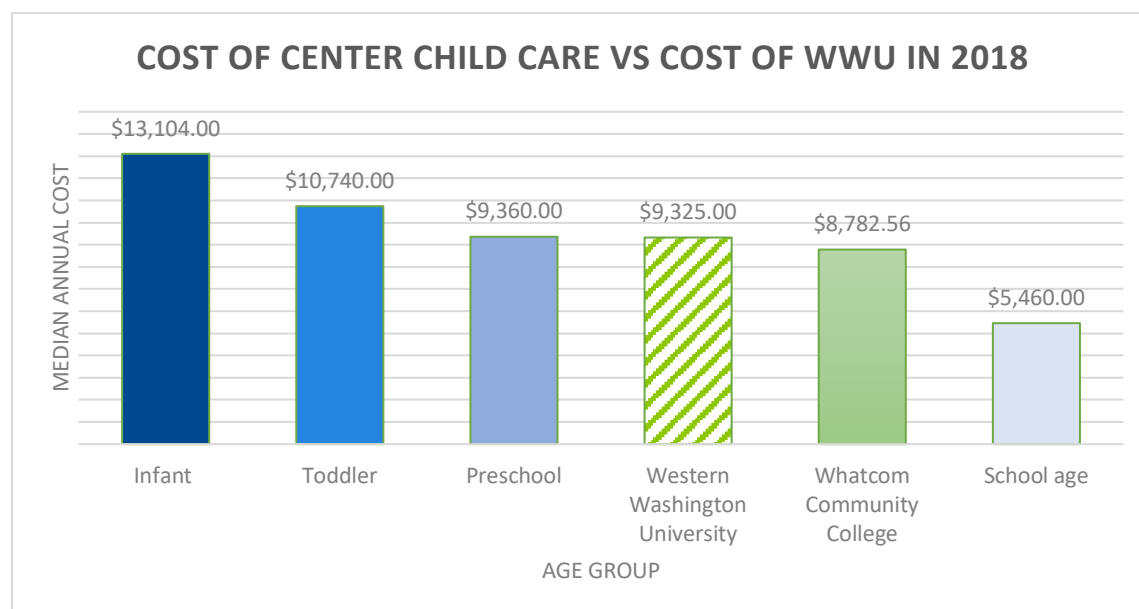
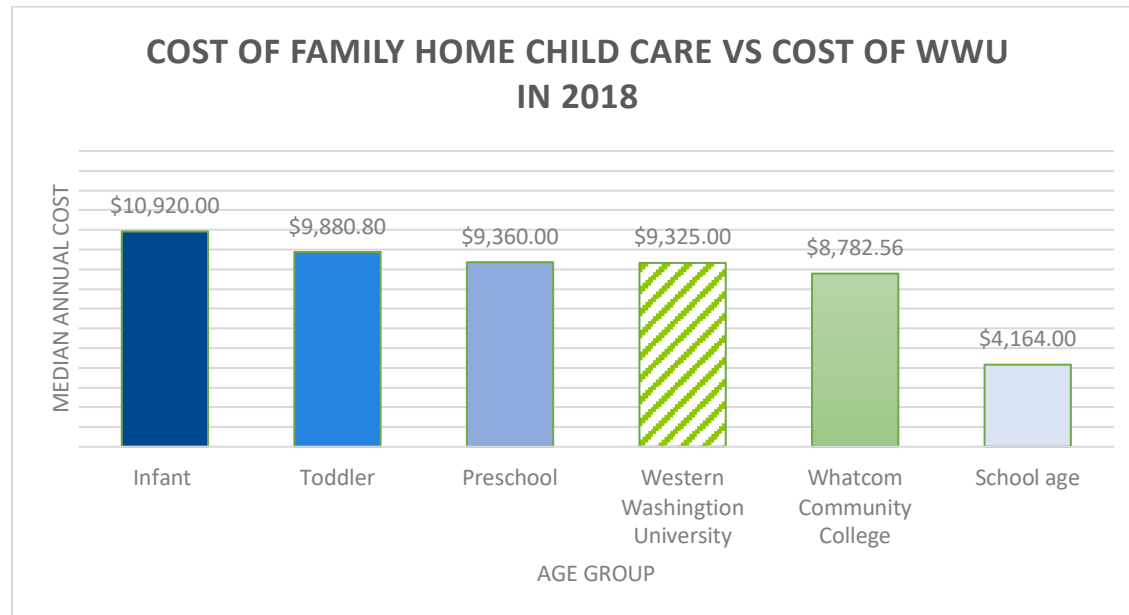
Economics of Child Care: Cost of Care

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 2018, the median cost of enrolling an infant in family home-based child care in Whatcom County was \$975 monthly. For families with two or more young children, like Melissa’s, the financial burden is even higher.

Child care is the greatest expense many families face. Overall, the yearly cost of child care—which is more expensive than tuition at Western Washington University²² or Whatcom Community College²³—is unaffordable, even for many middle-class families.



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 **combined** cost of tuition, books, and fees at Western Washington University^v or Whatcom Community College.^{vi}

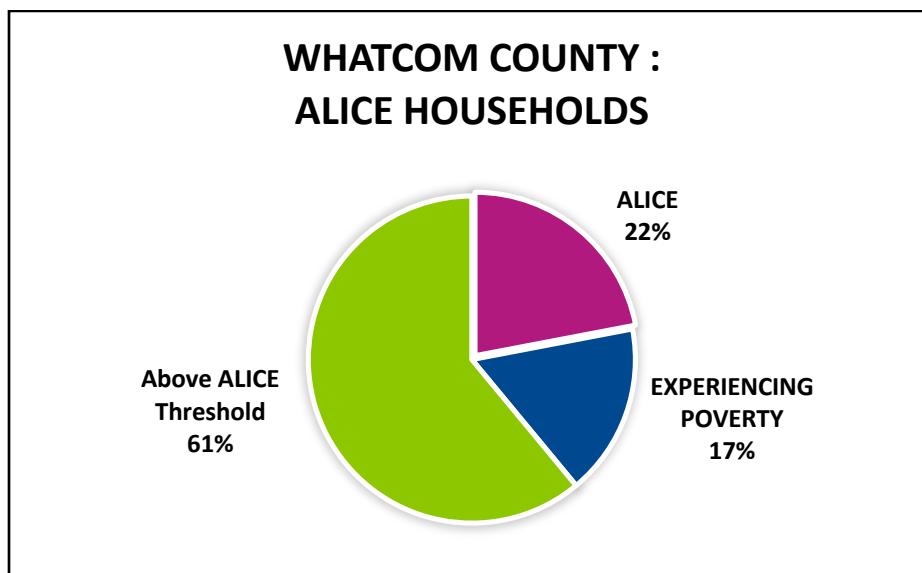


^v This amount was calculated using the estimated annual expenses for 2018–2019 from Western Washington University. It is a combination of the annual cost of tuition (\$6,387), fees (\$2,014), and books (\$924).

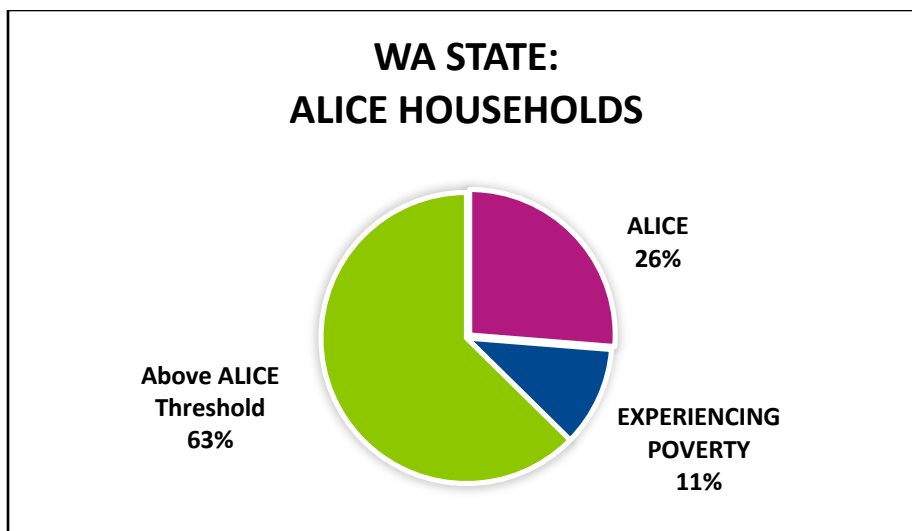
^{vi} This amount was calculated using the upper division tuition table for 2018–2019 from Whatcom Community College. It is a combination of the annual cost of tuition and fees for 18 credits (\$7,582.56), and the cost of books (\$1,200).

Economics of Child Care: Working Families

United Way of Whatcom County's 2016 ALICE report illuminates some of the hardship working families in this county face. ALICE families often struggle to make ends meet yet are not eligible to receive public benefits. Reviewing data from ALICE families provides a broader picture of Whatcom County's financial landscape. The number of households experiencing poverty combined with the number of ALICE households equals the total population that struggle to meet basic needs. **In other words, 39% or 4 out of 10 families are facing substantial financial hardship in Whatcom County.**

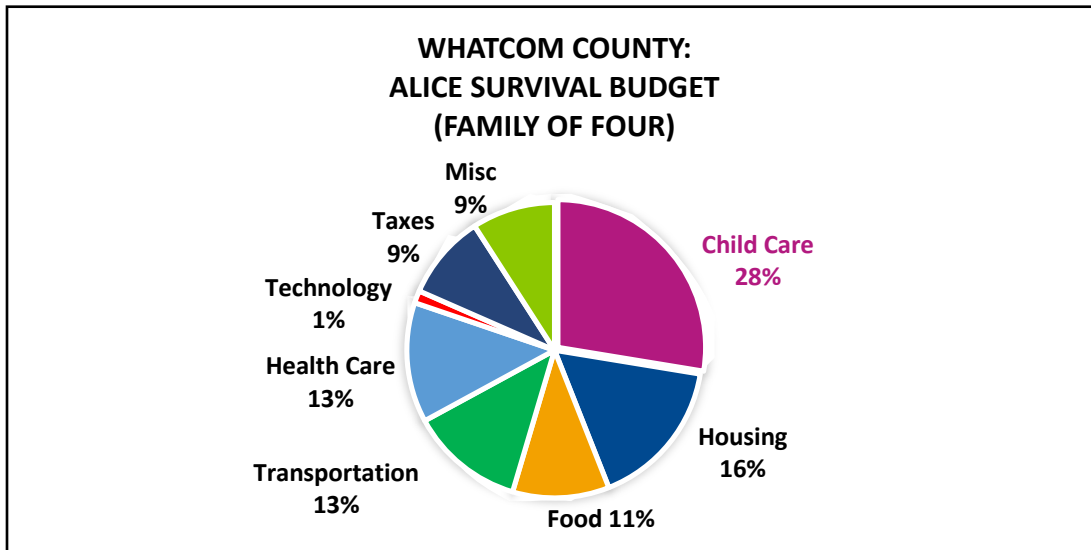


Whatcom County Median Household Income: \$56,411

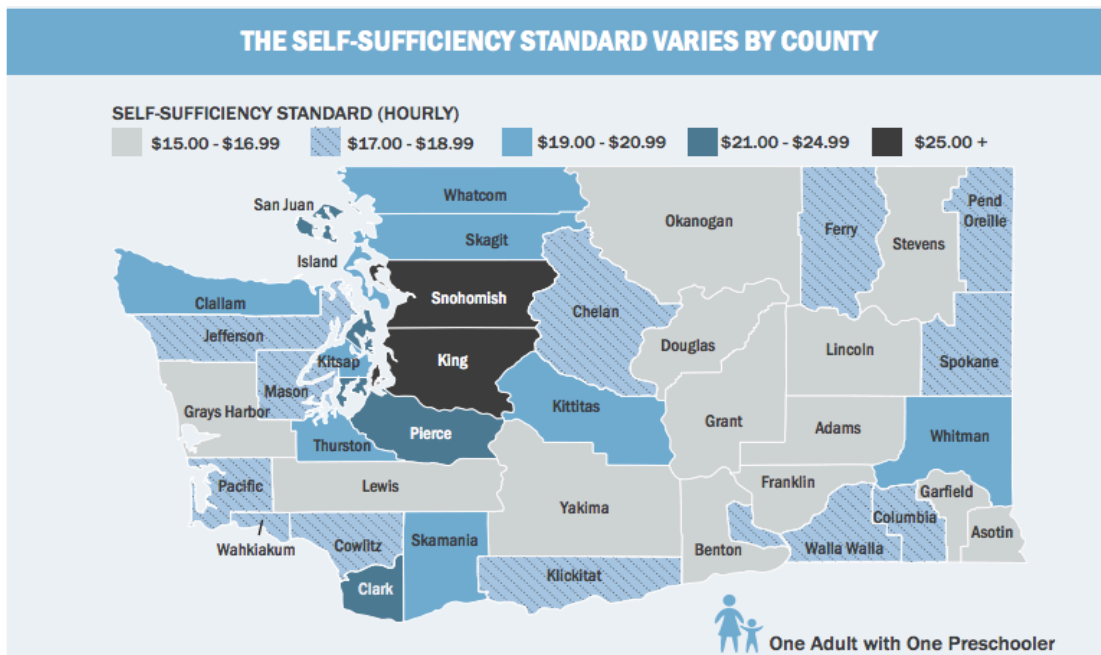


Washington State Median Household Income \$67,106

According to the United Way of Whatcom County's ALICE report, families who are not income eligible for the WCCC subsidy program must allocate approximately 30% of their budget to child care expenses.²⁴ The United Way ALICE report states that a family with two adults, one infant, and one preschooler needs to earn \$66,480 per year to meet their basic needs. This correlates with a necessary household wage of 33.24 per hour.²⁵ This figure is \$10,069 more than Whatcom County's median income, and child care is the largest expense these families face each month.



Furthermore, in 2017 the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County developed the Self-Sufficiency Standard, which calculates a living wage for a range of family models.²⁶ Like the United Way ALICE report, the Self-Sufficiency Standard reveals that most families must earn well above the minimum wage to afford their basic needs.



Economics of Child Care: Providers

Increasing or even maintaining existing child care capacity is a significant challenge for providers in the current child care market. Among other challenges, initial investment costs are high, overhead costs are high, and maintaining qualified staff are serious concerns. These issues can be an even greater challenge for first-time small business owners, such as individuals who are opening family home child care businesses for the first time.

Staying in business while also providing vital care to community members experiencing low incomes is a conundrum many child care providers face. **In 2018, Child Care Aware of Washington's Family Call Center referred 443 Whatcom County families with 510 children to licensed child care providers; 362, or 71% were seeking providers who accept any form of Child Care subsidy including Working Connections Child Care.**²⁷

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) is the DCYF child care subsidy for eligible families with particularly low incomes. State subsidy rates include Washington State's contribution, as well as a family's co-pay. Families that earn 0%–82% the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) have a \$15 co-pay per month. The WCCC co-pay increases as a family's income rises, until the subsidy begins to phase out at 201% the FPL. 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.

While WCCC is an essential program for parents to access child care, the subsidy payments from the state to child care providers are lower than market rates, which presents challenges to providers as small business owners. Although Child Care providers provide an extremely important service to our communities, they are also businesses and must take expenses into account in order to balance their budgets.



Consider a center that charged median rates in 2018. If that provider served three toddlers and one infant who receive the WCCC subsidy, it would have potentially lost \$936 in revenue per month. Over the course of the year that deficit would have been \$4,752. Depending on their location or their mission, many providers take a greater number of children whose families use the WCCC subsidy program and their financial deficit is even greater.

Monthly cost of child care center – Whatcom County, 2018

Center	Median rate ^{vii}	State subsidy rate	Difference
Infant ^{viii}	\$1,040	\$986	54
Toddler	\$936	\$822	114
Preschool	\$845	\$710	135
School age	\$466	\$345 (half-day rate)	121

Monthly cost of family home child care – Whatcom County, 2018

Family home	Median rate	State subsidy rate	Difference
Infant	\$975	\$928	47
Toddler	\$867	\$785	82
Preschool	\$785	\$785	5
School age	\$394	\$320 (half-day rate)	74

Please note, the subsidy rates have been increased as of July 2019 and are available on the DCYF website. However, they are not cited here because the 2019 median rates are not yet available for comparison. These figures are released annually at the beginning of the following year. Ongoing, advocates are working toward a further increase to the 75th percentile of market rates in order to increase access for working families.^{ix}

As noted, with 8,070 young children in Whatcom County, there are 3,608 licensed child care slots available and only 3,199 of those slots accept some form child care of subsidy (including local subsidies and other forms of financial assistance).

Low subsidy pay rates may be one reason why many providers may choose not to accept state subsidy—a situation that further limits child care options families who use the WCCC subsidy

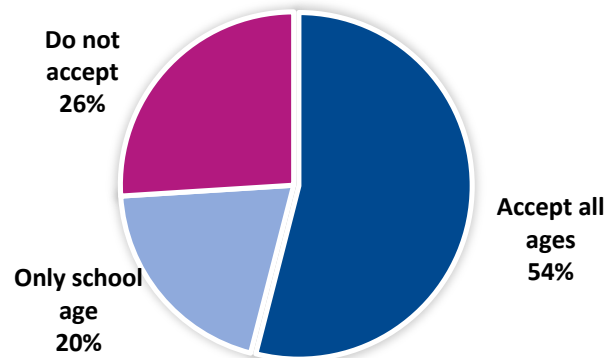
^{vii} The median rate is the rate in the very middle of the data set, with half of the providers charging more and half of the providers charging less per age group. The median rates are calculated by Child Care Aware of Washington Analysts. For more information see the most current [2018 Annual Data Report](#).

^{viii} According to the Washington Administrative Code, an infant is defined as a child birth through eleven months of age. A toddler is defined as a child twelve months through twenty-nine months (approx. 2.5 yrs.) of age, and Preschool is defined as children thirty months through six years of age not attending kindergarten or elementary school.

^{ix} For more information on market rates as a comparison to the median rate see the [DCYF 2018 Child Care Market Rate Survey Final Report](#).

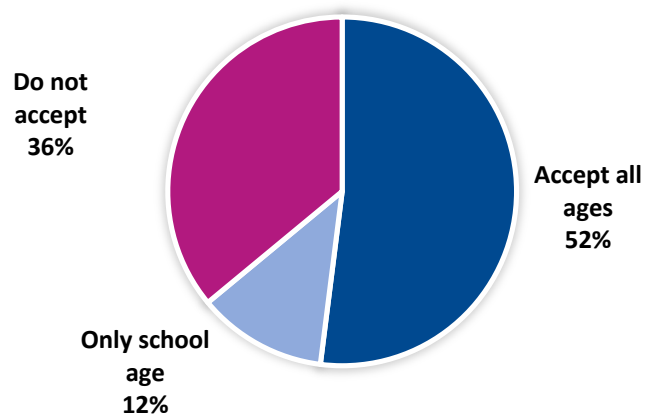
program. Child care is difficult for any family to find, but it is especially challenging for families who receive subsidy.

**WHATCOM COUNTY:
PROVIDERS THAT ACCEPT STATE SUBSIDY**



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**WA STATE:
PROVIDERS THAT ACCEPT STATE SUBSIDY**



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Quality of Care: Washington Early Achievers

Quality of care is also a matter of vital importance when analyzing the issue of child care access. Approximately 90% of brain development occurs for children between ages 0 to 5 and it is crucial that all children have access to safe and quality early learning opportunities.³⁰

Early Achievers is Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which gives coaching, training, technical assistance, scholarships, and other in-person resources to child care providers in order to improve the quality of their care. It is founded on the premise that highly experienced and well-trained professional coaches working directly with providers and teachers will result in an overall improvement in child outcomes.³¹ Early Achievers is also a linguistically inclusive program, with trainings and coaching in the provider's native language.

The Early Start Act, which was passed by the Washington State Legislature in 2015, also requires child care providers that serve families utilizing the WCCC subsidy program to join Early Achievers. Providers participate in quality improvement activities and demonstrate a quality level of care through an on-site evaluation conducted by Cultivate Learning at the University of Washington.³² The two major categories of care that are evaluated are interactions with children and environments within the child care facility.³³

The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) observes and records kindergarten readiness through six domains: social-emotional, physical, cognitive, language, literacy, and mathematics.³⁴ **As James Heckman's research shows, children who experience high-quality child care such as those who attend programs that receive and implement Early Achievers coaching are more likely to be prepared to enter kindergarten on-grade level.**³⁵

A Washington state study funded by the Department of Early Learning^x 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."³⁶

The quality of child care by providers participating in Early Achievers can also be demonstrated numerically. For example, 89% of rated providers^{xi} in Washington State have reached a Level 3 rating or above, and 90% of rated providers in the NW region are rated Level 3 or above.³⁷ According to DCYF and CCA of WA, Level 3 means that "...providers demonstrate supporting and nurturing interactions with children, developmentally appropriate practice and view

^x The Washington State Department of Early Learning has reorganized and is now the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

^{xi} Rated providers are participants in Early Achievers that have been rated by Cultivate Learning at the University of Washington.

parents as partners in their children's learning.” In addition, “these programs may be implementing some best practices in early childhood and working toward implementing others to help prepare children for kindergarten.”³⁸

Furthermore, the University of Washington renewal rating data shows significant gains in quality. This is also reflected in the provider survey data. Notably, 43% of providers reported significant learning area improvements.³⁹

Statewide, 71% of child care providers are enrolled in Early Achievers. In Whatcom County those numbers are even higher. **As of May 2019, 72% of licensed child care providers in Whatcom County are enrolled in Early Achievers.**⁴⁰

Through a lot of dedication and hard work, there have been significant and timely gains in child care quality, but more slots are necessary. Overall, it is important that as many families as possible can access these high-quality early learning environments.



F

Recommendations to Increase Child Care Access in Whatcom County

Whatcom County community partners should prioritize increasing child care capacity, particularly infant care, in Ferndale, Lynden, and the southern edge of Bellingham. It is also important to support areas with lower population density but rural access barriers such as East Whatcom County. Child care is increasingly expensive and difficult to find, and Whatcom County families need support and relief.

Increasing child care access will require collaboration between various community partners, including parents, providers, non-profit organizations, and businesses. Community members can effectively increase high-quality, affordable child care capacity throughout Whatcom County in the following ways:

1. Public and private investment in early childhood education

Non-profit entities, community business partners, and public funds could be used in tandem to invest in early childhood educational infrastructure. Creative solutions that pool funds have potential to support mixed income level classrooms, and provide care for families across the economic spectrum.

One strategic approach would be to support a team dedicated to child care capacity retention and expansion to augment the temporary and underfunded approaches that are currently being utilized. **Financial support for a team dedicated to recruitment and retention is critical in order to maintain and increase local child care capacity. This is an immediate need.**

Another example could be an Early Learning Hub model that incorporates both publicly funded programs, like ECEAP^{xii} and Head Start,^{xiii} and private or non-profit resources such as those of a pre-existing provider. This model could also include a private investor looking to open up a center. Another example could be a community loan fund aimed at new child care providers, supported by private community members and supplemented by state grants or non-profit coordination.

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

Retention, work-time commitment issues, reduced productivity, and long-term career stagnation affect child care providers just as they do other industries. Increasing the recruitment, retention, and work satisfaction of high-performing early learning staff can produce positive results for not only individual providers but the economy as a whole.

^{xii} ECEAP stands for Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program and is a preschool program funded by Washington State.

^{xiii} Head Start is a preschool program funded by the United States federal government.

One issue impacting the employment pipeline of child care providers is access to basic education and English proficiency classes for non-native speakers. Supporting programs that help people with low incomes and multi-lingual communities complete the necessary courses and educational requirements for child care staff can open up opportunities for diversifying and supporting local licensed child care providers.

Perhaps even more important for child care providers than recruitment is retention. Many highly qualified staff leave early childhood educational jobs because of a stagnation in wages and opportunities to make more money elsewhere⁴¹. Supporting efforts to increase compensation for early childhood educators is a first step to addressing this issue.

Moreover, the increase in public awareness of the importance of child care labor, and the impact of high-quality early learning on future generations and the economy could also play a part in increasing staff retention. Community partners can support programs which provide positive job recognition to child care providers and support conversations around the importance of high-quality child care accessibility.

3. Business supports to child care

Research and survey data confirms that child care issues affect the productivity, happiness, and reliability of workers. By supporting child care, employers can improve employee productivity and retention, while building a strong workforce in the future. As a recent US Chamber of Commerce report demonstrates, “[f]or American business, advancing high-quality child care is a winning proposition.”⁴²

Whatcom County business leaders and employers can help grow the local economy and benefit employees in the following ways:

Low cost

- Voice support for early childhood education to elected officials and the wider community
- Direct employees to Child Care Aware’s Family Call Center for referral services
- Promote public program supports to eligible employees
- Advocate for expansion of publicly-financed early childhood options to loosen private market capacity available to other incomes

Larger investment

- Offer child care vouchers, subsidy, or stipends for employees

- Reserve child care slots for their employees by contracting with a local provider to pay premium rates even while these slots are unused
- Increase public market supply by financially supporting expansion of publicly funded full or extended day early learning programs
- Assist with costs of conversion of family-friends-neighbor care or licensed-exempt care or unregulated providers to become licensed and offer reserved capacity for employees
- Purchase mixed-income child slots for employees in publicly supported settings
- Make charitable contribution to a donor-advised pooled fund within a local foundation

Additional cost and higher yield

- Acquire ownership of an existing child care business where the owner is retiring or relocating and turn-key to a new child care operator to serve employees
- Financially support a private or publicly funded hub-satellite early learning model with reserved capacity for company/org to accommodate irregular shift work
- Recruit licensed homes and centers at a premium to exclusively serve company/org employees
- Contractually outsource a company child care to a local or national provider or chain with its own facility
- Construct or remodel space for company facility to be run by outsourced local child care business or national provider
- Own/operate licensed child care facility for employees⁴³

For example, 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.⁴⁴

Examples of child care investment by employers in Washington State include organizations like Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories (SEL) in Pullman, WA. SEL created an onsite child care facility called *Little Edison's School* which offers extended hours, transportation, and on-site meals to 131 children of its employees. SEL reports that this amenity has significantly impacted their employee recruitment and retention efforts.⁴⁵

In addition, Seattle based company *Dick's Drive-In* offers childcare assistance between \$3,500–\$9,000 to its employees if they are working at least 20 hours per week after six months of employment.⁴⁶

Top Priorities

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

1. Collaborating with current Early Learning Initiatives in Whatcom County such as Generations Forward, and Healthy Whatcom.
2. Collaborating with The Imagine Institute^{xiv} to recruit and train individuals who show an interest in opening family home child care businesses that would accept state subsidy. This includes finding parents or FFN providers who are curious about becoming fully licensed providers.
3. Investigating and strategizing ways in which local school districts can support early learning in Whatcom County.
4. Supporting the use of the newly available \$18 million in early learning Washington State facilities grants as an opportunity for local investors to become more involved in early childhood education.
5. Creating connections with businesses that show interest in supporting child care and providing them resources and recommendations.



^{xiv} The Imagine Institute is a non-profit organization that works with Family, Friend, and Neighbor, substitute family child care providers, and family child care businesses focusing on professional development. They provide training and a mentorship program for clients interested in entering the child care field. For more information go to: <https://imaginewa.org/who-we-are/>

More Information: Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington

Funding and resources for this report were provided by Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington and the Opportunity Council.

Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington serves the Northwest Region of Washington State which includes Whatcom, Whatcom, Snohomish, San Juan, and Island Counties. Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington is passionate about advancing high quality early learning opportunities for all families in the region, and provides a variety of services. These services include supporting local families in finding quality, licensed child care providers; providing coaching and technical assistance for providers participating in Early Achievers; advocating for high-quality early learning at the local, state, and federal levels; raising awareness about the importance of early learning in the community; and coordinating professional development through the State Training and Registry System (STARS).

To learn more about Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington visit www.ccanorthwest.org.

Location	Address	Phone
Family Call Center	www.childcareawarewa.org/families	1-800-446-1114
Regional Office	1111 Cornwall Ave, Suite 200 Bellingham, WA 98225	360-734-8396 x227
		1-888-444-1862 x227
Mt. Vernon Office	416 Main Street Mt. Vernon, WA 98273	
Lynwood Office	3400 188th St. SW, Suite 291 Lynnwood, WA 98037	
Everett Office	3900 Broadway Everett, WA 98201	

CCA of NW WA Team (2018)



Data and Methodology

Using survey data of providers collected by Child Care Aware of Washington, this report examines 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 2017 American Community Survey data. 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. It was also informed by the conclusions of the Ready Nation report “The Economic Impacts of Insufficient Child Care on Working Families” by Clive R. Belfield.

It is important to note that working families are not geographically isolated. Although it may be more convenient for families to use child care providers that are close to home or their jobs, they sometimes have to travel long distances to find child care. 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. A more in-depth estimate of child care supply in the future might include an analysis of drive times in Whatcom County, or record information on cross county child care commutes.

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.

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Rose Marcotte, Administrative Program Coordinator of the Quality Child Care Program
Wilanne Ollila-Perry, Senior Manager of the Quality Child Care Program
David Webster, Director of Early Learning and Family Services

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