

Infant-Toddler Child Care Challenges Undermine Texas' Strength

High-quality child care can help grow the economy, increase public safety, and enhance national security.

High-quality child care can strengthen the current and future workforce, contribute to a strong economy and public safety, and enhance national security. However, Texas' working parents with infants or toddlers know how difficult it is to find child care that's accessible, affordable, and truly beneficial to their child's development during one of the most crucial periods of life, while Texas employers know the negative economic impact of these child care challenges.

Our new national study found that the infant-toddler child care crisis has an annual cost of \$57 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue. These costs impact working parents, employers, and taxpayers.

The stakes are enormously high for the many Texas families who depend on parents' employment, as well as for children, who depend on nurturing, stimulating environments for healthy brain development during the first three years of life.

But there are other consequences. Our national security relies on qualified young adults who are ready, willing, and able to serve in the U.S. military. However, educational deficits, health issues, and behavior problems (substance abuse and crime) currently prevent 73 percent



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of Texas youth from qualifying for service.¹ Early brain development sets the stage for children’s future success. Without improvements to the child care system, our nation risks having an even smaller recruiting pool in the future.

Further, Texas jails are full of people serving time for serious and costly crimes. It doesn’t have to be that way. Providing at-risk children with high-quality early learning opportunities can help reduce the human and fiscal costs of crime in the future.

Texas lawmakers must protect and expand programs that enhance the affordability and availability of quality child care—particularly for infants and toddlers—and foster continuing innovations at the state and local level that address this problem. Action

and innovation now can improve the experiences of Texas children today and strengthen our state in the years to come.

Most parents of infants and toddlers are in the workforce and need child care

In Texas, there are approximately 1.2 million children under age three and 54 percent of mothers with infants work outside the home.² As a result, many very young children are in child care.³

The current child care system does not meet the needs of Texas children, families, or employers

Several interrelated challenges render the child care system less than optimal:

- **Access:** There are only 291 subsidized child care slots for every one thousand children.⁴ Availability is especially limited for families who live in rural areas, have infants and toddlers, or work evening and night shifts.⁵
- **Affordability:** Infant care in a Texas center averages \$9,102 per year, nearly as much as public college tuition (\$9,836).⁶ This cost represents 36 percent of the annual income of the average single parent in Texas. Child care, particularly for infants and toddlers, is unaffordable for many families.
- **Quality:** The quality of child care in Texas is lacking, with fewer than 30 percent of subsidized child care slots certified by the Texas Rising Star quality rating system.⁷

Beyond the negative effects on children and families, problems with child care inflict a huge economic toll. Our recent national study of working parents of children under age three found that when families do not have the child care they need, parents' work productivity falls, resulting in costs to parents, their employers, and, ultimately, taxpayers.⁸ These child care challenges exact an annual cost of \$57 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue.

Research shows that high-quality child care supports children's cognitive, social, and emotional development

For example, a longitudinal study of more than 1,300 children found that children in higher-quality child care were better prepared for school at age 4 compared to children in lower-quality child care. At age 15, they were still performing slightly above their peers and had significantly lower levels of behavior problems.⁹



Policymakers should promote access to affordable, high-quality infant and toddler care

Texas parents, particularly those with infants and toddlers, often have difficulty finding affordable, high-quality child care. Quality care has long-term benefits for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Conversely, lack of such care has high costs, both for children and families, and for our state's economy. Federal, state and local policymakers must promote families' access to affordable, high-quality child care, particularly for infant and toddlers. Support for high-quality child care is an investment in our future national security, public safety, and economic well-being.

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- 2 KIDSCOUNT (2017). <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/> ; Zero to Three (2015). State baby facts. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1172-texas-state-baby-facts>
- 3 Child Trends (2016, May). DataBank: Child care. http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/21_Child_Care.pdf
- 4 Children at Risk (2017, October 4). How Many Low-Income Children in Texas Live in a Child Care Desert? <https://childrenatrisk.org/how-many-low-income-children-in-texas-live-in-a-child-care-desert/>
- 5 Howe, S. & Oncken, L. (n.d.) The third pillar of care: Availability. New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/care-report/third-pillar-care-availability/>
- 6 Child Care Aware (2018). The US and the high cost of child care. <http://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/research/costofcare/>
- 7 Children at Risk (2017, October 4). How Many Low-Income Children in Texas Live in a Child Care Desert? <https://childrenatrisk.org/how-many-low-income-children-in-texas-live-in-a-child-care-desert/>
- 8 Bishop-Josef, et al. (2019, January). Want to grow the economy? Fix the child care crisis. ReadyNation. <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/780-want-to-grow-the-economy-fix-the-child-care-crisis>
- 9 Vandell, D. L., Belsky, J., Burchinal, M., et al. (2010). Do effects of early child care extend to age 15 years? Results from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development. Child Development, 81, 737-756. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2938040/>

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1108 Lavaca Street / Suite 110 1A-139 / Austin, TX 78701 / 512.257.7399



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