

Characteristics of the Child Care Workforce

In 2019, more than 2 million child care workers, nearly all women, were employed in child care programs across the country, with a median hourly pay of \$11.65 an hour, or \$24,230 a year—well below the federal poverty rate for a family of four, which was \$26,200 in 2020.¹ These workers were evenly split between center-based and home-based programs, with about 1 million working in 130,000 center-based child care programs serving almost 7 million children, and another 1 million working in home-based settings serving about 3 million children. This workforce is more diverse than the country's overall population.

Language. More than a quarter (27%) of the center-based early childhood workforce speak a language other than English at home, compared to 14% of the U.S. adult population.² Within the child care workforce, teacher aides and assistants are more likely to speak a language other than English (32%) in comparison to lead teachers at 25%. Almost 1 in 5 workers in the early childhood field identify as immigrants (18%), roughly similar to the U.S. adult population as a whole (16%), though much higher in comparison to the total K-12 teaching workforce (8%).³

Race & Ethnicity. Though a plurality of the early childhood workforce is white (56%), individuals working in the field are more diverse than the overall population, which is 76% white. About 15% of the early childhood workforce is Black (compared to 13% of the population), and fewer than 1 in 10 are Hispanic (7%, compared to 13% of the total population).^{4,5} This trend holds true in both center- and home-based child care workers, with the latter being 16% Black, 16% Hispanic, and 63% white.⁶ Teachers' aides are more likely to be minorities (33% Black, 42% Hispanic, and 32% white).^{7,8} The child care workforce is also more diverse than K-12 educators, 82% of whom are white.⁹

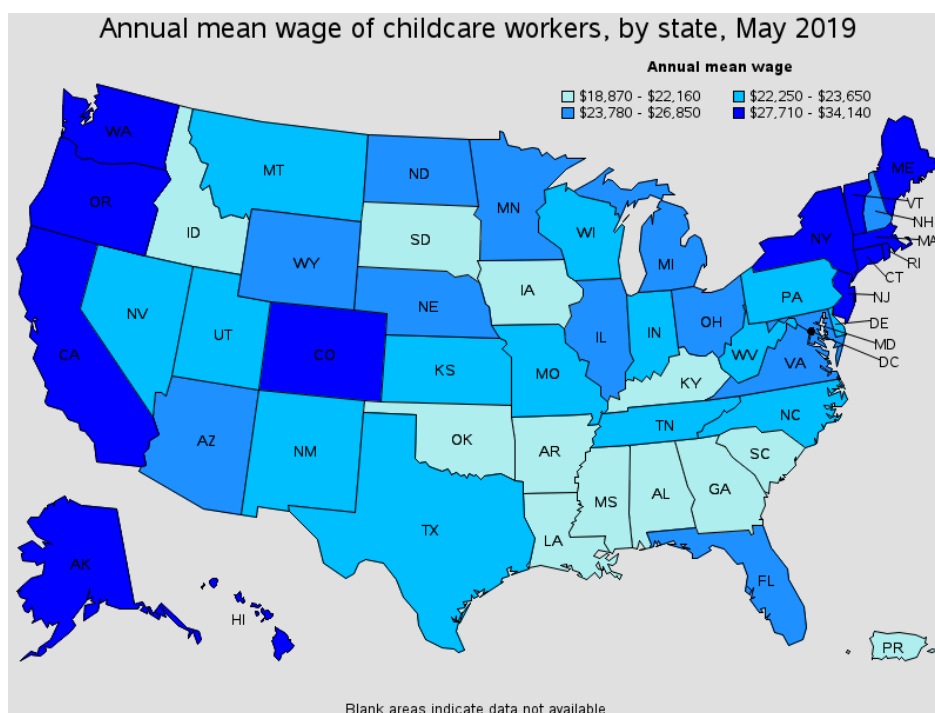
Income. The median pay of a child care worker was \$24,230 per year, or \$11.65 per hour, in 2019.¹⁰ This income is well below the federal poverty rate for a family of four, which is \$25,750 in 2019, leading to more than half (53%) of child care workers being enrolled in at least one main public benefit program—Medicaid, CHIP, EITC, SNAP, or TANF—compared to 21% of the U.S. population, despite 60% of the child care workforce working full time.^{11,12}

Child care workers who work with infants and toddlers, are minorities, or have a lower educational attainment, receive even lower wages on average. After controlling for education levels, child care workers that work with infants and

toddlers will make an average of \$2 less per hour than a worker who works with children aged 3-5.¹³ Even after controlling for education, full-time Black child care workers earn an average of \$0.78 less per hour than their counterparts, translating to a wage loss of \$1,622.40 per year.¹⁴

Hourly Wages of Child Care Workers	No Degree	Associates Degree	Bachelor's Degree and Higher
Infants & Toddlers	\$9.68	\$11.85	\$13.83
Children Aged 3-5	\$10.73	\$13.11	\$17.86

Data from the National Early Care and Education Survey Project Team (2015). National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), 2010-2015. Retrieved from <https://www.childandfamilydataarchive.org/cfda/archives/cfda/studies/35519>.



Graph from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2019, 39-9011 Childcare Workers. Retrieved from: [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes399011.htm#\(1\)](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes399011.htm#(1)).

Education. There are no uniform educational requirements across all state child care regulations to work in child care, and therefore, educational attainment varies widely. No state requires a bachelor's degree for lead teachers, while Kentucky, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, South Dakota, and West Virginia do not have any minimum education levels for center-based child care staff.^{15,16}

Just over half of center-based teaching staff reported having some degree—17% an associate degree, 26% a bachelor’s degree, and 9% a graduate or professional degree—as compared to one-third (31%) of home-based providers.¹⁷ Educational attainment for workers caring for children ages 3-5 is slightly higher, 45% of whom have a bachelor’s degree compared to just 19% of those teaching younger children. Similarly, one-third of home-based providers (34%) have no higher than a high school education, and an additional one-third (34%) have some college-level education but did not complete a higher education degree.¹⁸

Age and Gender. Nearly all of the child care workforce (92%) are female.¹⁹ The average age of a female child care worker is 36, while male employees are generally a few years younger, with an average age of 32. Those working in home-based child care tend to be older than those working in center-based child care, with about 26% of center-based workers over the age of 50, compared to 38% of home-based workers in the same age group.

Benefits. Many child care workers do not have access to employer-based benefits—such as paid vacation or sick days, or health care—which are typically provided to encourage and promote retention.²⁰ Specifically, less than half (47%) of the child care workforce receives employer-sponsored health insurance, including just 37% of those working in home-based child care programs. As a comparison, 63% of preschool teachers have employer-provided health insurance.²¹ Studies have shown that, after accounting for demographic differences between child care workers and other industries, the child care workforce is 27% less likely to receive health insurance than similar workers.²² A report by the Joint Economic Committee of Congress found that just 27% of child care workers had access to paid sick leave.²³

The Takeaway

The child care workforce plays a critical role in communities by supporting children’s healthy development and working parents. Research shows that positive, consistent, responsive, and stable relationships between children and child care workers provides the basis for a positive, foundational education and skills development in children. By supporting investments in education and workforce development for child care workers, and elevating the diversity of the child care workforce as a strength, increases the supply of quality early education across the county.

Endnotes

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