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# National Child Care Gap Assessment: Nebraska Analysis

March 2025

POLICY BRIEF



## Key Findings for Nebraska

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- There are 2,579 legally operating child care providers in Nebraska with a combined capacity of 94,857 spaces\*.
- The number of child care spaces has increased by 2,079 since 2020.
- The potential need has decreased by 1.3% caused primarily by fewer women in the labor market.
- The gap between the potential need and the actual capacity is 17,568 spaces.
- There are 10 counties in Nebraska with no child care providers.

\*Licensed capacity frequently exceeds the actual operating capacity.

## Glossary

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**Potential Need:** number of children under six with all available parents in the labor force

**Supply:** number of open child spots in existing child care facilities

**Gap:** the difference between the child care need and child care supply in a service area



## Background

As of 2024, over 15 million children in the United States (66.7% of all children) under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce and are potentially in need of child care<sup>1</sup> options. Yet, the reality for many of these families is that child care is inaccessible, unaffordable or simply nonexistent. These child care gaps are exacerbated in rural areas, where child care supply is greatly lacking.<sup>2</sup> While there is broad bipartisan support for child care at all levels of government, exactly how much more child care is needed is challenging to know. Work done by the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) Early Childhood Initiative has shed some light on the topic but more needs to be done to determine regional and local variations in child care need.

Building on the work of the BPC, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska and Child Care Aware of America are both working with states to refine the need and supply in their states using the latest data available from the Census Bureau, national parent surveys, and an enhanced spatial analysis and mapping technique.<sup>3</sup> Unique from other analyses, this mapping technique accounts for the added complexity of parent choice and preferences regarding commute, and breaks down child care gap to a regional and local level. As a result, this approach gets us closer than ever before to the true need for child care at a local level relative to the availability of care within a reasonable distance, and will provide comprehensive, comparative data across the country.

This gap analysis will give policymakers and stakeholders a baseline from which to devise strategies to improve access to child care. It will also give policymakers a critical tool for holding federal, state, and local leaders accountable for improving access to child care; and serve as an evidence base that will allow federal, state, and local leaders across the country to use data rather than anecdotes to evaluate the need for care.

The recent work, when applied to Nebraska data, has shined a light on how important it is to understand the gap at the community level and how, when funding is targeted at high need areas, progress can be achieved.

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1 For purposes of this project, “child care” includes all legally operating early care and education programs as defined by the State. This includes center- and home-based child care, as well as PreK and Head Start programs.

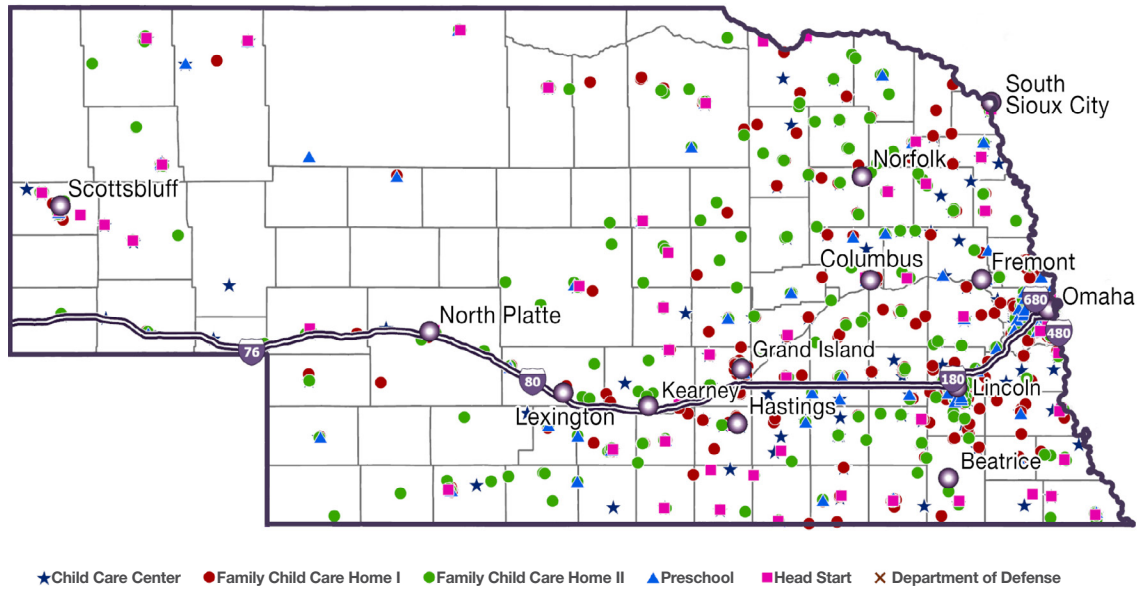
2 Bipartisan Policy Center (October 2023). Rural child care policy framework. [https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BPC\\_ECI-Rural-Child-Care-Framework\\_R05.pdf](https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BPC_ECI-Rural-Child-Care-Framework_R05.pdf)

3 Bipartisan Policy Center (2024). *Child care gaps assessment*. <https://childcaregap.org/>

# Findings To Date: Nebraska

## Nebraska Child Care Providers

**FIGURE 1.**  
NEBRASKA  
LICENSED  
CHILD CARE  
PROVIDERS  
MAP



**TABLE 1.**  
NEBRASKA  
LICENSED  
CHILD CARE  
PROVIDERS  
BY FACILITY  
TYPE

Facility Type	Count	Capacity
Child Care Center	690	65,888
Family Child Care Home I	957	9,451
Family Child Care Home II	508	5,982
Preschool	106	2,866
Provisional Child Care Center	79	6,334
Provisional Family Child Care Home I	77	753
Provisional Family Child Care Home II	84	983
Additional Facilities From Office of Head Start	77	2,142
Department of Defense	1	458
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,579</b>	<b>94,857</b>

## Widespread Increased Supply and Decreased Gap

**TABLE 2. CHANGES IN CHILD CARE GAP, MAY 2020 TO JULY 2024**

The Buffett Institute mapped the child care gap in Nebraska from May 2020 to July 2024, each yielding consistent increases in child care capacity (supply) (+2.2%), decreases in potential need (-1.3%) and decreases in overall gap (-15.4%). It is important to note that the decrease in potential need, and in part, the reduction in the gap, is result of a decline in the number of women in the workforce. It is also important to point out that despite overall progress, families in rural areas continue to experience higher child care gaps than those in urban areas.

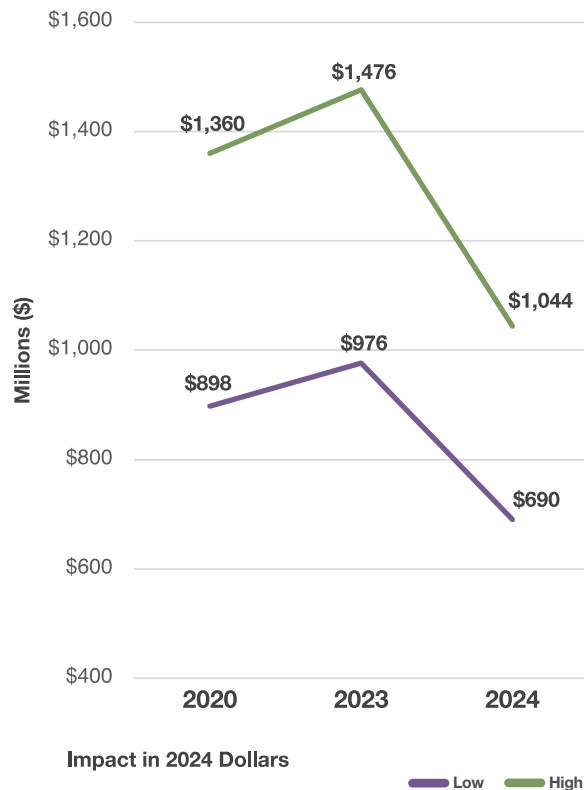
Category	Potential Need	Capacity	Gap
<b>Total</b>	<b>-1.3% ↓</b> (-1,413)	<b>2.2% ↑</b> (+2,079)	<b>-15.4% ↓</b> (-3,199)
<b>Urban</b>	<b>-0.5% ↓</b> (-333)	<b>0.8% ↑</b> (+503)	<b>-18.9% ↓</b> (-1,679)
<b>Rural</b>	<b>-2.7% ↓</b> (-1,080)	<b>6.0% ↑</b> (+1,576)	<b>-12.8% ↓</b> (-1,520)

## Estimated Significant Improvements on Economic Impact

### Long-Term Economic Impact

**FIGURE 2. LONG-TERM ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CHILD CARE GAP**

Of particular note, the long-term economic impacts of a child care gap on potential lost earnings, reduced revenue, and lost income and sales tax revenue has decreased by 23% since May 2020. This indicates that the increase in child care supply is predicted to significantly benefit individual parent, business, taxpayer, and overall state economic stability.



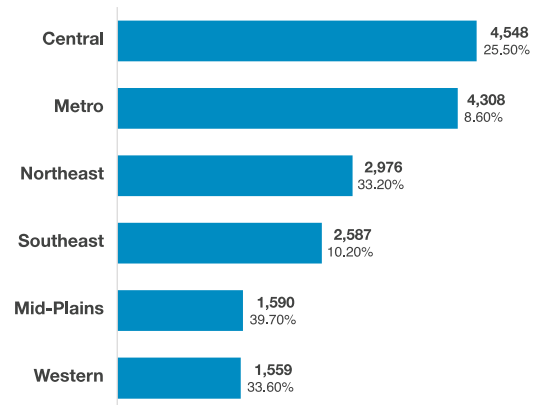
## Regional Outcomes are Varied, and Some Regions Require More Attention/Resources

### Child Care Gap

#### Regions with the Highest Gap

**FIGURE 3. NEBRASKA CHILD CARE GAP BY REGION**

Using the Six Regions, One Nebraska<sup>4</sup> regions for economic development, the child care gap is highest in Central (4,548 or 25.5%) and Metro (4,308, or 8.6%). Part of this need is due to regional population. Meanwhile, the Western (1,559, 33.6%) and Mid-Plains (1,590, 39.7%) regions have smaller gaps, yet larger proportions of children left unserved. The gap between the potential need and actual capacity is 17,568 spaces. Strategies to address the gap within each region must consider these overlapping factors and plan efficiently.

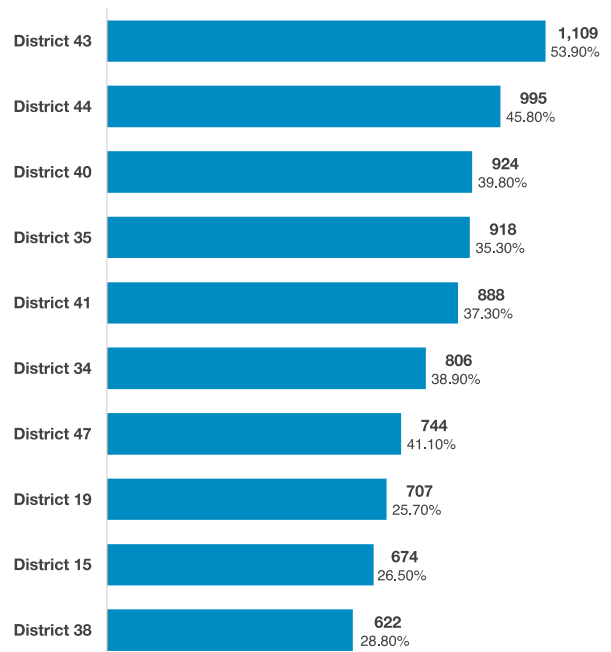


### Child Care Gap

#### Legislative Districts with the Highest Gap

**FIGURE 4. NEBRASKA CHILD CARE GAP BY LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT (TOP 10 ONLY)**

In Nebraska's highest need districts, nearly 50% of children do not have access to child care. The districts with the highest need tend to be those with the most expansive rural and agricultural areas and do not include a major city or major highway.



<sup>4</sup> Nebraska Department of Economic Development. (n.d.) *6 regions, one Nebraska*. <https://opportunity.nebraska.gov/regions/>

## Multiple Counties have Zero Child Care Providers

**TABLE 3. NEBRASKA COUNTIES WITH ZERO CHILD CARE PROVIDERS**

While Nebraska has invested in child care access, 10 counties still have no child care provider options. These counties are scattered in the western half of the state, and again represent some of the most remote, rural, and agricultural areas.

County	Potential Need
Banner	58
Sioux	55
Hayes	46
Keya Paha	41
Logan	39
Grant	37
Arthur	29
Thomas	26
Blaine	17
McPherson	8

**The field has historically lacked comprehensive data to adequately estimate potential economic outcomes.**

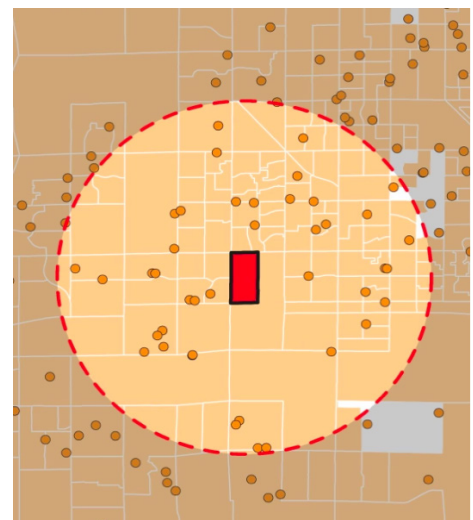
This work attempts to build a more cohesive picture of the long-term economic outcomes on households, business, and tax revenues by using:

- ▶ the immediate one-year impact of child care gaps.
- ▶ the residual burden they produce over the next 10 years.
- ▶ the impacts under more and less conservative assumptions (high and low estimates).

## Methodology

This analysis defines the potential need for child care by using the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2018-2022 estimates of population under age six with all available parents in the labor force. Then, using supply data from state government sources combined with Head Start data from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and military child care data from the U. S. Department of Defense, we are able to further refine the gap in child care need and supply. Using this unique method of data analysis helps visualize all available child care facilities in a region and their distance from populations in an assigned “block group” area.

“Block groups” are assigned a “service area” of accessible child care. Service area distance is calculated within a 3.5-mile radius in urban areas and a 10-mile radius in rural, and represents how far child care providers can be from a block group and still be considered within reasonable driving travel. Depending on the available data, the distance can be adjusted for state or local circumstances. Potential child care need within each block group is proportionally allocated to the child care facilities within their service area. Often, service areas from neighboring block groups



overlap. In these cases, providers are allocated children from all available block groups, until the provider capacity is filled up, without going over facility capacity.

This child care gap analysis shows how supply and need are distributed across the state, with breakdown by county, state legislative district, and Congressional District, and cross tabulations of gap data by socioeconomic characteristics.

## Summary

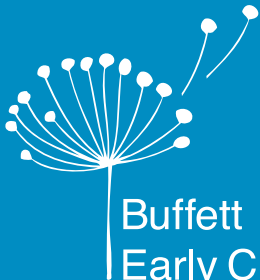
As states and communities continue to struggle with the lack of child care, it is more important than ever that policymakers understand the real need for child care and where they can get the biggest “bang for the buck.” As Nebraska has shown, targeted investments demonstrate results. At the same time, as investments are made in the infrastructure, there is also an equal need to invest in the workforce. This should not be an either/or discussion. Without the workforce, we are seeing unused capacity in existing facilities. At the same time, we see substantial parts of the country without any child care at all, and Nebraska is no exception. Targeted investments in new facilities, rehabilitation of other facilities (including schools and churches) and investments in family child care providers can produce substantial gains. Finally, to achieve the maximum gains, investments at the state and community level must include conversations with the parents who use child care and the businesses who need employees.

States must invest more in programs that enhance the expansion of child care in rural areas. Targeted strategies—when combined with partnerships with parents and businesses—can produce significant impacts on the quality of life and economic health of communities.

## Acknowledgments

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