

OVERVIEW

Omaha Metro Child Care Gap Assessment



Child Care Landscape in the Omaha Region

Nebraskans are hard workers—75% of young children across the state have working parents. In the Omaha metropolitan area, roughly 56,000 children from birth to 5 live in households where all adults work.

Child care is foundational for working families, who need reliable, affordable care so they can show up for work every day. When child care isn't easily accessible, parents may miss shifts, cut back their hours, or, in the case of women especially, drop out of the workforce altogether.

This data analysis by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute shows the need for child care is spread across the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area, not concentrated in any one city or local community. That's because of one important factor: how families frequently move across city and state lines to work and seek child care.

While most of the child care supply in the Omaha metro is located in the City of Omaha proper, that capacity cannot support the overall needs of families in neighboring towns and cities in the metro area.

Increasing the child care supply in the Omaha metro will require a regional approach.

This analysis is based on a new, distance-based methodology that quantifies the child care gap by factoring in the actual distance between existing child care spots and the homes of the children and families that need care. It accounts for the added complexity of parent choice and preferences regarding commute.

GLOSSARY

Potential Need:

The number of children from birth to 5 with all available parents in the labor force

Supply or capacity:

The number of legally operating child care spaces

Gap:

The number of children needing care whose families lack reasonable access to formal child care based on distance

Omaha Metropolitan Statistical Area:

Five counties in Nebraska (Douglas, Sarpy, Washington, Cass, and Saunders) and three in Iowa (Pottawattamie, Harrison, and Mills)



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Key Findings for Omaha

- The child care gap in the Omaha Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is 7.9%, or 4,454 spots. Broken down by region, the gap is:
 - 20.1% on the Iowa side of the MSA surrounding the City of Omaha (Pottawattamie, Harrison, and Mills Counties)
 - 7.5% on the Nebraska side surrounding the City of Omaha (Douglas, Sarpy, Washington, Cass, and Saunders Counties)
 - 5.4% in the City of Omaha
- In the Omaha MSA, the potential need for child care spaces is 56,106, but the actual number of licensed or legally operating spots is 51,745*. There is concentrated need in North Omaha, South Omaha, Bellevue, and Council Bluffs.
- In the City of Omaha, the potential need is 26,886, with a supply of 28,176 spots. The number of children in need of care in the areas surrounding the City of Omaha is so great that it strains the city's supply of child care, resulting in increased gaps.
- The potential economic losses over 10 years could range from \$221 million to \$335 million in the Omaha metro, stemming from reduced labor participation, lower productivity, tax losses, and more.

*Licensed capacity frequently exceeds the actual operating capacity.

Recommendations and Next Steps

- Approach child care planning as a regional issue, similar to initiatives that support long-term housing and transportation planning (MAPA, Metro Transit, Heartland 2050).
- Undertake a regional, cross-city approach to increase the overall number of child care spots across the Omaha metro.
- Gain a greater understanding of family proximity and mobility in the Omaha metro area and families' specific child care needs through geospatial mapping and other tools.
- Build data systems that track child care supply and utilization, similar to the one recently built in Iowa.
- Study solutions adopted by peer cities and metro areas, such as the Tri-Share financing model in Rapid City, South Dakota.

This analysis helps decision-makers pinpoint where to invest resources most strategically—down to the census block group—to expand child care spaces and achieve the greatest return on investment. It can also support future scenario-building and testing to determine potential impacts in different neighborhoods and cities.

