



Child Care Landscape in Missouri

When the coronavirus came to the U.S. in 2020, no one could have predicted just how much it would ravage so many systems and structures—both nationally and around the world. Industries like healthcare, leisure and hospitality, entertainment, and transportation all suffered as the pandemic wreaked havoc on the economy, as people lost their jobs, and as society learned to adapt to a “new normal.”

One industry, too-often sidelined but absolutely crucial in our modern-day economy, has been significantly impacted: child care. In the months since COVID-19 has changed the world, it seems that policymakers, legislators, journalists, and communities are finally recognizing and proclaiming just how foundational the child care industry is to the economy and to a future economic recovery—a fact that child care educators and experts in the field have been trumpeting for decades.

Child care truly is the backbone of the American economy.
And in its current state, that backbone is going to break.

Why Do We Need Child Care?

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 25% of children under the age of five were in some form of organized child care arrangement, including child care centers, nurseries, and preschools ([Center for American Progress 2012](#)). In today's society, it is not uncommon for all adults in the household to work, whether that be both parents or a single parent. And these parents need child care to obtain and retain a job, while their children need a safe place to spend their time away from home that promotes their healthy development and learning. In Missouri alone, 78% of mothers are the sole or co-breadwinners in the families, suggesting a significant need for child care ([Center for American Progress 2016](#)).

Child care programs provide a place for parents to send their children so they can participate in the workforce, provide for their families, and contribute to the economy. Additionally, child care programs are an integral part of the social and emotional development of our nation's children. "Children under the age of 5 spend an average of 28 hours a week in the care of a non-family member. During this time, their brains are growing rapidly... regularly positive experiences with a trusted, safe, and reliable caregiver can have long-term benefits... The quality of those 28 hours of child care a week matters as much to children's development as access matters to parents' employment" ([New York Times May 2020](#)).



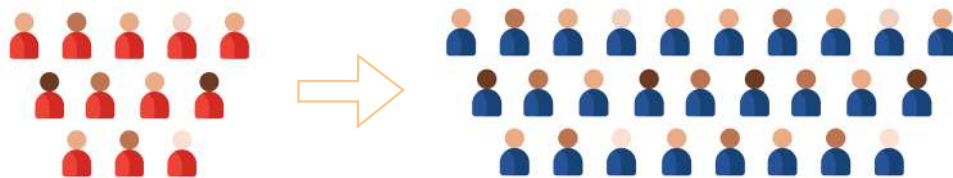
How Has the Pandemic Changed the Child Care Landscape in Missouri?

One of the primary functions of Child Care Aware® of Missouri (CCAMO) has been to collect, aggregate, and analyze data around child care in the state of Missouri. This data collection is more important than ever, as the figures demonstrate what child care experts have long known: Missouri is rife with child care deserts, which have increased dramatically since the pandemic, leaving few options for families who rely on child care.

As part of its work to inform and assist families, child care programs, and the community, CCAMO tracked the number of child care programs across the State that were open prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. To understand the impact of the pandemic in Missouri, CCAMO mined and analyzed its own internal data to determine factors affecting child care.

Potential Impact on Affected Populations

In Missouri, there are 2,909,023 individuals in the workforce; 252,737 of them are first responders and/or healthcare workers. Before the pandemic, 23,331 of these healthcare workers and first responders needed child care. During the pandemic, that number has skyrocketed to 64,072, representing a 36% increase in need ([School's Out: Childcare Needs among Essential Health Care Workers and First Responders April 2020](#)).



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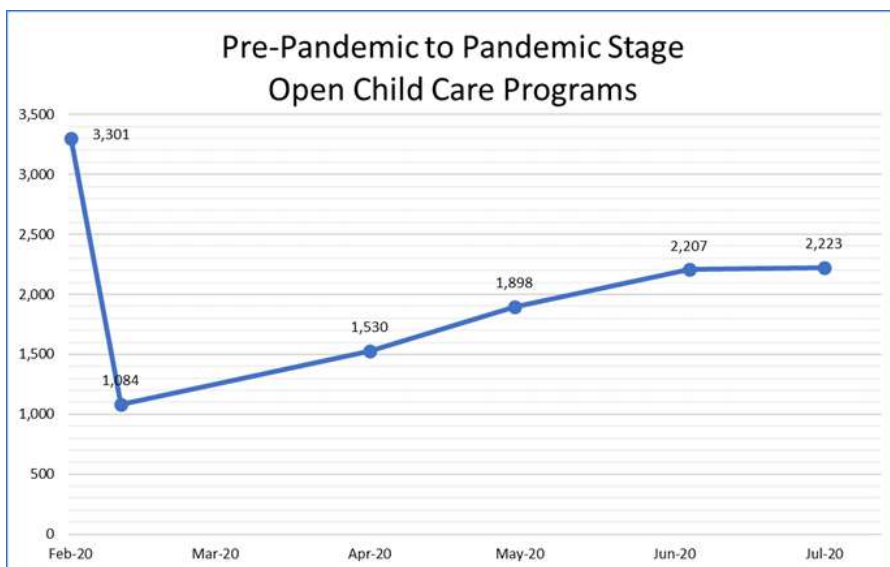
Business that **are** open must accomodate:

- Staff for smaller group sizes
- Personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Cleaners, sanitizers & more

When it comes to child care programs, only 67% of businesses are currently open, and many have decreased enrollment, operating at a 50% capacity rate. Further, child care programs, which have a very slim profit margin to begin with, now have increased costs for staff to accommodate smaller group sizes and social distancing, plus supplies like Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), cleaners and sanitizers, and other items necessary to maintain safety during this time.

Impact on the Number of Child Care Programs in Missouri

As the following chart depicts, there were 3,301 open child care programs in CCAMO's database prior to the pandemic. As of late July 2020, the number of open programs decreased to 2,223 and most are operating at partial capacity. Many programs closed temporarily at the beginning of the pandemic, and although the expectation is that more will reopen, the reality is that the economic crisis will lead many to shut their doors permanently, ultimately widening an already-vast child care desert.



What is a child care desert?

1) a county with greater than 50 children under age 5 that contains either no child care providers, or 2) so few options that there are more than 3 times as many children as licensed child care slots.

Resulting Effect on Counties that are Child Care Deserts

While the need for child care is still unknown, the number of child care slots has significantly decreased. The concern is, as families begin their return to work, there will be fewer options available. As shown in the chart below, since the pandemic, of the 115 counties in Missouri, the number of child care desert counties have increased by 49%, indicating that child care services have become more difficult for families to find.

Child Care Desert			
	Pre-Pandemic (February 2020)	Pandemic Stage (June 2020)	Increase (%)
Total Counties	115	115	-
Total Population	5,988,927	5,988,927	-
Desert Counties	63	94	49%
Number of Individuals Impacted by Child Care Deserts	1,210,605	2,758,809	128%
Additional Child Care Capacity Needed	8,286	19,707	138%
Number of Counties w/o Child Care	0	8	8

What Does This Mean for Child Care Programs and the Families They Serve?

Child care providers have largely been left to fend for themselves. They have been put on the front lines, serving as essential workers with no hazard pay, no health benefits, while struggling to obtain resources such as personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies. During CCAMO’s *We Are All in This Together* weekly webinars, child care providers have expressed their frustrations around a lack of clarity, communications, and guidance. They wonder: Will adjusted subsidy payments continue and for how long? How will child care continue to support the families that need it? When should they reopen? How should they reopen? What are best practices for maintaining safety? What happens if my staff get sick? These are just a few of the issues that arise during the sessions.

For families who rely on child care, the picture is just as grim. The Center for American Progress estimates that “the country could lose half of its licensed child care capacity without government intervention. Millions of American workers, hoping to get back to their jobs once the public health risk has sufficiently decreased, will not be able to do so until they have safe, reliable, and affordable child care. This has major consequences for the reopening of the economy but also has important implications for income and educational inequality, racial equity, geographic equity, and a potentially significant decline in the number of mothers in the labor force” (Center for American Progress, April 24, 2020).



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Currently, during the pandemic, 11% of the U.S. workforce is caring for young children on their own and will be unlikely to return to work full time until child care programs and schools reopen, according to the University of Chicago's Becker Friedman Institute. For Missouri, this means that approximately 331,353 individuals in the civilian workforce are taking care of their children ([Bureau of Labor Services](#), May 2020). Further, 13% of U.S. parents had to quit their jobs or significantly reduce their hours because of a lack of child care, according to a survey of 2,557 working parents conducted by Northeastern University.

The Uneven Playing Field

Of course, the burden of child care has never been evenly distributed, with low-income families and providers bearing the brunt. Now, many low-wage workers, referred to as "essential workers," no longer have access to the child care programs that enable them to do their jobs. These families must make the impossible choice to lose their source of income or to care for their children. "Prior to the pandemic, most child care deserts were in low- and middle-income communities"; the pandemic has not only underscored the already existing equity gaps in these communities, but exacerbated them ([Center for American Progress](#), June 2020). Further, research shows that in "child-care deserts," there is a 12% drop in mothers' labor force participation. For women, who already struggle to be equal and active participants in the workforce, this disparity can set back their careers and income in irrevocably damaging ways. And so, the vicious cycle of intergenerational and gender inequity continues.

The Reality on the Ground

From April to June, Kids Win Missouri, a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to improving the well-being of Missouri children, conducted virtual sessions with child care providers across Missouri to better understand their challenges as they operate in the current environment, prepare

to reopen to children and families, and sustain their businesses through financial hardships brought on by the pandemic. These interviews culminated in a [report](#) that illustrates the hard realities of the child care landscape in Missouri.



The child care community has worked very hard to provide quality care through the pandemic, and I do not want to see quality sacrificed due to lack of funds. Our children deserve better.

Tiffany Brinton One Step Ahead Early Learning Center St. Joseph, MO

The child care crisis extends beyond just the families who will no longer have access to child care. Child care is one of the lowest paid professions, with families of child care educators twice as likely as other families to live in poverty. In Missouri, the median wage for child care educators was \$9.96 in 2017—less than the living wage of \$10.76 (Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018). Many child care educators find themselves living paycheck to paycheck. According to data from the National Association for the Education of Young Children and Early Care and Education Consortium, child care programs across the U.S. lost nearly 70% of their daily attendance in one week during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many stated they could not last even one week without getting paid (Without Immediate Relief 2020). And at the beginning of the pandemic, nearly two-thirds of child care providers said they could only maintain their businesses for a month during the stay-at-home orders and subsequent closure of their businesses, only 11% said they could survive indefinitely, and two out of every five programs are estimated to shut their doors permanently (National Association for the Education of Young Children 2020).

How Missouri Is Addressing These Challenges

In a recent briefing prepared by The Center for Law and Social Policy, Senior Policy Analyst Stephanie Schmit stated that “Child care is a \$99 billion industry that is the backbone of the economy, providing safe places for children to learn and grow and an essential work support for parents. Yet even under typical circumstances and a strong economy, millions of providers operate on razor-thin margins. These challenges are exacerbated in the current crisis in which child care centers and homes are closing, families are losing jobs and unable to pay for care, and emergency and essential personnel have elevated unique child care needs.”

In the meantime, federal policymakers have taken critical steps to address the needs of families who need child care, as well as child care providers, with the emergency funding of \$3.5 billion through the CARES Act, \$66 million of which was allocated to Missouri (Governor of Missouri, May 2020). In July, many advocates reached out to members of Congress asking for an increased investment of \$50 billion in the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). CARES Act funding, which was administered by the Missouri Department of

Social Services and provided grants and stipends, has been used to support child care programs who accept children on subsidy, even expanding eligibility and income requirements so more families can access it; but this is short term. The CARES Act funding has merely been a down payment to try and help stabilize child care businesses and support families who need access to child care subsidy.

Part of CCAMO's organizational mission is to serve child care providers and the families who seek child care. Since the pandemic, CCAMO has amplified our efforts, recognizing the critical situation for child care programs. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, CCAMO expanded our child care provider referral services to address the increased need of child care for essential service providers. We provided the additional service of contacting child care programs directly to ensure spots were available for the children of essential workers in programs near their homes or workplaces. For families seeking child care within child care deserts, CCAMO has been verifying supply versus demand data across Missouri. During the onset of the pandemic, CCAMO also created a geo-coded map of open and closed child care programs across Missouri and plotted hospital locations to best assist those working in hospital settings who were in need of child care (CCAMO map: <https://bit.ly/3dED8kw>), as well as keeping the State informed about the number of programs operating.

Additionally, CCAMO has helped child care programs get connected to resource hubs for supplies and be made aware of opportunities that have been provided by the Small Business Administration and the Paycheck Protection Program. CCAMO passed along information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and worked with multiple organizations to create re-opening guidelines for child care programs. We also leveraged St. Louis-based foundation dollars to fund mini-grants for child care programs in ZIP codes with a significant number of low-income households and a high rate of positive COVID-19 cases. We are hosting weekly webinars to hear from providers about their needs, frustrations, and questions. CCAMO has also been providing hands-on technical assistance and consulting for child care providers applying for grants—such as the St. Louis County grant for child care programs—including access to technology, web-based tutorials, and one-on-one consulting sessions to help providers navigate complex grant guidelines. In fact, of the 105 grants submitted to St. Louis County, CCAMO assisted with approximately 25% of those grant applications.



While concrete, on-the-ground efforts are critical to keeping child care afloat, large-scale, systemic changes must be made to the industry. CCAMO has helped to educate child care providers on how to advocate at all levels on public policy surrounding child care, facilitating the opportunity for these individuals to find their voices, contribute to the child care conversation, and demonstrate just how invaluable their input is to decision-makers.

Many organizations and early childhood education leaders across Missouri are currently working to advocate for widespread change in the child care industry. CCAMO has contributed to policy changes in numerous ways, including drawing critical attention to issues via op-eds and public relations opportunities, serving as a media contact for those seeking information about child care, partnering with legislators, and advising policymakers. In June, Kids Win Missouri, a children's policy and advocacy coalition, and Child Care Aware® of America joined national efforts calling for Congress to invest an additional \$50 billion through the Child Care & Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to stabilize the child care industry via the creation of a Child Care Stabilization Fund to support programs across the nation. CCAMO's CEO Robin Phillips participated on a panel hosted by State Senator Jill Schupp and two others hosted by the Missouri Budget Project with staffers from the offices of U.S. Senators Roy Blunt and Josh Hawley to advocate for significant increased investment in the CCDBG, which is being voted on in Congress in August. The fund, \$1 billion of which would potentially be allocated to Missouri, would be used to invest in critical needs such as workforce compensation, health care benefits for providers, and other programmatic and operational costs ([KRMS](#), July 2020). To mitigate the effects of the pandemic, Congress must put money directly in the hands of the child care programs quickly.





What Next?

COVID-19 has not broken the child care system, it has simply hastened its inevitable collapse. Among the many lessons learned from the pandemic, one crucial one is that child care systems, structures, and educators can no longer be taken for granted. They are essential workers and deserve to be recognized as such and valued for the services they provide and their contributions to the success of the economy in communities across our State. Significant changes in infrastructure, deep financial investments, and a reframing of how child care is viewed must occur to maintain a healthy and stable economy. As a recent report from the business-leader group ReadyNation revealed, “This child care crisis costs our country \$57 billion per year” ([Missouri Times](#) July 2020). In fact, a 2013 publication by America’s Edge stated that “If all Missouri children age 5 or under were given access to quality early care and education at a cost of an additional \$1.9 billion, that investment would generate \$3.5 billion in total new spending in Missouri businesses.”

Without a substantial rethinking of the system, child care educators will no longer be financially equipped to care for millions of children, leaving them without the means to support their own families or follow their passion for caregiving and teaching—shaping the next generation. Without child care educators to care for children, families will have to choose between staying at home with their children or pursuing their career and educational goals. And without child care programs, many children will miss out on crucial social and emotional support during some of the most formative years of their lives, potentially changing forever the trajectories of their lives and impacting society in ways we cannot imagine.

In the end, when the child care industry is not supported and valued as essential, it is all of us that lose.



About Child Care Aware® of Missouri

Child Care Aware® of Missouri believes that every child deserves a safe, quality early childhood education experience, which is critical to maximizing their future well-being. The organization’s mission is to improve child care services in Missouri through training, education, quality standards, coaching, and support. CCAMO provides child care referrals to families; training and scholarships to child care educators; and advocating for policy change to benefit children and families.