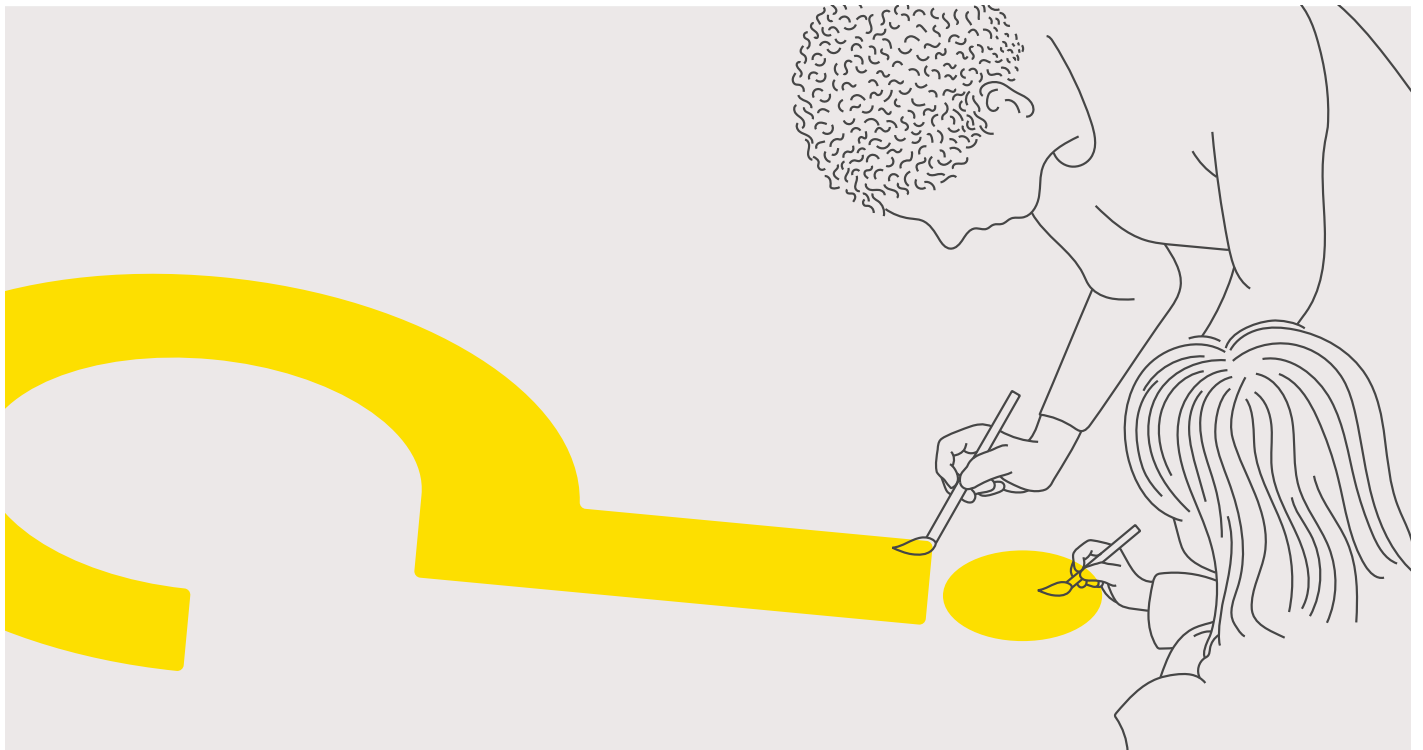


OVERDUE: A NEW CHILD CARE SYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS CHILDREN, FAMILIES & PROVIDERS

U.S. families have long faced difficulties finding high-quality child care that is both reliably available and affordable. Meanwhile, U.S. child care providers have continued to receive low pay, insufficient benefits, and poor working conditions. In recent years, child care has grown even more challenging for both of these groups.

The last three years have reaffirmed both the urgency and opportunity to restructure the American child care system. It is time to improve this fundamental pillar of America's current and future economy and society and strengthen our country's education of young children.



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Child care is a critical community resource that supports child development and learning, enables parents to work and go to school, and employs a diverse workforce of talented educators and caregivers. The pandemic has laid bare how interdependent our families, communities, and economy are with the vibrancy of the American child care system. However, this system has never been adequately resourced, and decades of disinvestment have resulted in a weak and tenuous sector that pandemic closures, evolving demand, and staffing shortages have ravaged. Over the past three years 16,000 licensed child care programs have closed and thousands of workers (mostly mothers) have left and not returned to the workforce. Here we highlight that these problems are deepening, and the impacts on parents and the child care workforce are getting worse.

In late 2021, we wrote about the toll that child care shortages were having on the emotional well-being of parents, children, and child care providers. A few months later in March of 2022, our data indicated a dramatic rise in the number of parents who were unable to find child care and experiencing disruptions to child care that impacted their ability to work.

Here, we look at the latest data from our national parent and provider surveys, and we see that this child care crisis is far from over. First, data from parents show that parents are

continuing to struggle with child care. Care has not been available for the majority of parents needing it and the parents who do have care have experienced ongoing disruptions in that care that have impacted their ability to work. Data from providers show that weaknesses in the child care system are continuing to make it hard for providers to offer high-quality care to children. The majority of child care providers have experienced widespread staff shortages and limited resources to recruit and retain staff. Staffing challenges have negatively impacted providers' emotional well-being, and widespread burnout has affected their ability to provide high-quality care. Many providers have considered leaving the child care workforce, which will only exacerbate the lack of child care available to parents and the lack of staff and resources available to child care providers.

Taken together, these new data illustrate a concerning, long-standing pattern. There remains a significant need to establish better systemic resources to ensure that providers are adequately compensated, supported, and able to provide high-quality care to children.

“I’m most worried about child care. If I cannot get at least 30 hours of child care per week, I will face unemployment.

Parent in California

“Our biggest concern is lack of affordable child care (or even unaffordable child care major shortage of child care spots in our large metro area!)

Parent in Illinois

“Our biggest challenge is finding child care for my infant. There is nothing available for infants in this area. Because of this, I have to go from full time to part time and we will use family to help watch the baby on the days I do work.

Parent in Michigan

MOST PARENTS' NEED FOR CHILD CARE IS UNMET DUE TO AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY.

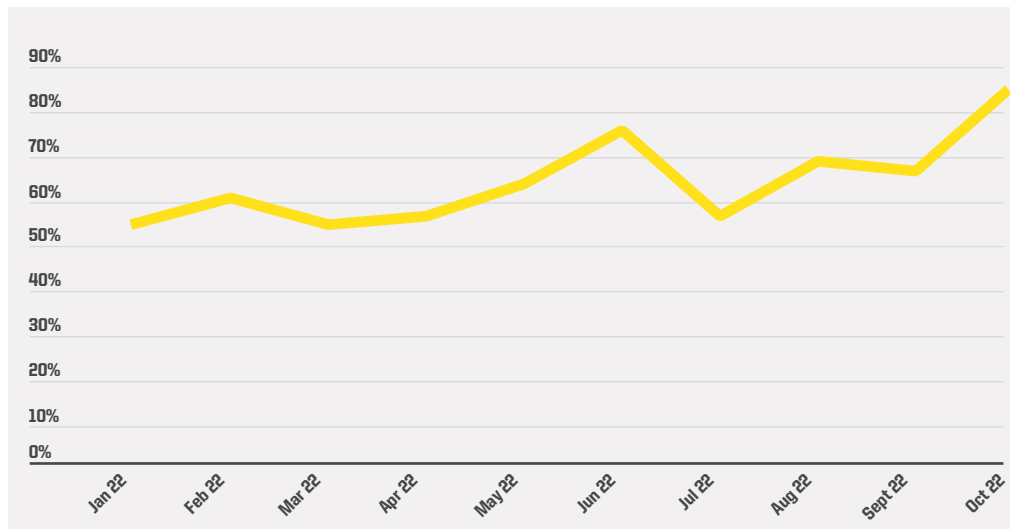
Overall, reliable child care has not been available to the majority of parents needing it.

During every month from January to October of 2022, over three-quarters of parents looking for child care had difficulty finding any center-based, home-based, or other type of care.

In March of 2022 alone, 91% of these parents had difficulty finding child care.

The majority of parents using child care (over half during every month from January to October 2022) said that disruptions in that care were impacting their work. By October of 2022, this number had risen to 85% of these parents.

Percentage of parents who experienced child care disruptions that affected their work



WIDESPREAD STAFFING SHORTAGES AS WELL AS DIFFICULTIES RECRUITING AND RETAINING STAFF HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE QUALITY OF CHILD CARE.

Staffing challenges have impacted the majority of child care providers. Each month during the past year,

more than half of child care providers reported staff shortages.

“My biggest concern is the cost of child care in general and no subsidies for middle class families. Concerned that we can’t have more children due to the financial cost of child care specifically.
Parent in Michigan

“Our biggest concern is the rising child care costs - our child care informed us that unless the state (MONTANA) renews some of the grant funding, our costs will increase 20% for the 23-24 school year.
Parent in Montana

“Our biggest concern is the cost of daycare. We are expecting a baby this winter and with two children in full time care, the monthly cost in our area will be \$5000 per month.
Parent in Massachusetts

This has been especially pronounced at child care centers – the number of center-based providers reporting staff shortages ranged from 64% to 82% over the last year. Staff recruitment and retention have also been challenging.

Over three-quarters of center-based providers and over two-thirds of home-based providers have reported difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. Staff shortages have left child care providers with less time and

resources to dedicate toward the provision of high-quality care. They have had less time for the activities that directly help the children in their care, including: preparing activities, projects, and lessons for class, sanitizing their classrooms, and keeping their work days and class routines consistent and predictable (the numbers of center- and home-based providers reporting less time for these activities ranged from 31% to 54% over the last year).

“Our biggest concern is money. Rising costs of all goods have been difficult for our family, especially when one parent is unable to work due to child care availability and costs.

Parent in North Carolina

CHILD CARE PROVIDERS’ WELL-BEING IS SUFFERING AND IMPACTING THEIR PLANS FOR REMAINING IN THE CHILD CARE WORKFORCE.

Staffing difficulties and lack of resources have had a major impact on provider well-being.

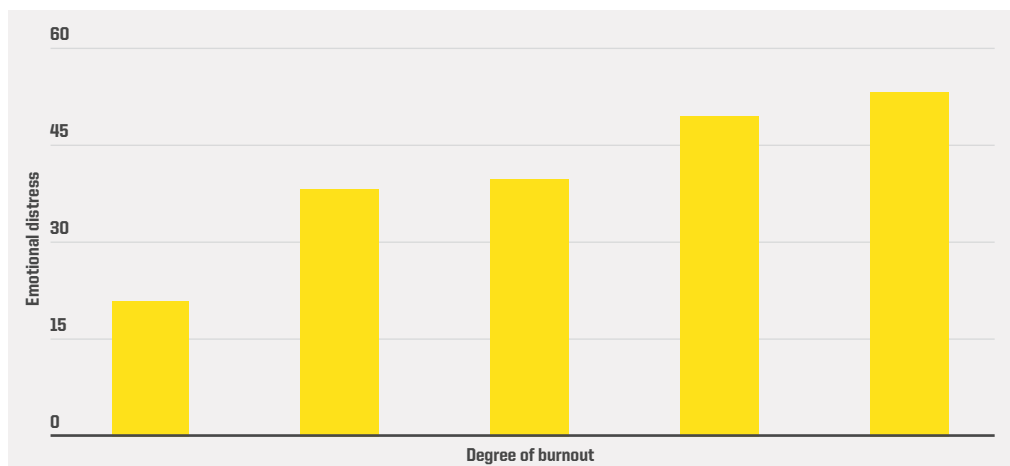
The vast majority of providers have reported higher levels of stress as a result of staff shortages (81% of center-based and 73% of home-based providers), along with anxiety,

difficulty decompressing, and depression. Inadequate resources, staff shortages, low wages, and a general lack of systemic support for the child care system have also led to the majority of providers (71%) feeling burned out “often” or “always” and less able to provide high-quality care.

“I am considering leaving my role as a child care provider because I have trouble making ends meet and burnout. The stress of “coping” is getting to me and often makes me wonder how much longer I want to be an Early Childhood educator.

Home-based provider

Associations between burn out symptoms & total emotional distress



Providers experiencing more burnout have had higher levels of emotional distress. Increasing numbers of providers have considered leaving the child care workforce over the past year. This could lead to increasing

shortages in the workforce. From October to December of 2021, the percentages of providers who were considering leaving their jobs each month ranged from 15% to 18%. During 2022, the monthly percentages ranged from 26% to 32%.

PARENTS AND PROVIDERS ARE MAKING IT CLEAR THAT CHILD CARE CHALLENGES ARE NOT IMPROVING.

The current child care system is crumbling – it is inaccessible and unaffordable for the majority of parents, and it is not a sustainable job or business for most providers. A summary of our key findings presented above:

- Child care has not been available to the majority of parents who need it, and disruptions in child care have negatively impacted their ability to work.
- Child care providers have continued to experience staff shortages and difficulty with staff recruitment and retention, especially center-based providers. These staffing challenges have had a negative impact on providers' ability to provide high-quality care.
- The majority of child care providers have experienced more stress, and widespread burnout has led to higher levels of emotional distress. Because of systemic child care challenges, as many as a third of providers have considered leaving the child care workforce.

As more providers are forced out of the workforce, these concerning

patterns will only become more dire as staff shortages worsen and put more pressure on the providers that remain. They will have ever-dwindling resources to meet the learning, safety, and socialization needs of the children in their care, and they will have even more limited space available for the families who are still trying desperately to find care. Some communities and states, including [Multnomah County in Oregon](#) and [New Mexico](#), have implemented programs that make child care more affordable and provide support to child care providers. These states show us that public commitment to the child care system is possible. Without more widespread implementation of policies like these, the child care crisis will hit a breaking point, and the impacts will be felt not only by families but by many other businesses, industries, and the larger economy. Childcare is what allows a significant portion of the American workforce to work. We need a strong child care system so that we can have a strong American workforce. Now is the time to address this urgent need.

“I am considering leaving my role as a child care provider because the rising costs are making it way less profitable to be in this business.
Home-based provider
in Texas

“I am considering leaving my role as a child care provider because of the stress and exhaustion - not worth the pay. Parent pressure - not being able to focus on teaching and learning, spending all the time on administrative/ financial stuff; staffing and COVID policies (and staffing-so many absences).
Center director
in Virginia

ABOUT THE RAPID PROJECT

Data presented in this fact sheet are based on RAPID household surveys. Analyses are based on responses collected from 15,556 caregivers between April 2020 and September 2022. These caregivers represent a range of voices: 9.1% are Black/African American, 13.8% are Latinx, and 34.9% live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. Proportions/percentages are calculated based on the item-level response rates, not on the total sample. The data for these analyses are not weighted.

The RAPID project includes a survey of caregivers with children under age 6 and a survey of child care providers and other adults who care for children under age 6.

RAPID is under the direction of Philip Fisher, PhD, Director of the Center on Early Childhood at Stanford University

1,000

surveyed monthly

111

surveys

15,000+

households

50

US states

