

# Many Connecticut families with young children are struggling to access child care

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The RAPID Survey Project partners with cities, counties, and states across the U.S. to listen to parents and caregivers with children under age 6. Their voices and experiences provide snapshots of what life is like for those raising young children in communities across the country and help to spot national trends. The goal of the project is to lift up parent voices to inform local policies and programs that support families.

[Learn more about our work and where we conduct surveys.](#)

In 2024, we partnered with The Connecticut Project and community-based organizations in the state to hear directly from Connecticut families of all races, ethnicities, and income levels. This fact sheet represents survey data from 1,803 parents of children under age 6 across all eight Connecticut counties, who told us about their experiences with child care access and affordability.



**Stanford**  
Center on Early Childhood



“I cannot go back to work because child care would take up my entire paycheck if not more. My husband makes too much for us to qualify for Care 4 Kids [child care subsidy program]. I budget closely so we live comfortably. But this situation, like most families, traps women as the primary caregivers at home.” Parent in Hartford County

The Connecticut Project and its partners will use this information to inform early learning and care professionals, policymakers, funders, economic and workforce developers, intermediaries, and business leaders so that program and policy recommendations are reflective of what families in the state say they need.

## One in four Connecticut families with young children say child care is unaffordable

“I try to find free child care through friends when possible and the use of family.” Parent in Windham County

The data show that Connecticut families of all races, ethnicities, and income levels who do not have their young child in child care report that the high cost is the main reason they are not using child care.

“Grandparents helping to provide free child care when they can [is helping].” Parent in New Haven County

Among surveyed Connecticut families who have child care, 25% report that their current child care arrangement is unaffordable. Almost two in three surveyed Connecticut parents (63%) report spending more than 7% of total family income on child care, higher than the child care affordability benchmark established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“[Losing] Care 4 Kids is a constant threat if we lose a job and are looking for work.” Parent in Windham County

## Child care subsidies intended to help lower-income families afford child care are only reaching a small percentage of income-eligible families

“Even with Care 4 Kids, it’s a struggle. My son is currently in a home daycare, and Care 4 Kids pays less for this kind of care.” Parent in Hartford County

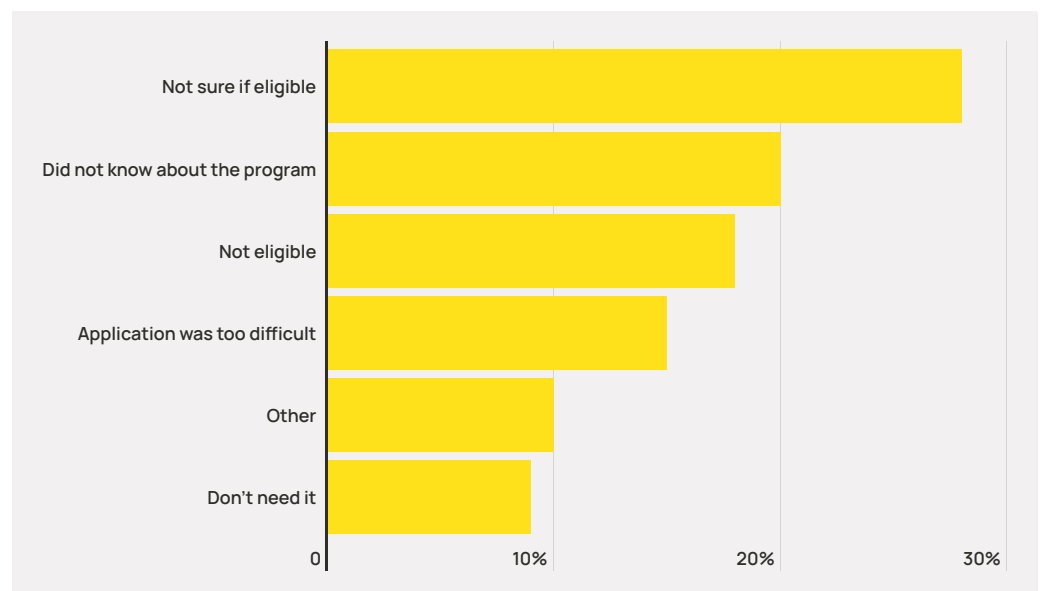
To help offset the cost of child care, Connecticut offers a child care subsidy (Care 4 Kids) to parents based on their family income. Only 35% of surveyed Connecticut parents who are eligible based on their income are receiving Care 4 Kids.

“Care 4 Kids helps relieve some stress.” Parent in Hartford County

More than one in four (28%) surveyed Connecticut parents who are eligible based on their income but did not apply for child care benefits say the reason they did not apply is because they are unsure if their family meets the income eligibility criteria. Additionally, one in five (20%) surveyed Connecticut parents who are eligible based on their income say they did not know about the child care benefits or how to find a child care program that accepts the benefits.

“I’m often denied [eligibility] in error by Care 4 Kids.” Parent in Hartford County

Connecticut families’ reasons for not applying for the Care 4 Kids child care subsidy



“Finding affordable child care that helps my wife return to the workplace [is my family’s biggest challenge].”  
Parent in Windham County

“[My biggest challenge right now is] having to find care for my kids on holidays that fall on a weekday.”  
Parent in Hartford County

“[My biggest challenge is] balancing two children and two full-time jobs, particularly with a child with special needs who requires a plethora of outside supports.” Parent in Hartford County

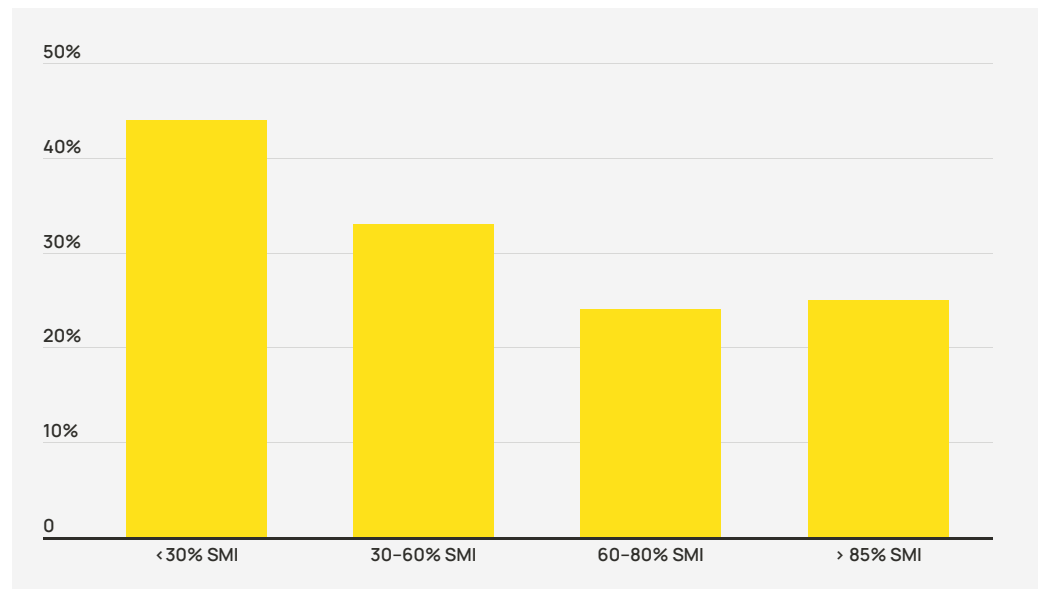
“Keeping up with bills and my children’s sensory needs as they need tools and materials to help.” Parent in New London County

# Connecticut families with young children face difficulty finding child care

Half of Connecticut families (50%) who took the survey and report searching for child care in the past year had difficulty finding space in a home – or center-based program. When asked about their most recent search for child care for their children under age 6, 29% of parents say that it took three months or longer to find child care.

Families’ experiences finding child care differ by income level and primary language spoken in the home. The data show that surveyed lower-income Connecticut families with young children are more likely to have spent at least three months searching for child care compared to surveyed middle- and higher-income Connecticut families with young children.

Percentage of Connecticut families whose child care search took longer than three months, by state median income (SMI)



“We lack support and resources for our child who is disabled.”  
Parent in New Haven County

Among surveyed Connecticut families with young children who speak a primary language other than English in the home (16%), almost half (44%) had difficulty finding a child care provider who speaks the same language as them.

“The financial strain of specialized care for our child with disabilities is overwhelming.”  
Parent in Hartford County

## Connecticut families with a child with disabilities experience additional challenges accessing child care

The surveyed Connecticut parents with a young child with a disability are experiencing particular hardships meeting child care needs. More than two in three Connecticut parents (69%) who have a child under age 6 with a disability report difficulty finding a child care provider who could meet the needs of their child.

“Finding affordable summer care where my disabled child will be safe [is my biggest challenge].” Parent in Hartford County

Missing work due to lack of child care can impact parents' emotional well-being and the household's financial well-being and economic stability. RAPID Survey Project analysis shows that Connecticut parents with a young child with a disability report having to miss work more than three times in the past month due to disruptions in their usual child care, compared to an average of two times per month for Connecticut parents who do not have a young child with a disability.

## Conclusion

Many parents with young children in Connecticut are finding it hard to access the child care they need and that can support their family and young children's well-being. Child care is particularly hard to access for parents with lower incomes and parents who have a child with a disability. The data show that more work is needed to reach all families with young children in Connecticut with information about the availability of child care subsidies (Care 4 Kids) and to support families looking for child care. These findings point to the need to address parents' concerns and experiences so they are better supported in providing the healthy, responsive caregiving that is essential to their young children's development. The Connecticut Project aims to make these findings available to advocacy organizations and policymakers who are in the best place to make needed changes for families in the state.

# About the RAPID State Surveys

The RAPID Survey Project is based in the [Stanford Center on Early Childhood](#), under the direction of Philip Fisher, PhD, Director of the Center.

Data were analyzed in partnership with the Connecticut Data Collaborative and The Connecticut Project, except where noted by the RAPID Survey Project. This set of analyses is based on responses collected from 1,803 Connecticut parents between April 29, 2024 and May 31, 2024, with the support of community-based organizations who recruited survey participants from a range of backgrounds. These caregivers represent a range of voices: 16.7% are Black, 21.6% are Latinx, and 34.5% of the participants live below 200% of the federal poverty level. Proportions/percentages are calculated based on the item-level response rates, not out of the total sample size. The data for these analyses are not weighted.

The Connecticut Project mobilizes people, partners, and resources around priorities that create economic opportunity for families, especially low-income families, and is a catalyst for time-bound, results-oriented campaigns that advance positive outcomes for families. The Connecticut Project works for a just, thriving, and optimistic Connecticut where race, gender, income, geography, and other circumstances no longer predetermine opportunity.