Diapers and formula are difficult for families with infants and toddlers to afford

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Inflation and trade policy changes are putting pressure on caregivers of young children. These challenges are part of a more general trend of economic hardship among families with young children.

Since the RAPID Survey Project began six years ago, at least one in four families has reported difficulty meeting basic needs, including food, utilities, housing, child care, and healthcare. Other RAPID data show that one in every four surveyed families with children under age 6 reported food insecurity.

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"The main thing that we've bought has been diapers. Stores have made their coupon policies more restrictive, so even if the sticker price hasn't changed, I'm not able to get things as cheaply." **Parent in Arizona**

This fact sheet presents national data from parents and child care providers of infants and toddlers (defined as birth through age 3) who participated in RAPID surveys in July 2025 and March 2026. We document caregivers' experiences accessing diapers, formula, and other baby equipment (e.g., cribs, bassinets, strollers, car seats, changing tables, baby gates, and high chairs), which are essential for the health, positive development, and well-being of young children.

"Have definitely noticed prices going up, like bags for diaper pail. Trying to get clothes, books, toys secondhand for better cost." **Parent in Wisconsin**

More than one in 10 families report not having enough diapers for their infants and toddlers

Diapers are essential for public health and family well-being. Without enough diapers, children are at risk of health problems like rashes and infections.

"Our child is potty trained so now she only needs diapers during naps and sleep. This has helped a lot with expenses." **Parent in Indiana**

We asked caregivers with children using diapers: "In the past month, have you had enough diapers to meet your children's needs?"

In July 2025, 11% of surveyed parents reported they did not have enough diapers. Nine months later, in March 2026, 13% of surveyed parents reported they did not have enough diapers.

"It would be great if these items could become covered under federal benefits." **Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) provider in Mississippi**

Nine percent of surveyed providers in March 2026 reported that they did not have enough diapers to meet children's needs while they are in their care. The top barriers to having enough diapers selected by these providers were that

families cannot always provide enough diapers (72%), and that diapers cost too much (44%).

"Everything is more expensive now and just keeps going up." **Parent in Maryland**

In their written open-ended responses, caregivers focused on the high cost of diapers.

High cost is what keeps families from having enough diapers

"Inflation has affected even this [purchasing baby gear] and it sometimes gets concerning and worrying." **Parent in California**

To parents who reported not having enough diapers, we asked: "What barriers are you experiencing to getting enough diapers to meet your needs? Select all that apply."

- Cost
- Unable to get time away from work
- Too busy, or not enough time
- Inability to find child care
- Diapers were out of stock or unavailable where I usually purchase them
- I usually get diapers donated or provided free of charge, and they were not available
- Caring for family members
- Transportation issues

"There is also an obvious up-charge for baby products which is annoying." **Parent in Ohio**

In July 2025, 91% of surveyed parents without enough diapers reported cost was a barrier.

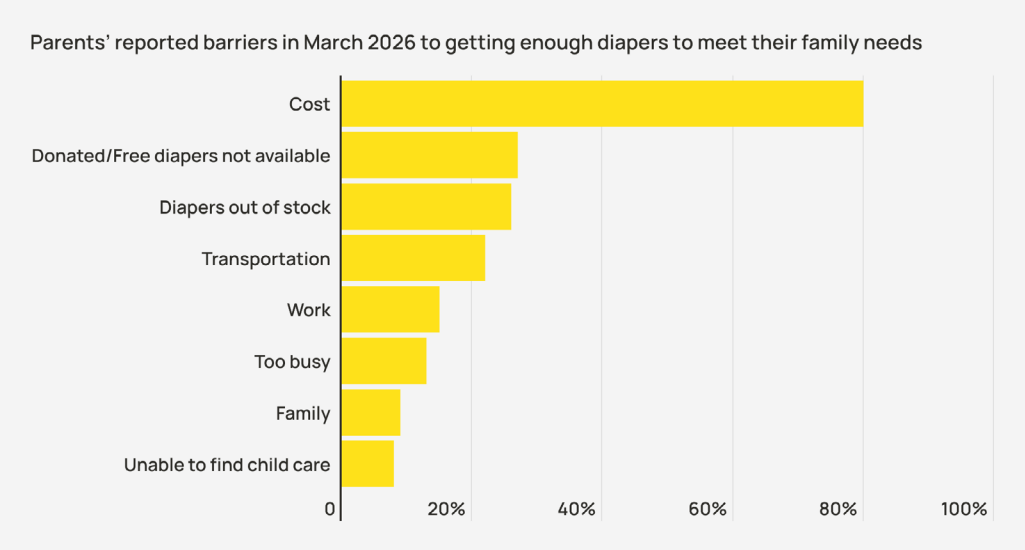
"Purchasing infant and toddler equipment has been both essential and overwhelming at times. While there are many options available, finding quality items that are safe, affordable, and durable can be challenging." **Parent in Nebraska**

"The cost of [baby] goods and services is rising much faster than my salary ever will." **Parent in Michigan**

This remained the most-frequently reported barrier nine months later, when 80% of surveyed parents in March 2026 reported cost was a barrier.

Other barriers were reported at much lower rates. In March 2026, 27% of surveyed parents without enough diapers reported donated or free diapers were not available, and 26% reported diapers were out of stock where they usually purchased them.

"Tariffs have caused prices to increase exponentially." **Parent in Massachusetts**



"I definitely noticed an increase with prices [of baby gear] due to tariffs." **Parent in Arizona**

In their responses to RAPID's open-ended survey questions, caregivers wrote about rising costs for baby supplies, with some referencing tariffs and inflation, as indicated in the quotes in this fact sheet.

"Tariffs (or the threat thereof) have driven up prices a lot." **Parent in Massachusetts**

"With the tariffs, things are getting more expensive. I often rely on major sales to purchase equipment or go to my local pregnancy resource center for gear." **Parent in Pennsylvania**

Some families with infants using formula struggle to have enough to feed their children

Infants receive nutrition from breast milk, formula, or a combination of both.

Baby formula is the primary source of nutrition for many infants, typically consumed within their first year of life before they begin having cow's milk and other foods.

"I have been purchasing equipment for my children since my oldest (now almost 12) and inflation has been fairly obvious in the overall cost of equipment throughout time." **Parent in Michigan**

We asked parents who reported having a child under age 1 using formula: "Are you currently struggling to access baby formula?"

In July 2025, nearly one in ten surveyed parents (9%) reported struggling. Nine months later, in March 2026, 16% of surveyed parents reported struggling.

Additionally, we asked child care providers who care for children using baby formula: "Are you currently experiencing challenges accessing enough baby formula for the infants in your care?" In March 2026, 27% of surveyed providers reported struggling to find and afford formula for the infants in their care.

"The cost of everything has increased." **Center teacher in New Hampshire**

In their responses to RAPID's open-ended survey questions, caregivers wrote about the high costs and limited availability of formula, as described in the quotes in this fact sheet.

"Formula prices are terrible. My newborn needs hypoallergenic formula and it is EVEN MORE EXPENSIVE." **Parent in Wisconsin**

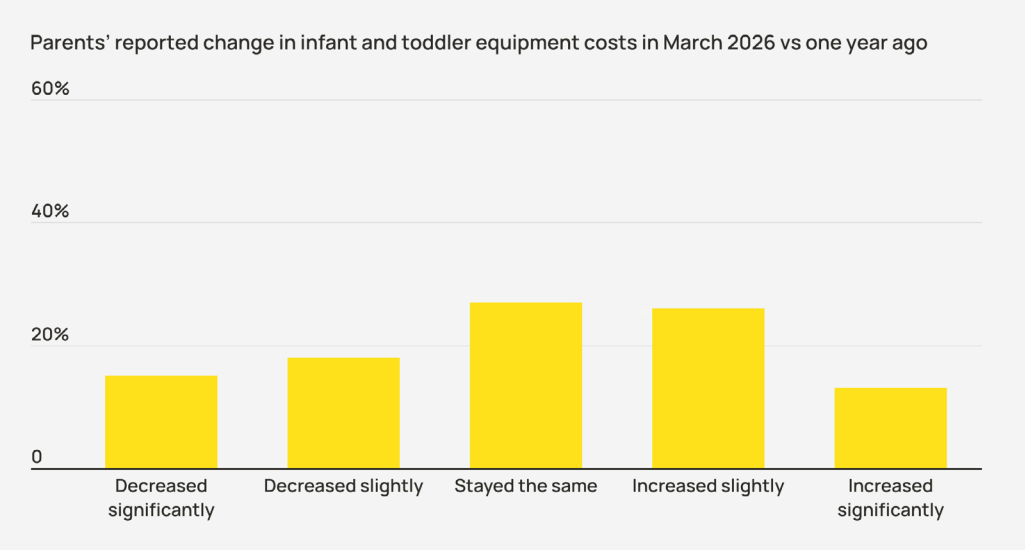
"I live in a more rural area, so we have to travel to bigger cities or towns to purchase anything that is a bigger need or formula. Most higher quality items can be found further away in the Chicago area." **Parent in Michigan**

Families report rising costs for infant and toddler equipment

We asked caregivers: "Compared to one year ago, how has the cost of infant and toddler equipment changed for your family?"

In March 2026, about two in five surveyed parents (39%) reported increased costs, with 26% reporting a slight increase and 13% reporting a significant increase.

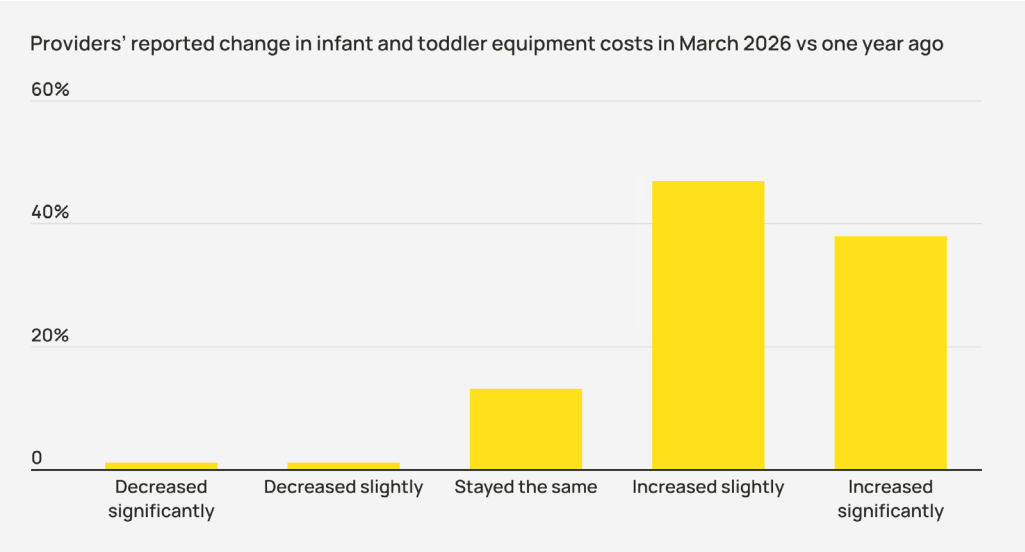
"Most of the necessary equipment we already had from our older son, so mainly using hand me downs. Only purchased formula and a few additional clothing items." **Parent in Virginia**



"[Social media] and my mom groups have been a lifesaver. We all share what we have or sell it cheaply." **Parent in California**

We also asked child care providers: "Compared to one year ago, how has the cost of infant and toddler equipment changed?" In March 2026, the majority of surveyed providers (85%) reported increased costs, with 47% reporting a slight increase and 38% reporting a significant increase. Providers may experience cost increases differently than families because providers purchase multiple pieces of equipment used for multiple children.

"A lot of parents are using special organic formula for their infants and it is a major struggle finding it locally, forcing me to purchase online, which has been damaged and delayed getting to me." **Home-based provider in Michigan**



"I try and purchase things secondhand or get things for free through various social media groups, like the neighborhood mom's group and our local Buy Nothing group." **Parent in New Jersey**

In their responses to RAPID's open-ended survey questions, caregivers described asking for equipment on social media, secondhand markets, donations, and community networks. These strategies work for durable equipment that can be shared or reused over time, such as strollers and cribs. However, they do not work for consumables like diapers and formula, which must be purchased new and are needed continuously.

"In our area there's a wonderfully robust Buy Nothing network. We also have neighbors who share their used items with us." **Parent in North Carolina**

"I usually look for sales, and used items. Some parents donate." **Home-based provider in California**

Conclusion

"Our community is very generous and through the Buy Nothing group I have been able to find most of what I need." **Parent in Utah**

RAPID data show that during a period of economic pressure, essential baby supplies were difficult for many families with young children to afford. More caregivers reported struggling to access baby formula in March 2026 than July 2025. Cost was the most frequently cited barrier when families did not have enough clean diapers. These challenges reflect policy choices about wages, prices, and which basic needs are covered by support programs.

"I purchased secondhand baby equipment for items that have no expiration and I have found it to be much more affordable." **Parent in Massachusetts**

When families cannot afford enough diapers, both children and caregivers face risks to their health and well-being. Research also indicates that young children who do not have adequate nutrition face increased risks of developmental delays, poor health outcomes, and behavioral difficulties. During the earliest years of life, when children's brains are rapidly developing, consistent access to adequate nutrition and basic needs is essential.

"I wish infant and toddler gear was more affordable, since they outgrow things so quickly." **Parent in Indiana**

Our current support systems are designed in ways that make it hard for families to have enough diapers and formula. Federal programs that help families purchase food and nutrition supports, like SNAP and WIC, do not cover diapers. As one child care provider wrote, "It would be great if these items could become covered under federal benefits." Families receiving TANF may face difficult trade-offs between diapers and other essentials. WIC covers formula for eligible families, yet barriers to enrollment, benefit amounts that may not cover full needs, and limited formula availability mean many families still struggle to have enough. Addressing these gaps in support could reduce health risks for children and economic hardship for families.

"The cost of everything has gone up, including essential items like strollers and car seats." **Parent in Michigan**

"Finding equipment is easy, but paying for new or gently used products can be difficult to get the money."
Home-based provider in Ohio

Policymakers can build support systems where every family has access to essentials, like diapers and formula, that keep infants and toddlers healthy. RAPID will continue to gather insights from caregivers about access to essential supplies to inform policies and programs that support young children and their families.

About the RAPID Survey Project

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

This set of analyses on RAPID national household data is based on responses collected from 1,447 parents with at least one child aged 0–3 in July 2025 and March 2026. These caregivers represent a range of voices: 16.8% are Black, 21.1% are Latinx, and 29.8% live below 200% of the federal poverty level. Proportions/percentages were calculated based on the number of participants who provided valid responses to a given survey item, rather than the total sample size. Data are weighted to match the known population.

This set of analyses on RAPID national provider data was collected from 266 child care providers who indicated caring for at least one child aged 0–3 in March 2026. These providers represent a range of voices: 12.3% are Black, 14.5% are Latinx, and 30.4% live below 200% of the federal poverty level. Proportions/percentages were calculated based on the number of participants who provided valid responses to a given survey item, rather than the total sample size. Data are not weighted.

RAPID collects data from parents of young children, child care providers, and pediatric healthcare providers across the country. The surveys are national in scope, though not technically nationally representative. RAPID collects snapshots of data across time and can also assess trends longitudinally.

For more information about RAPID study design and methods, see here.

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