



EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKING GROUP

Child Care Deserts in West Michigan



A Child Care Provider
Survey Summary

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Addressing the crisis.

The lack of affordable, quality child care keeps many parents out of the workforce. This barrier to employment is increasing in West Michigan, where the number of child care providers declined by 30 percent from 2016 to 2017 and continues to fall.

Recognizing this as a significant obstacle to our goal of making West Michigan a top 20 talent region, Talent 2025's Early Childhood Working Group and several partners surveyed providers in all 13 counties of West Michigan. Surveyors placed 700 outreach calls, completing 296 phone surveys and 140 online surveys. They gathered information on the availability of infant and toddler care, provider waitlists, barriers to staying in business, licensing and regulation, motivations, and expenses.

A central and recurring theme in the Child Care Provider Survey was that providers have a heart for working with children, but the system does not support them in this work. Many see a need for a licensing and regulatory system that treats them as small businesses, supporting their success.

The findings are indicative of several persistent and ongoing difficulties faced by child care providers in Michigan, highlighting some of the contributors to growing "child care deserts" – areas where child care is not readily available. The collection of this data is used to articulate the problems and make recommendations for strategies to address them.

Providers feel the need for a system that treats them like small businesses and provides the proper supports for success.

"It's hard to serve the families and the regulations at the same time."

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Increase the eligibility threshold
- 2 Increase the reimbursement rate to child care providers
- 3 Streamline the regulatory framework
- 4 Increase the capacity of child care providers and invest in a well-trained workforce
- 5 Create quality rated subsidy grants

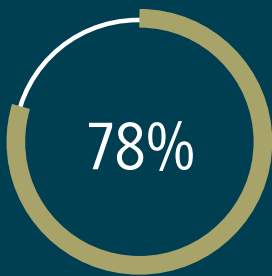
Barriers identified by providers.

- **Inspections:** This step to acquire and maintain a license can be expensive and time-consuming.
- **Getting started:** Navigating the system to become a registered provider is difficult, especially without ongoing support.
- **Playground rules:** Regulations are hard to interpret, and authorized equipment can be costly, limiting opportunities for outdoor play areas.
- **Zoning:** Repeatedly cited as a barrier, local zoning regulations are particularly restrictive for centers and group homes.
- **Liability insurance:** All providers struggle to find companies to insure their business.
- **The ability of families to pay:** Providers are willing to be flexible on payment but lose income when they have to let a family go due to lack of payment. Operating at less than full capacity is not profitable.
- **Cost of doing business:** Child care is a low-margin business. One in-home provider estimated earning less than five dollars an hour after factoring costs.
- **Finding and retaining quality staff:** Paying competitive wages is difficult when trying to keep rates affordable for families.
- **Licensing compliance:** Difficulties include changes in regulatory staff, staying up to date on changes and rising costs of compliance.
- **Work-life balance:** In a business designed to provide families with work-life balance, it is difficult for providers to achieve that for themselves. It is hard to find staff to cover for them while they attend to needs of their own families.

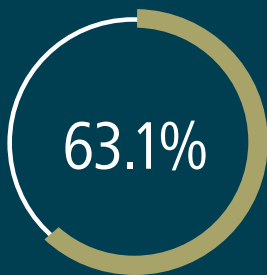
Mapping our region's infant and toddler child care deserts.

The child care deserts are the empty areas between concentrations of providers, where care is not accessible or feasible for working parents.

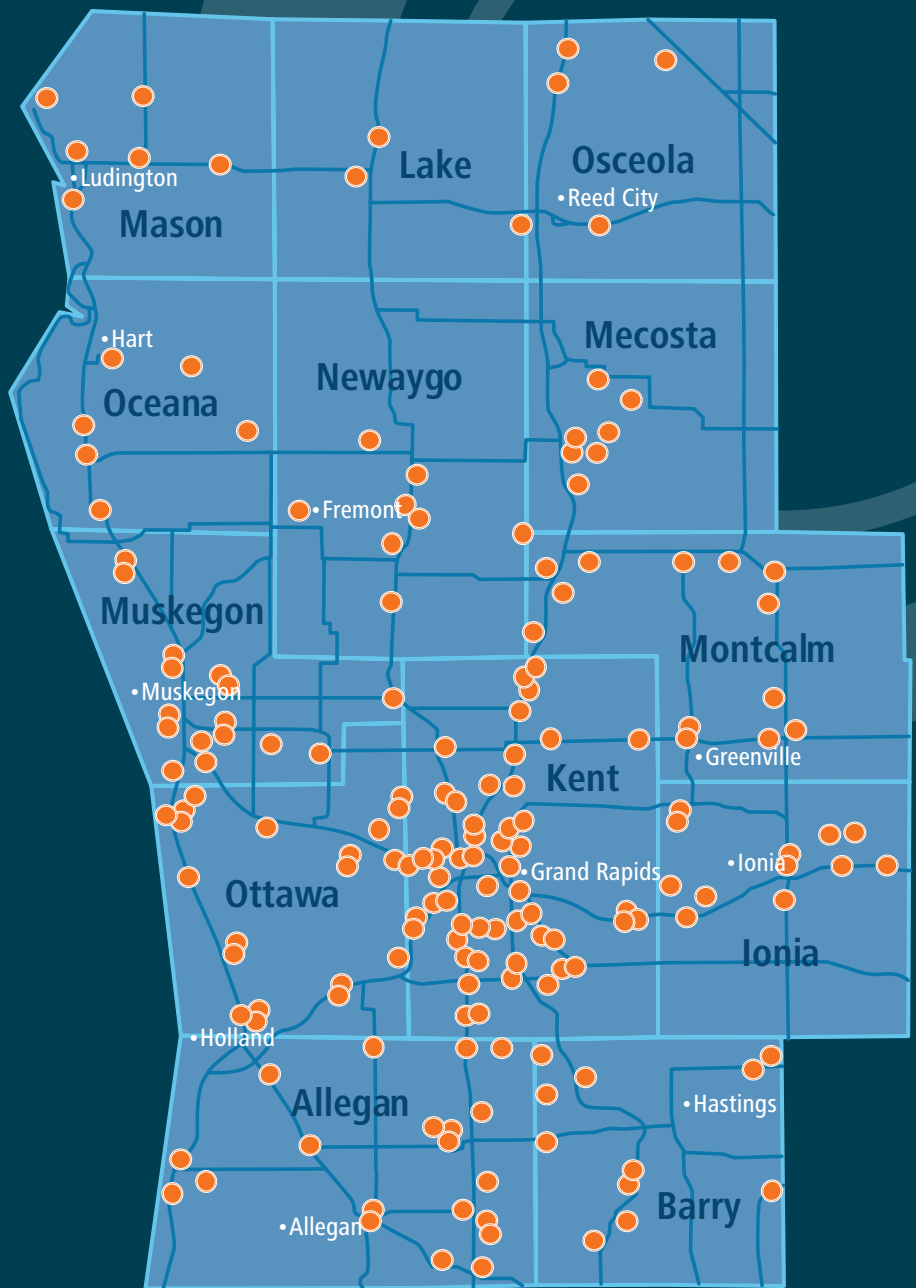
- Licensed center and home-based providers who care for infants and toddlers, 0-18 months



78% of surveyed providers reported having zero slots available for infant and toddler care



63.1% of children, ages 0-5, with all parents in the workforce (13-county average)





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