


INFANT AND TODDLER GAP ANALYSIS 2023



Understanding the need for infant
and toddler early childhood care and
education services in Virginia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Since 2016, Virginia’s Mixed Delivery program has provided public funding for early childhood care and education (ECCE) services for 3- and 4-year-olds in community and private settings. During the 2022 legislative session, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation expanding the program to fund a pilot for up to 200 infants and toddlers in recognition of the need for similar services for families with children at younger ages.

Despite a body of research that indicates that investment and participation in high quality ECCE services in the earliest years of life provides the strongest return and outcomes for children,^{1,2,3} families’ access is more limited for infants and toddlers than for 3- and 4-year-old children. And because of the educator-to-child ratio and other features required by ECCE licensing, the cost of these services is much higher than for preschool-aged children. Parents of infants and toddlers, many of whom are at the start of their professional careers and earning trajectories, struggle to access and afford these services. And while quality, including health and safety measures, matters for children at all ages, stakes are especially high considering the significant needs and vulnerabilities of very young children. Understanding the needs, preferences, and gaps for families seeking these services will better inform the targeting of strategies and resources to match cost-effective supply with specific demand.

The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF), which implements the state’s Mixed Delivery program, initiated this gap analysis to identify and document the status of infant and toddler ECCE services across the state and to understand where gaps exist in the system. The analysis, which sought to answer six core questions, included a review and analysis of secondary data, as well as primary data collection from Virginia families with infants and toddlers who are unserved or underserved by the ECCE system.

Findings provide the following answers to the study’s six research questions. For more details on methodology and findings, see the full report.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

What is the availability of infant and toddler ECCE services?

Findings summary:

- There are 298,000 infants and toddlers living in Virginia. Of these, 68% or 203,000 have all available parents in the workforce, a proxy for the need for ECCE services.
- Virginia has 3,734 regulated ECCE sites that report serving toddlers (16-35 months) and 2,716 that accept infants (15 months and younger).
- Just over half (56%) of regulated sites in the state report that they accept children under 16 months, another 21% accept children starting at 16-35 months; the remainder of sites either reported accepting children beginning at 3-5 years old (12%) or did not report minimum ages accepted (11%).
- Statewide, 63% of infant- and toddler-serving sites are centers; the remaining 37% of sites are family day homes.

¹Doyle, O., Harmon, C.P., Heckman, J.J., Tremblay, R.E. (2009). *Investing in early human development: Timing and economic efficiency*. *Economics and Human Biology* (7), 1-6.

²Heckman, J.J. (2006). *Skill formation and the economics of investing in disadvantaged children*. *Science* (312).

³Heckman, J.J. (2012). *Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy*. www.heckmanequation.org

- There are 48 infants for every infant-serving site in the state and 45 toddlers for each toddler-serving site; given that most sites do not serve nearly this many infants and toddlers, more capacity is needed to serve these age groups.
- Specific data on site enrollment by age is needed to better understand supply and gaps; LinkB5 offers an opportunity to understand enrollments at all publicly funded ECCE sites starting in FY24.



Why it matters: The need (demand) for infant and toddler ECCE services exceeds what the current regulated system can provide (supply). When availability of infant and toddler services is limited, families who cannot rely on family or extended family support must either turn to unregulated services, if they can find them (and have no assurances or safeguards for the safety, quality, and reliability of services), or leave/reduce participation in the workforce. These choices are less than ideal for child development, parent employment, family financial security, and the economic well-being of the state. There is considerable research indicating that high-quality ECCE services provide long-term benefits to children and families.^{4,5,6}

Potential solutions to build supply:

- Leverage public-private partnerships across government, business, and philanthropy to:
 - create incentives for existing ECCE sites (both centers and family day homes) to expand capacity to serve more infants and toddlers.
 - create incentives for new ECCE operators (both centers and family day homes) to enter the field. These incentives might include tax breaks, start-up loans, technical assistance and/or expedited licensing, and financing to promote growth of the industry.
- Develop and promote workforce development programs, supports, and resources to recruit, retain, and ensure a robust early educator workforce skilled in supporting infants and toddlers.
- Develop a data collection system to capture actual slot availability, enrollment levels, and wait lists at state, regional, and community levels to better understand gaps, inform solutions, and target resources.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 2 and 3:

To what extent can families with infants and toddlers access services that meet their current and anticipated needs and preferences?

What factors impact families' ability to access preferred ECCE services?

Findings summary:

- Nearly half of surveyed families (44%) say it is very hard to find openings for infants and toddlers.
- The primary factors impacting families' ability to access their preferred infant and toddler ECCE services are: lack of availability, price, location, and hours.
- Among unserved families, affordability is the primary reason they do not have ECCE services.

⁴Dearing, E., McCartney, K., & Taylor, B.A. (2009). *Does higher quality early child care promote low-income children's math and reading achievement in middle childhood?* Child Development, 80(5), 1329-1349.

⁵Keys, T.D., Farkas, G., Burchinal, M.R., Duncan, G.J., Ruzek, E.A., & Howes, C. (2013). *Preschool center quality and school readiness: Quality effects and variation by demographic and child characteristics.* Child Development, 84(4), 1171-1190.

⁶Sabol, T.J., & Chase-Lansdale, P.L. (2015). The influence of low-income children's participation in Head Start on their parents' education and employment. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management.* 34(1), 136-161.

- In addition to affordable and quality ECCE services, unserved and underserved families report high demand for services that offered shared language, faith, or culture and the ability to accommodate special needs.
- One-quarter of all families with infants and toddlers need ECCE services during non-traditional hours or on the weekends; this proportion was 39% among unserved and underserved families.

Why it matters: Barriers to ECCE services, such as limited availability and cost, impact parents' ability to work and force them to make compromises about the type and quality of services their child receives. For some, it means leaving the workforce, while others become underemployed to align their work hours and ECCE arrangements. This also means that many infants and toddlers are not participating in ECCE services and may be at increased risk of entering school unprepared to learn.



Potential solutions to build supply that address family demand:

- Create ECCE enterprise zones to help new or expanding ECCE providers to open/expand sites close to where families live and work.
- Reduce liability and improve business climate for employers to sponsor on- or near-site ECCE services.
- Partner with cultural organizations, such as religious groups or immigrant services, to provide technical assistance to potential ECCE operators from diverse communities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 4 and 5:

How much do families pay for infant and toddler ECCE services?

What proportion of family income is needed to access ECCE services?

Findings summary:

- Families statewide pay an average of \$12,987 annually for infant and toddler ECCE services.
- ECCE expenses for a single year for an infant or toddler make up an average of 17% of a family's budget, more than twice the 7% that the federal government has identified as affordable for a family.
- Families would need to earn twice the median household income to afford the average statewide price for a year of ECCE services for an infant or toddler.
- High-quality services require increased investments by ECCE business owners, such as purchasing curriculum and compensating teachers for planning time. This cost of providing high-quality services, when passed to families, would increase the price of services by an average of \$2,685 annually.

Why it matters: Although the price of infant and toddler ECCE services is too expensive for most families to afford, it is not high enough to cover the actual costs to the ECCE provider for delivering high-quality services. This conundrum has contributed to insufficient supply of infant and toddler services across the state and prices that have driven many families out of the regulated ECCE market.

Potential solutions to make high-quality infant/toddler ECCE services more affordable for families:

- Invest in programs like the Mixed Delivery Infant/Toddler pilot that more fully cover the cost of quality so ECCE providers can increase capacity, quality, and educator compensation and low-income families can access high-quality services.

RESEARCH QUESTION 6:

How are publicly funded infant and toddler slots distributed across the state?

Findings summary:

- In Virginia, there are less than one-third the number of publicly funded infant and toddler slots (13,685) than there are publicly funded preschool slots (44,620). In the Mixed Delivery program, there are one-sixth the number of infant and toddler slots (284)⁷ as there are preschool slots (1,875).
- The number of infants and toddlers living in families with incomes below the 200% federal poverty level (97,145) far exceeds the number of publicly funded slots for this age group (13,685).
- Statewide, less than half (1,733) of all infant- and toddler-serving sites (3,734) are Child Care Subsidy vendors and can serve children from low income families who are eligible for subsidized services.



Why it matters: The cost of ECCE services is out of reach even for households that earn the median income. For those living in poverty, publicly funded ECCE slots are a key lifeline that allows them to work and go to school. The lack of sufficient publicly funded slots means that those families who could otherwise be part of the full-time workforce may not be able to fully participate. The limited ECCE site participation in publicly funded programs further restricts family choices even if they do have access to subsidies.

Potential solutions to expand infant/toddler capacity in areas where need is greatest:

- Identify localities where infant/toddler gaps are largest and expand the Mixed Delivery infant/toddler pilot to target resources to areas with the greatest need.
- Provide incentives (e.g., higher reimbursement rates, innovative strategies to recruit and retain effective educators) to publicly funded ECCE sites that serve infants and toddlers, open or expand in child care deserts, and/or provide services during second and third work shifts.
- Identify and resolve potential barriers to ECCE site participation in publicly funded programs, such as administrative requirements/burden, delays in reimbursement, stigma for or challenges with reaching and attracting families eligible to enroll, and insufficient reimbursement rates or limited funding overall.

⁷Number reflects late Fall 2022 expansion to the program that funded an additional 84 slots beyond the originally legislated pilot size.

GLOSSARY



Affordability: This report adopts the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services definition of affordable ECCE services as those that require a family to spend no more than 7% of income on services for all children in the household.

Capacity: The ability of the ECCE system to meet families' needs for services.

Centers: Virginia defines centers as "child day programs offered to (i) two or more children under the age of 13 years in a facility that is not the residence of the provider or of any of the children in care or (ii) 13 or more children at any location."

ECCE: This report uses the phrase early childhood care and education (ECCE) to refer to services that support the physical, emotional, and cognitive development and well-being of young children.

Family Day Homes: Virginia defines family day homes as ECCE providers who: "provide care for five through twelve children (exclusive of the provider's own children and any children who reside in the home). The care may be offered in the home of the provider or in the home of any of the children in care."

Formal/Informal: This study defines "formal" ECCE services as those that are licensed, regulated, or otherwise recognized by state or local jurisdictions. "Informal" ECCE services refer to paid arrangements such as care by family, friends, or neighbors (FFN) that are not part of the formal ECCE system.

Infants: This study defines infants as children under the age of 16 months.

Preschool Development Grant Birth-5 (PDG): A federal grant issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families to improve early childhood services.

Ready Regions: Virginia has developed a nine-region structure of early childhood coordination and governance that covers all areas of the state. Each [Ready Region](#)⁸ is responsible for supporting early childhood capacity, service, and engagement within their catchment area.

Toddlers: This study defines toddlers as children between the ages of 16-35 months.

Underserved: Families who receive some ECCE services but not enough to fully meet their needs.

Unserviced: Families who are not currently receiving formal ECCE services.

⁸Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. (2022). VECF Ready Regions Map. <https://vecf.org/ready-regions/>



FINDINGS

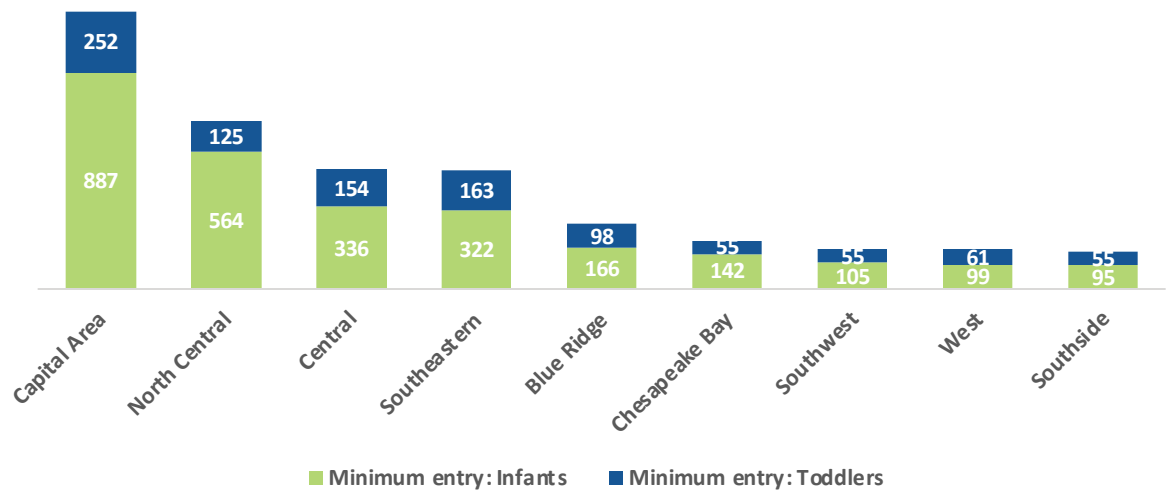
Methodology: Findings for this report come from primary and secondary data sources that are detailed in [Appendix A](#).

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

What is the availability of infant and toddler ECCE services?

According to licensing data,⁹ there are 4,864 regulated early childhood care and education (ECCE) sites in Virginia serving children birth to under 5 years old.¹⁰ Of these, 2,716 sites accept infants who are 15 months and younger and another 1,018 sites begin serving children as toddlers. Most ECCE sites in the state serve preschool age children¹¹ (4,301) or did not report minimum ages accepted (554).

Figure 1. Regional distribution of all regulated infant and toddler sites (Jan 2023)



THE TYPES OF ECCE SITES THAT REPORT TAKING INFANTS AND TODDLERS VARY REGIONALLY. ACROSS VIRGINIA, CENTERS MAKE UP 63% OF INFANT AND TODDLER ECCE SITES AND FAMILY DAY HOMES MAKE UP 37%.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all regulated infant- and toddler-serving sites (both centers and family day homes) based on minimum age of entry across the nine Ready Regions. The largest number of infant- and toddler-serving sites are concentrated in the Capital Area and North Central Ready Regions, followed by the Central and Southeastern Ready Regions.

The types of ECCE sites that report taking infants and toddlers vary regionally. Across Virginia, centers make up 63% of infant and toddler ECCE sites and family day homes make up 37%.¹² The Ready Regions adjacent to Washington, D.C., Capital Area and North Central, have proportionally more home-based providers than other areas of the state (56% and 47%, respectively). Other regions have proportionally more center-based providers than home-based, ranging from 76% center-based in Southeastern to 86% in Southside.

⁹Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs. Licensing database (DOLPHIN) as of 1/30/2023.

¹⁰ECCE Sites were identified as sites that serve a minimum age less than 4 years 9 months or do not report minimum ages served. Sites that operated for less than 4 months in the year or were filing exempt facilities (facility type = FEXP) were excluded from this analysis.

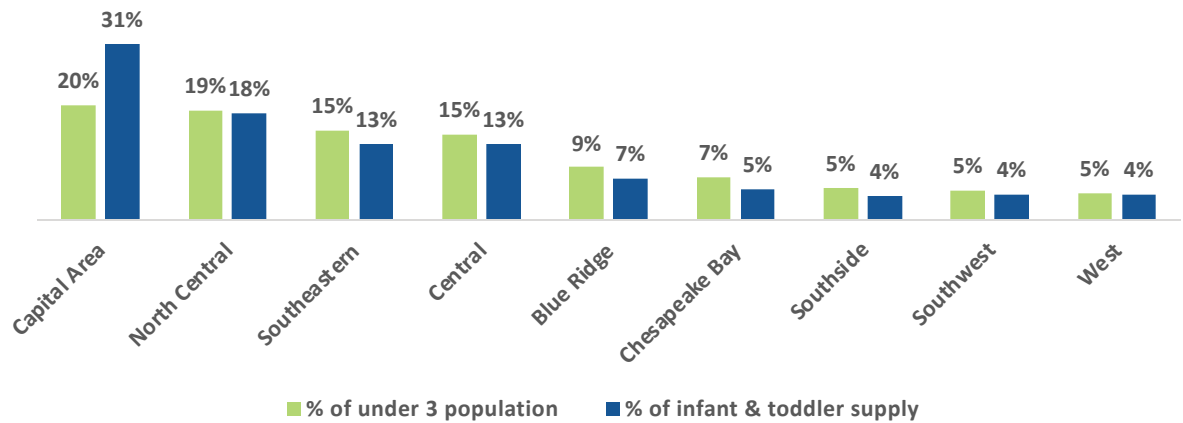
¹¹Minimum age of entry between age 3 to under 4 years 9 months.

¹²Family day homes include ECCE sites with facility type FDH, FDS, LOH, SAH, UFD, and VR. All other ECCE sites are classified as centers.

Availability relative to population. Virginia was home to nearly 298,000 infants and toddlers in 2021.¹³ Figure 2 shows the distribution of this population next to the distribution of sites that offer infant and/or toddler ECCE services in the same regions.

Except for Ready Region Capital Area, the regional proportion of the state’s infant and toddler population is similar to its regional infant and toddler ECCE supply distribution. It is possible that the variation for the Capital Region reflects the role of that region as an employment hub. There may be a greater supply to serve not only families who live in the region but also those who come into the region to work. The Capital Region also has a relatively higher proportion of home-based providers (who serve smaller numbers of children) than most other regions in the state, suggesting that their actual capacity may not be as large as the population-supply comparison suggests.

Figure 2. Regional proportion of infant/toddler supply compared to regional proportion of infant/toddler population



Data on how many infants and toddlers each ECCE site actually serves is not available and specific data on provider enrollment (broken down by ages served) is needed to better understand provider capacity. Starting in FY24, this data will be captured for all publicly funded ECCE providers in the state as part of the data collection for the Unified Virginia Quality Birth to Five System.¹⁴ While this will not include information on all sites that serve infants and toddlers, it represents a significant opportunity for improved understanding.

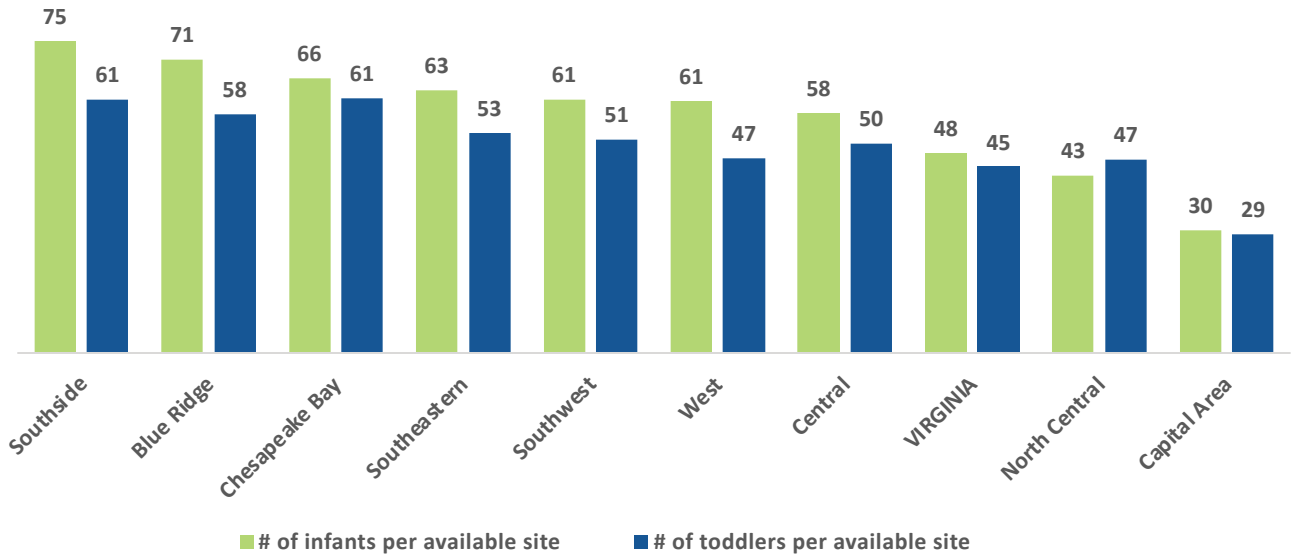
Ratio of infants and toddlers to ECCE sites. Across the state, there are an estimated 48 infants for each infant-serving site and 45 toddlers per toddler-serving site. The average licensed capacity for sites in the state is 69 for sites that serve infants and 72 for sites that serve toddlers. However, operational capacity is typically much lower than licensed capacity. And, almost all sites that serve infants and toddlers are also serving older preschool-aged children, so their stated capacity is not just for infants and toddlers.¹⁵ Typically, ECCE sites serve a greater number of preschoolers than younger children because the teacher-child ratios and cost of care for those older ages are more financially sustainable.

¹³Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) Program. (2022). U.S. Population Data 1969-2020. Retrieved from <https://seer.cancer.gov/popdata>.

¹⁴<https://doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/vqb5/index.shtml>

¹⁵According to the 2021 Virginia Child Care Provider Survey conducted by SEE-Partnerships at the University of Virginia, the average enrollment at ECCE sites statewide was 39.4 children. The average number of infants enrolled was 3.2, and the average number of toddlers enrolled was 8.1; combined, this is an average enrollment of 11.3 infants or toddlers, or less than one-third of average enrollment.

Figure 3. Ratio of infants and toddlers to each infant- and toddler-serving site in the region



The greatest supply of infant services is in Ready Region Capital Area (30 infants per site), while the lowest supply is in Ready Region Southside (75 infants per site). The supply of toddler care ranged from 29 toddlers per site in Capital Area to 61 toddlers per site in Southside and Chesapeake Bay. Figure 3 displays the number of infants and toddlers in the population for every ECCE site serving that age group. It is important to note that the number of sites does not necessarily reflect the amount of service capacity. Capital Area and North Central have more sites available, but they also have the highest proportion of family day homes, which have fewer slots than larger centers do.



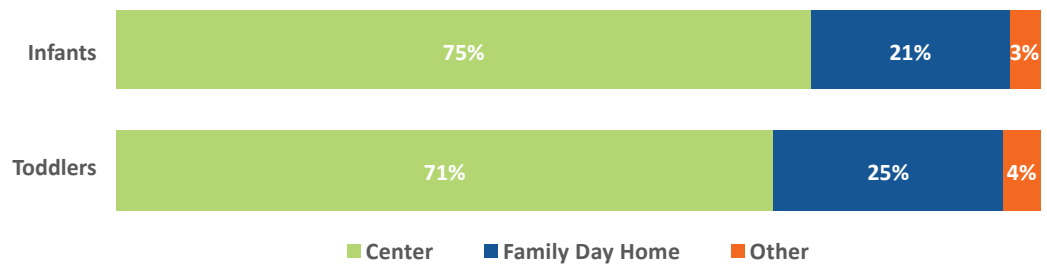
RESEARCH QUESTION 2

To what extent can families with infants and toddlers access ECCE services that meet their current and anticipated needs and preferences?

Current Early Childhood Care and Education Arrangements Virginia Families with Young Children Survey (2021)

According to 1,161 Virginia families with infants and toddlers who were enrolled at Preschool Development Grant sites¹⁶ and answered a UVA-administered survey between November 2021-January 2022, most infants (75%) and toddlers (71%) were in center-based settings (Figure 4). Approximately one fifth of infants and one quarter of toddlers were in family day homes, with the rest reporting being served in other settings.¹⁷

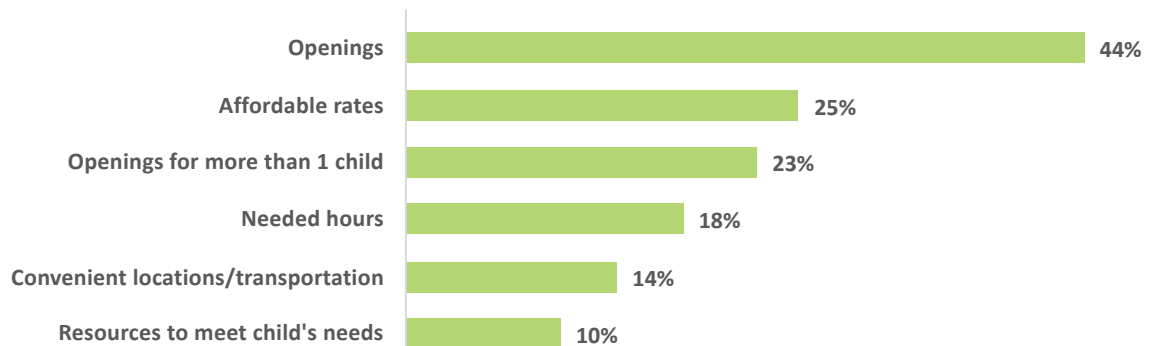
Figure 4. Distribution of care settings for infants and toddlers served by PDG sites



Source: SEE-Partnerships. 2021. Virginia families with young children survey [Unpublished tables]. University of Virginia.
Note: Values may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Most families with infants and toddlers in ECCE reported that their children entered formal ECCE settings between 3 and 6 months of age. This was consistent across all regions of the state. Slightly under half (44%) of parents surveyed reported that it was very hard to find programs with openings for infants and toddlers (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Statewide, families with infants and toddlers said it was very hard to find programs with...



Source: SEE-Partnerships. 2021. Virginia families with young children survey [Unpublished tables]. University of Virginia.

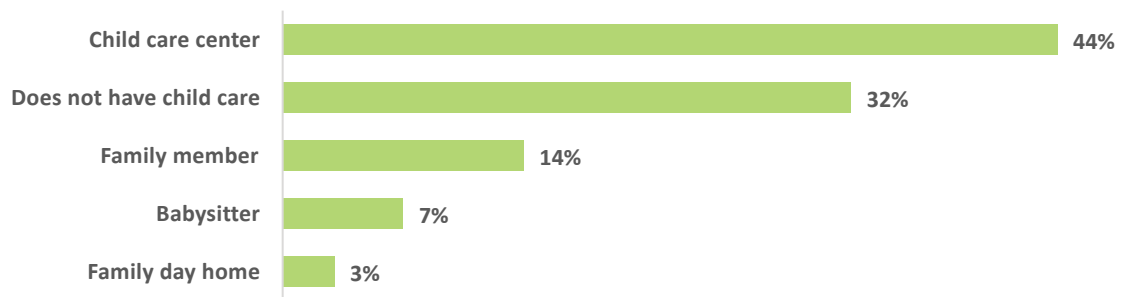
¹⁶SEE-Partnerships. 2021. Virginia families with young children survey [Unpublished tables]. University of Virginia. See methodology for additional information on this survey.

¹⁷Some families self-reported that their infants and toddlers were in public school settings. Researchers incorporated these responses into the "Center" category to consolidate all families with infants and toddlers in group settings not within a caregiver's home. UVA researchers used this same approach in their analyses and reporting.

VECF Survey of Unserved/Underserved Families and Focus Groups (2022)

Families (n=101) who responded to the Virginia Survey of Unserved/Underserved Families administered during July/August 2022 were recruited specifically to reach those who may not be connected to the regulated ECCE system or who may not have the ECCE services they need from the current system.¹⁸ Among these families, 47% reported using formal ECCE services as their primary care arrangement (44% used an ECCE center and 3% used services within a family day home). Nearly a third (32%) did not have ECCE services, and the remainder relied on family members (14%) or babysitters (7%) (Figure 6). Differences in families' use of ECCE settings from those found in the UVA survey likely reflect differences in the samples. The VECF sample recruitment was intentionally focused on families with limited access to or use of formal ECCE arrangements, such as regulated ECCE centers and homes.

Figure 6. Primary child care arrangements for unserved/underserved families



Source: 2022 Virginia Survey of Unserved/Underserved Families [Unpublished tables]. Virginia Early Childhood Foundation.

Among the parents who currently use some form of regular, non-parental ECCE services (n=61), approximately one-quarter (26%) reported that they rely on multiple forms of ECCE to meet all their needs, such as support from family members or babysitters to supplement their regular center-based care.

“SOMETIMES JUST MY INCONSISTENT WORK SCHEDULE DOESN’T MATCH MY CHILD CARE SCHEDULE. SO THEN, I’M PIECEMEALING CHILD CARE TOGETHER AND IT’S STRESSFUL.”

VECF Focus Groups of Unserved/Underserved Families

Families who participated in focus groups identified both positive and challenging aspects of their current arrangements that highlight key factors driving whether and where they place their infants and toddlers in ECCE services.

Positive aspects of current arrangements. Families identified several positive aspects of their current arrangements, including:

- Caring staff
- A safe environment
- Convenient hours or location
- Engaging activities

Challenges with current arrangements. While most families identified aspects of their current ECCE services that they appreciate, many also identified challenges, including:

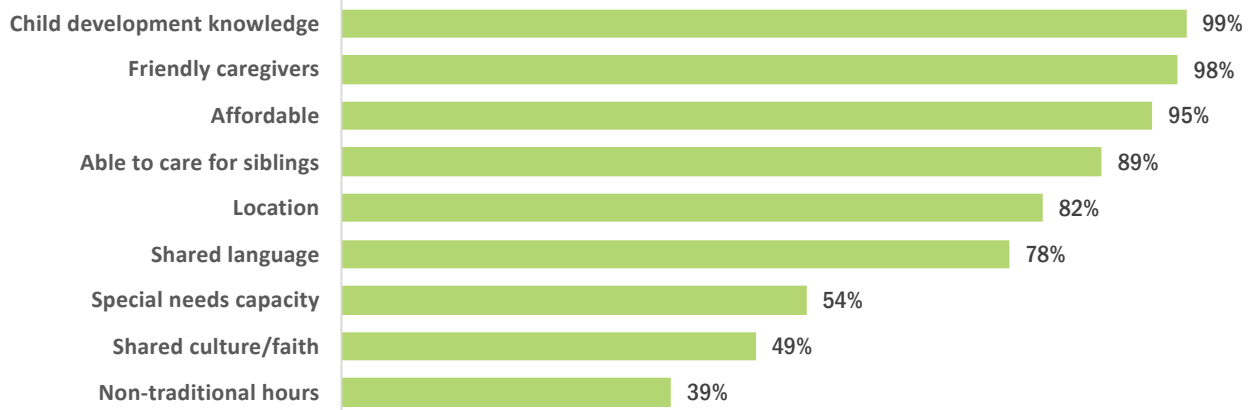
- Inconvenient hours/days of operation
- Poor quality
- Fragmented services

¹⁸ECE Insights partnered with Ready Region leads and other family-serving organizations across Virginia to recruit families with infants and toddlers with little to no connection to regulated ECCE services. See Appendix A for more detail.

ECCE Needs and Preferences

Data from the Virginia Survey of Unserved or Underserved Families identified caregiver characteristics and affordability as the primary features families want in ECCE (Figure 7). Nearly all participating families indicated they want caregivers who are friendly and understand child development. Logistically, they need their early childhood care and education to be affordable and convenient, with providers who can take infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to accommodate families with multiple children.

Figure 7. Percent of families who identified ECCE features as "important" or "very important"



Source: SEE-Partnerships. 2021. Virginia families with young children survey [Unpublished tables]. University of Virginia.

Roughly four-fifths (78%) of all respondents (including English speakers) indicated that they are looking for caregivers who can speak their family's language. Among respondents whose primary language is not English, 50% said having a caregiver who speaks their language is important or very important.

MORE THAN HALF OF UNSERVED/UNDERSERVED FAMILIES NEED ECCE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS. OVER ONE-THIRD NEED ECCE SERVICES DURING NON-TRADITIONAL HOURS

Notably, more than half (54%) of unserved/underserved families indicated that they need a caregiver who can accommodate special needs. Nearly as many (49%) want a provider who shares the family's faith or culture, and more than one-third of families (39%) indicated they need ECCE services during non-traditional hours or on weekends.

These same needs and preferences, and others, including safety concerns, emerged within the family focus groups.

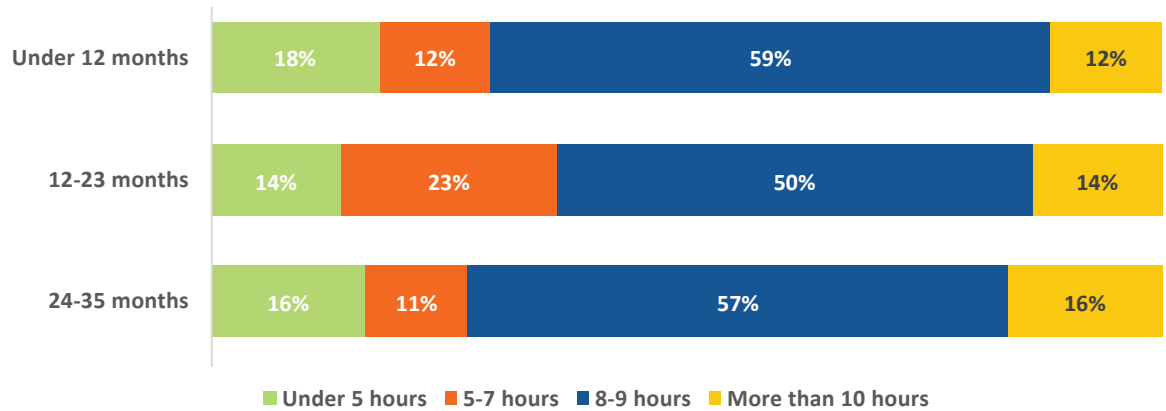
VECF Survey of Unserved/Underserved Families (2022)

Hours of operation

Within the 2022 Virginia Survey of Unserved/Underserved Families sample of unserved/underserved families, 39% reported needing ECCE services during non-traditional hours or on the weekends. Of those who have some non-parental services, 18% reported that their current arrangements do not offer services on all the hours and days needed. In the focus groups, one family shared that “the [ECCE providers] that I’ve found are only open at 7:00 AM at the earliest and they all close at 6:00. So, if your hours are at all outside that range, then you’re kind of having to find something else to do or figure out who else is going to be able to pick up your kids.” Other parents expressed a similar need for weekend and extended shift services. “I don’t like that they’re closed on the weekends...because it puts me in a bind,” said one parent. “I work 12-hour shifts,” said another. “So, on Fridays they close at 4:00, and I don’t get off till 7:00.”

Depending on the age of their children, most unserved/underserved families (64-73%) reported needing between 8-10 hours of ECCE services per day for their infants and toddlers (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Hours of care needed by age of child



Source: 2022 Virginia Survey of Unserved/Underserved Families [Unpublished tables]. Virginia Early Childhood Foundation.
Note: Values may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

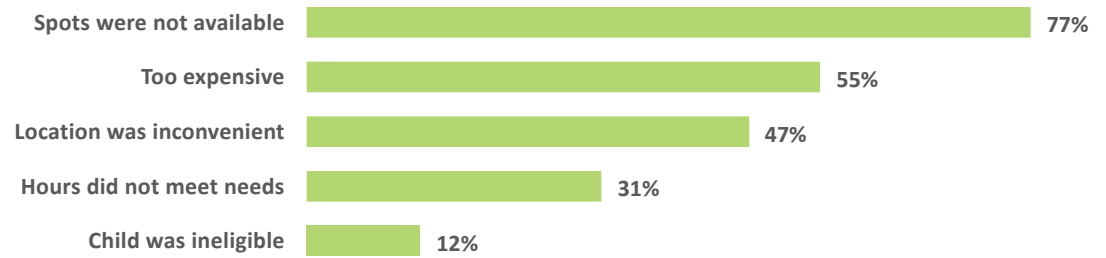
RESEARCH QUESTION 3:

What factors impact families’ ability to access preferred ECCE services?

Factors Impacting Access

Data from the 2021 Virginia Families with Young Children Survey show that of those families receiving ECCE services who did not have their infant or toddler in their preferred ECCE arrangement, three-quarters (77%) identified **availability** as a key barrier (Figure 9). Over half (55%) said that their preferred provider was **too expensive**, while nearly as many (47%) reported **location** as a barrier. Almost a third (31%) said that their preferred ECCE did not offer the **hours** they needed. An additional 12% of families reported that their child was not eligible for their preferred arrangement. Respondents were able to select more than one barrier, so percentages total to more than 100%.

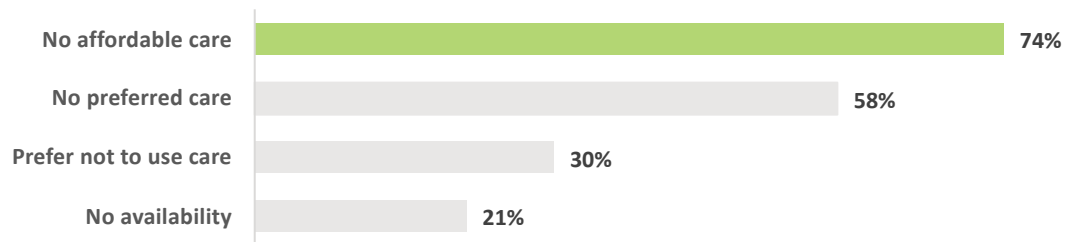
Figure 9. Key barriers for families of infants and toddlers who were not in preferred care arrangement (n=136)



Source: SEE-Partnerships. 2021. Virginia families with young children survey [Unpublished tables]. University of Virginia.

Unserved families who participated in the Virginia Survey of Unserved/Underserved Families (n=39) identified **affordability** as their primary barrier (74%) to accessing infant and toddler ECCE services (Figure 10). Eighty-four percent (84%) of unserved families said they would put their children in ECCE if they could afford it.

Figure 10. Affordability is the primary reason unserved families do not have care



Source: 2022 Virginia Survey of Unserved/Underserved Families [Unpublished tables]. Virginia Early Childhood Foundation.

Many of the focus group comments from unserved/underserved families echoed these same themes around affordability. Said one parent, “daycare that is certified... [is] very expensive. I usually end up relying on my mom or my friends to be able to go to work.” Other families have had to juggle parental care and work schedules or take one parent out of the workforce completely. “My wife is taking care of [our baby] and she’s at home,” said one father. “But when she had to work, we would switch off and I would stay with the kids. And that’s how we’ve been able to manage because we don’t have the means to pay for child care.”

Other barriers that unserved families shared included not being able to find ECCE services that meet their needs (58%) and not having any availability of services in their area (21%). “When I have to end up working on Saturdays and Sundays, that’s the hard part,” said one parent about trying to find services to meet their needs. “I end up paying a lot more money than what I really can afford,” shared another parent, “We don’t really have any daycares. The closest one to me is...like 45 minutes to an hour away. And they don’t take kids under two. So, I wouldn’t be able to put my girls in there anyway.”

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 4 and 5:

How much do families pay for infant and toddler ECCE services?

What proportion of family income is needed to access ECCE services?

According to Child Care Aware, families pay between \$11,492-\$15,288 for a year of infant ECCE services, depending on setting (home- vs. center-based). Families pay slightly less for a year of toddler ECCE services, ranging from \$11,024-\$14,144.¹⁹ In comparison, the average cost of tuition and fees at a 4-year college in Virginia is \$13,902.²⁰

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services²¹ defines affordable ECCE as no more than 7% of household income. Statewide in Virginia, the median household income is \$76,398.²² At an average cost of infant and toddler services of \$12,987,²³ Virginia households at the median income are spending approximately 17% of their income on infant and toddler services for just one child. This amount is more than twice what is recommended and nearly as much as one year in college – an expense for which families typically have eighteen years to save. In addition, many families are shouldering ECCE costs for multiple children at a time, so the percent of the median budget spent on ECCE services is likely much higher for families with more than one child.



¹⁹Child Care Aware of America. 2022. Child care affordability in Virginia. https://info.childcareaware.org/hubs/2021%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Virginia_Price%20Fact%20Sheet%202021.pdf

²⁰State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. (2022, November 16). In-state tuition and fees. <https://www.schev.edu/financial-aid/in-state-tuition-and-fees>.

²¹Federal Register / Vol. 81, No. 190 / Friday, September 30, 2016 / Rules and Regulations, p. 67440. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-09-30/pdf/2016-22986.pdf>

²²U.S. Census Bureau. 2020. Table S1901 INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2020 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS). 2016-2020 5-Year American Community Survey. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Median+household+income&g=0400000US51&tid=ACST5Y2020.S1901> Due to data limitations at the county level, this is different than the State Median Income scale used for subsidy eligibility.

²³Average was calculated by summing average costs for infants in centers, infants in family day homes, toddlers in centers, and toddlers in family day homes and then dividing by four.

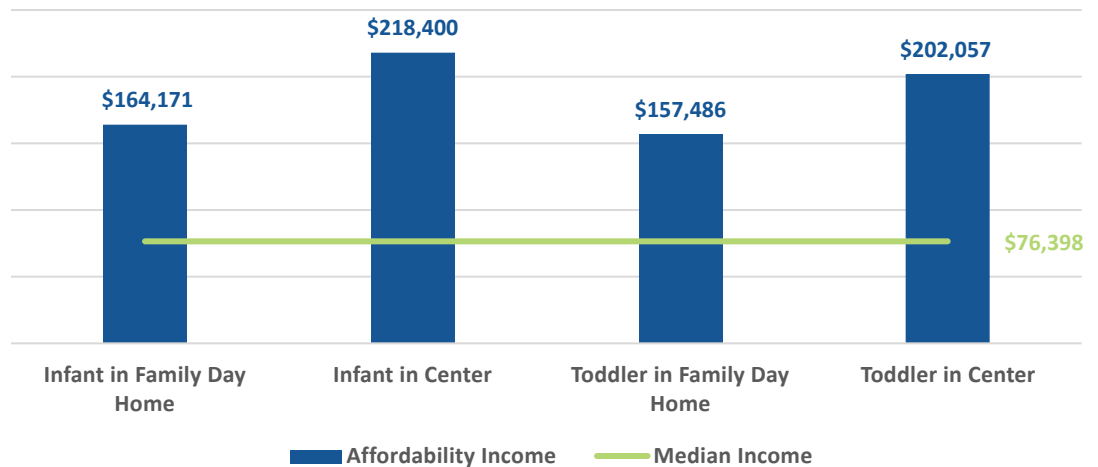
Across Ready Regions, the burden of this expense varies. Median household income is as high as \$123,378 in Ready Region Capital Area and as low as \$45,737 in Ready Region Southwest. Using the statewide cost of ECCE services as a basis for estimating cost burden,²⁴ the proportion of income families spend on services for infants and toddlers ranges from 11-28% (Table 1). For all these scenarios, a year of ECCE services for a single infant or toddler is 1.5 to 4 times higher than the 7% affordability rate set by the federal government. ECCE services are clearly not affordable for Virginia families.

Table 1. Regional median household incomes and infant and toddler care as a proportion of income

Ready Region	Median Household Income	Average Percent of Household Budget Toward Infant/Toddler Services
Southwest	\$45,737	28%
Southside	\$51,056	25%
West	\$53,443	24%
Chesapeake Bay	\$64,988	20%
Blue Ridge	\$66,516	20%
Southeastern	\$69,345	19%
Central	\$70,888	18%
VIRGINIA	\$76,398	17%
North Central	\$111,642	12%
Capital Area	\$123,378	11%

Affordability gap. To afford infant and toddler ECCE services in Virginia, the median household would need to earn \$185,529,²⁵ or more than twice the current median income (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Affordability gap between actual median income and average income needed to afford care



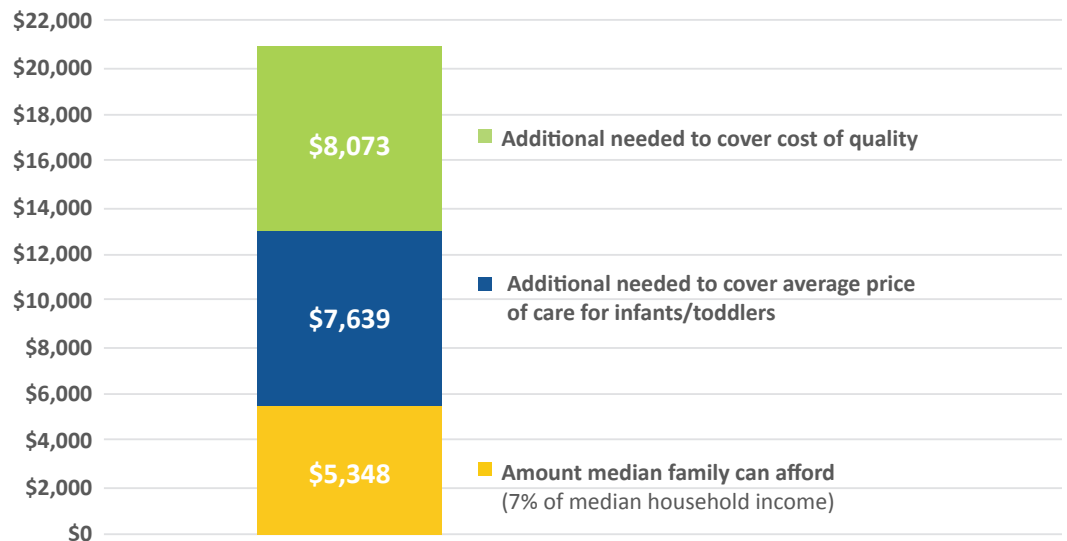
²⁴Researchers determined that local and regional cost of care estimates are currently not reliable enough to include in calculations for this report.

²⁵Calculated by dividing the average cost of care by .07.

At 7% of the median household income, the average Virginia household can only afford to pay \$5,348 of the \$12,987 average price of ECCE services. This leaves a gap of \$7,639 that median income households must decide whether they can absorb or not. Based on data from family focus groups and surveys, many families end up using non-preferred ECCE services, cobble together fragmented service arrangements, or leave the workforce because of the lack of affordability.

Quality gap. The affordability gap assumes current average ECCE prices but does not consider what it might take to cover the cost of high-quality services. Virginia’s Fiscal Year 2024 Mixed Delivery Reimbursement Rates²⁶ are based on a cost estimation model that examines different program characteristics, cost drivers, and business decisions to assess the “true cost” of operating an ECCE program. This true cost of ECCE quality includes competitive compensation for early childhood educators, defined as parity with elementary educators in line with education and/or experience. Using these rates, there is an estimated additional gap of \$8,073 between what the median household can afford and the cost of quality infant and toddler ECCE for a total affordability gap of \$15,712 statewide.²⁷ Figure 12 visually displays the gap between what the median household can afford, the average price of ECCE services, and the additional cost for quality.

Figure 13. Gap between affordability, average price of care, and cost of quality care.



²⁶Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. (2023). VECF Mixed Delivery Funding Guide: Fiscal Year 2024.

²⁷The statewide quality gap is the difference between the average annual price of care and the annual cost of quality care for infants and toddlers in Mixed Delivery in Fiscal Year 2024. The Mixed Delivery reimbursement rates were averaged across age groups (infants, toddlers, 2-year-olds) and across Ready Regions to obtain a statewide average for infants and toddlers. The reimbursement rates are based on an estimated true cost of ECCE quality that includes competitive compensation for early childhood educators, defined as parity with elementary educators in line with education and/or experience.

RESEARCH QUESTION 6:

How are publicly funded slots distributed across the state?

Providing financial assistance for families to afford ECCE is one approach to solving the problems families face accessing high-quality, affordable infant and toddler ECCE services. Currently in Virginia, there are four primary sources of public ECCE funding:

- Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), serving 3- and 4-year-olds with qualifying factors before their first year of kindergarten
- Head Start/Early Head Start, serving birth to 5-year-olds with qualifying factors
- Child Care Subsidy, serving birth to 12-year-olds with qualifying factors
- Mixed Delivery, serving birth to 4-year-olds with qualifying factors

In all cases, income is a key qualifying factor. Other factors can include homelessness, parental education level, and child disability status.

Table 2 shows the estimated slots for children under 3 years and for preschoolers ages 3-4. Data are for the 2022-2023 program year for all programs except for Head Start/Early Head Start, which is from 2022.

Table 2. Current publicly funded slots in Virginia

Program	Under age 3	Ages 3-4 ²⁸
VPI ²⁹	0	21,764
Head Start ³⁰	3,448	11,007
Child Care Subsidy ³¹	9,953	9,974
Mixed Delivery ³²	284	1,875
Total publicly funded slots	13,685	44,620
Number of children under 200% of poverty	~97,000	~67,000

There are currently 13,685 publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers in Virginia, which is less than one-third the 44,620 publicly funded slots for preschool-aged children. As a point of comparison, there are an estimated 67,000 children ages 3-4 and 97,000 infants and toddlers with family incomes under 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) in Virginia.³³ This means that there is approximately:

- 1 publicly funded ECCE slot for every 7 **infants or toddlers** under 200% FPL
- 1 publicly funded ECCE slot for every 1.5 **preschoolers** under 200% FPL

A statewide examination of publicly funded infant and toddler slots³⁴ shows that there are far more infants and toddlers in poverty (below 200% FPL) than there are slots to support their cost of care (Figure 13). While there are regional variations in poverty levels and slot availability, within each region there is insufficient publicly funded support for the existing need.

²⁸Most 4-year-olds turn 5 at some point during their final pre-kindergarten year.

²⁹2022-2023 VPI slots. Data represents the final FY allotments and reflects full-time equivalent slots.

³⁰Office of Head Start. 2022 Program Information Report (PIR). Excludes Migrant Head Start. Early Head Start slots were classified as infant/toddler slots and Head Start slots were classified as PreK slots.

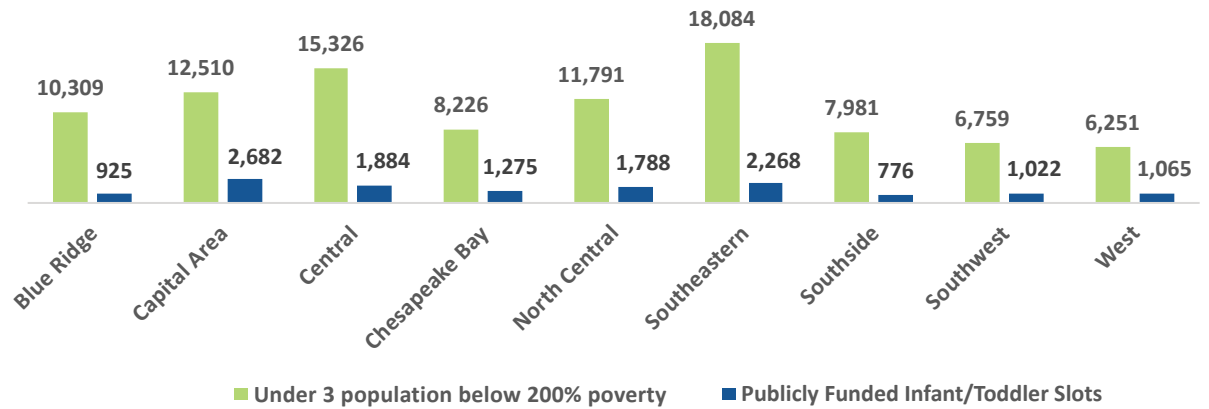
³¹CCSP enrollment by age as of September 2022 was obtained upon request by VDOE. Infant/toddlers are children ages 0-2 receiving subsidy and PreK are children ages 3 and 4 receiving subsidy.

³²Data are for 2022-23, which is the first year of the Mixed Delivery Infant/Toddler program. Data for Mixed Delivery is as of February 2023 and reflects slot expansions made at the end of 2022.

³³These values were calculated by multiplying the number of children at the specified ages (derived from NIH SEER estimates) by the <200% poverty rate for children ages 0-5 (derived from the 5-Year American Community Survey).

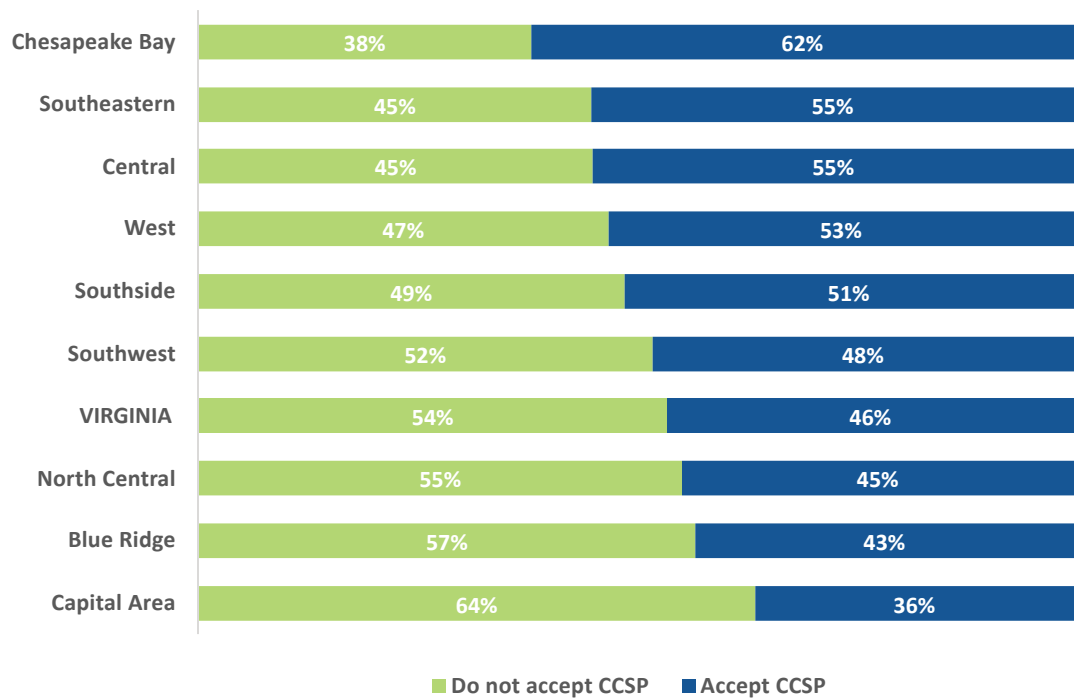
³⁴Publicly funded slots include Child Care Subsidy enrollments, Early Head Start (EHS) slots, and Mixed Delivery slots. EHS slots were assigned to Ready Region based on the geographic location of the Head Start grantee.

Figure 13. Regional infant/toddler population below 200% poverty as compared with publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers



Less than half of all sites statewide that serve infants and toddlers accept the federal Child Care Subsidy,³⁵ the largest source of public ECCE funding in Virginia. This figure varies regionally (Figure 14), with just over one-third of Ready Region Capital Area sites accepting Child Care Subsidy (36%) and 62% of sites in Ready Region Chesapeake Bay accepting Child Care Subsidy.

Figure 14. Percent of infant- and toddler-serving sites that accept subsidies



³⁵ Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs. Licensing database (DOLPHIN) as of 1/30/2023. Provided by request from Virginia Department of Education.



THIS REPORT ESTIMATES THAT THE MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD WOULD NEED TO EARN 2.4 TIMES THE CURRENT MEDIAN ANNUAL INCOME TO AFFORD THE AVERAGE COST OF INFANT AND TODDLER ECCE SERVICES IN VIRGINIA.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has identified a significant gap between the infant and toddler services that families need and what is available. Fewer sites serve infants under 16 months than serve 3- and 4-year-olds in Virginia (and even these can be hard to come by), leaving thousands of families without quality, affordable options for their children. Infants and toddlers are primarily served in centers and family day homes, but those families who cannot find or afford those services either patch together support across family members, split shifts within the household, or leave the workforce altogether. Seventy-four percent of families who aren't accessing infant and toddler services want that option but cannot afford it or find it in their communities.

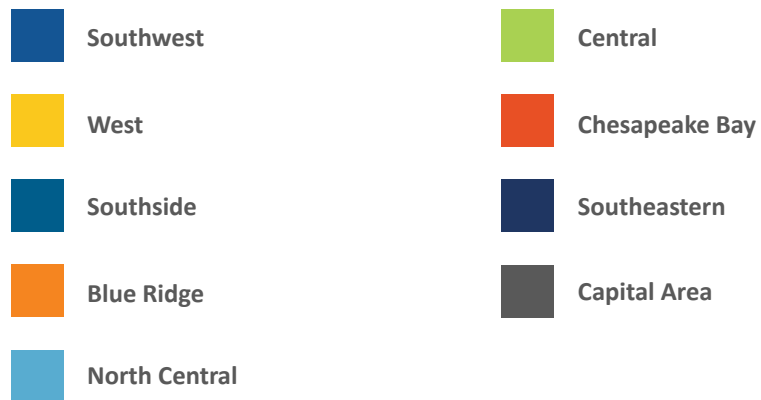
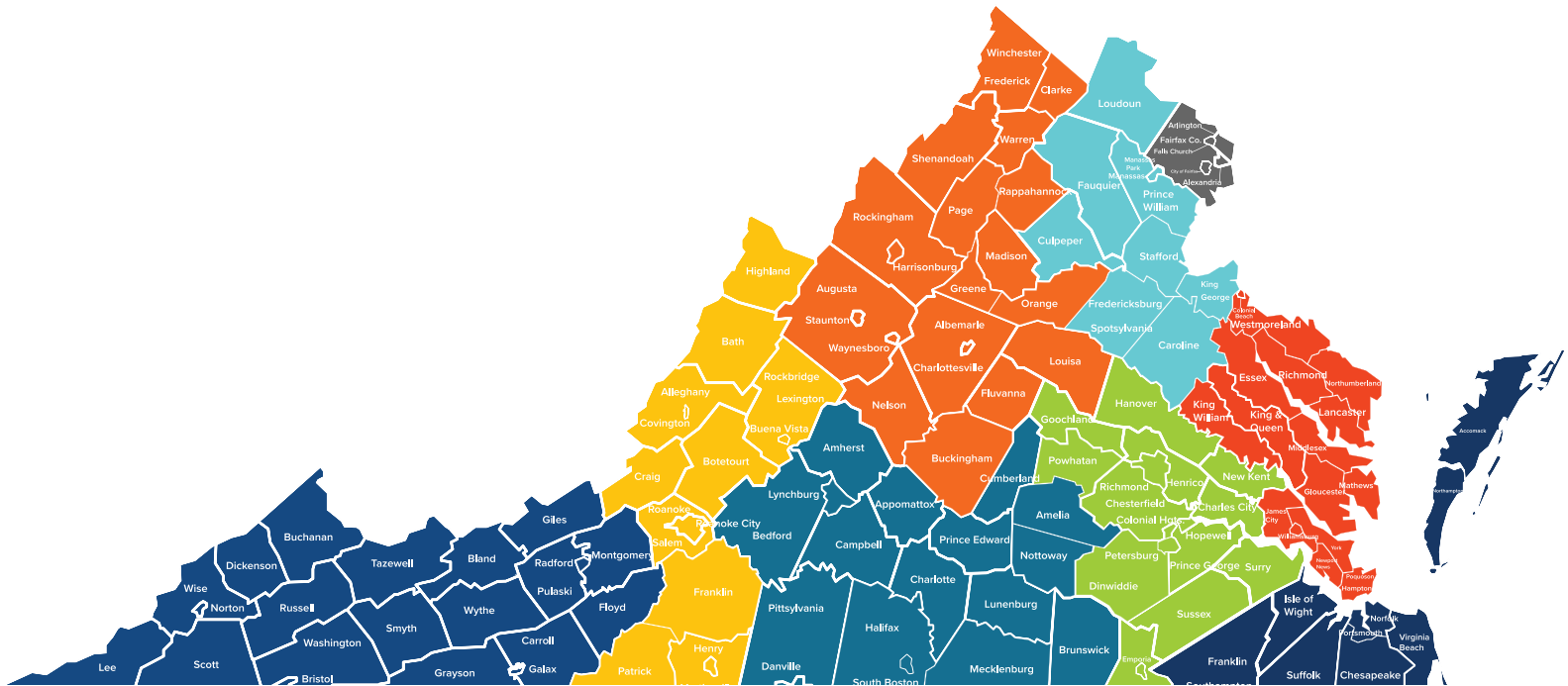
In fact, the amount that the median household needs to spend on infant and toddler services is more than double what is affordable as determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This report estimates that the median household would need to earn 2.4 times the current median annual income to afford the average cost of infant and toddler ECCE services in Virginia. Unfortunately, current programs to subsidize ECCE sites so they can offer quality, affordable services for families do not reach all who need them. More programs like Child Care Subsidy and Mixed Delivery are needed to address the need. Families and ECCE providers cannot fill the gap alone.

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READY REGION PROFILES

This section provides detailed information about infant and toddler care in each Ready Region across Virginia. Profiles include data about child demographics, economic well-being, ECCE availability / capacity, enrollment, family needs and preferences, and affordability of ECCE care. Researchers compiled data for these profiles from several different sources, which are listed at the end of this section. Each profile shows data for the Ready Region alongside the same statewide data, so users can put data figures in context.



READY REGION: BLUE RIDGE

DEMOGRAPHICS	Blue Ridge	Statewide
Child population by single-year of age¹		
Under 1	8,764	97,752
1 year	8,901	98,819
2 years	9,276	101,420
3 years	9,003	101,096
4 years	9,420	104,378
5 years	9,110	103,992
Race/ethnicity of population ages 0-4²		
American Indian	0.1%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.1%	6.6%
Black	8.6%	20.1%
Hispanic	12.8%	16.2%
Multiracial	5.9%	6.7%
White	70.4%	50.1%
ECONOMICS AND POVERTY		
% of children 0-4 under 100% FPL ³	15.5%	13.9%
% of children 0-4 under 200% FPL ⁴	38.3%	32.6%
Median household income ⁵	\$66,516	\$76,398
% of children 0-5 with all available parents in the workforce ⁶	68%	68%
INFANTS/TODDLERS		
Sites serving infants ⁷	166	2,716
Number of infants (<16 months) in population per infant-serving site ⁸	71	48
Sites serving toddlers ⁷	264	3,734
Number of toddlers (16-35 months) in population per toddler-serving site ⁹	58	45
Number of publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers ¹⁰	925	13,685
BARRIERS TO CARE AMONG PARENTS OF INFANTS & TODDLERS¹¹ (N=87-151)		
% who need non-parental care outside of traditional working hours	25.8%	26.0%
% reporting "Very Difficult" to find:		
Programs with openings	54.7%	43.8%
Affordable programs	29.4%	25.4%
ECCE services for multiple children	24.1%	22.7%
Programs with hours needed	20.4%	17.9%
Programs that were easy to get to/provide transportation	13.8%	13.6%
AFFORDABILITY¹²		
Annual cost of care by age & setting		
Infant in family ECCE services		\$11,492
Infant in center-based ECCE services		\$15,288
Toddler in family ECCE services		\$11,024
Toddler in center-based ECCE services		\$14,144
% of Median HH Income Needed to Afford Care (calculated using statewide cost of care)		
Infant in family ECCE services	17.3%	15%
Infant in center-based ECCE services	23.0%	20%
Toddler in family ECCE services	16.6%	14%
Toddler in center-based ECCE services	21.3%	19%

READY REGION: CAPITAL AREA

DEMOGRAPHICS	Capital Area	Statewide
Child population by single-year of age¹		
Under 1	19,697	97,752
1 year	19,422	98,819
2 years	19,700	101,420
3 years	19,443	101,096
4 years	20,090	104,378
5 years	19,864	103,992
Race/ethnicity of population ages 0-4²		
American Indian	0.1%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	15.0%	6.6%
Black	11.0%	20.1%
Hispanic	24.6%	16.2%
Multiracial	7.1%	6.7%
White	42.1%	50.1%
ECONOMICS AND POVERTY		
% of children 0-4 under 100% FPL ³	9.3%	13.9%
% of children 0-4 under 200% FPL ⁴	21.3%	32.6%
Median household income ⁵	\$123,378	\$76,398
% of children 0-5 with all available parents in the workforce ⁶	68.7%	67.9%
INFANTS/TODDLERS		
Sites serving infants ⁷	887	2,716
Number of infants (<16 months) in population per infant-serving site ⁸	30	48
Sites serving toddlers ⁷	1,139	3,734
Number of toddlers (16-35 months) in population per toddler-serving site ⁹	29	45
Number of publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers ¹⁰	2,682	13,685
BARRIERS TO CARE AMONG PARENTS OF INFANTS & TODDLERS¹¹ (N=128-223)		
% who need non-parental care outside of traditional working hours	31.4%	26.0%
% reporting "Very Difficult" to find:		
Programs with openings	23.7%	43.8%
Affordable programs	22.9%	25.4%
ECCE services for multiple children	21.9%	22.7%
Programs with hours needed	12.0%	17.9%
Programs that were easy to get to/provide transportation	11.2%	13.6%
AFFORDABILITY¹²		
Annual cost of care by age & setting		
Infant in family ECCE services		\$11,492
Infant in center-based ECCE services		\$15,288
Toddler in family ECCE services		\$11,024
Toddler in center-based ECCE services		\$14,144
% of Median HH Income Needed to Afford Care (calculated using statewide cost of care)		
Infant in family ECCE services	9.3%	15%
Infant in center-based ECCE services	12.4%	20%
Toddler in family ECCE services	8.9%	14%
Toddler in center-based ECCE services	11.5%	19%

READY REGION: CENTRAL

DEMOGRAPHICS	Central	Statewide
Child population by single-year of age¹		
Under 1	14,537	97,752
1 year	14,719	98,819
2 years	14,852	101,420
3 years	14,785	101,096
4 years	15,213	104,378
5 years	15,134	103,992
Race/ethnicity of population ages 0-4²		
American Indian	0.3%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.7%	6.6%
Black	30.7%	20.1%
Hispanic	12.7%	16.2%
Multiracial	5.5%	6.7%
White	46.1%	50.1%
ECONOMICS AND POVERTY		
% of children 0-4 under 100% FPL ³	15.1%	13.9%
% of children 0-4 under 200% FPL ⁴	34.7%	32.6%
Median household income ⁵	\$70,888	\$76,398
% of children 0-5 with all available parents in the workforce ⁶	71.7%	67.9%
INFANTS/TODDLERS		
Sites serving infants ⁷	336	2,716
Number of infants (<16 months) in population per infant-serving site ⁸	58	48
Sites serving toddlers ⁷	490	3,734
Number of toddlers (16-35 months) in population per toddler-serving site ⁹	50	45
Number of publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers ¹⁰	1,884	13,685
BARRIERS TO CARE AMONG PARENTS OF INFANTS & TODDLERS¹¹ (n=110-204)		
% who need non-parental care outside of traditional working hours	22.1%	26.0%
% reporting "Very Difficult" to find:		
Programs with openings	45.7%	43.8%
Affordable programs	21.8%	25.4%
ECCE services for multiple children	18.2%	22.7%
Programs with hours needed	16.8%	17.9%
Programs that were easy to get to/provide transportation	11.4%	13.6%
AFFORDABILITY¹²		
Annual cost of care by age & setting		
Infant in family ECCE services		\$11,492
Infant in center-based ECCE services		\$15,288
Toddler in family ECCE services		\$11,024
Toddler in center-based ECCE services		\$14,144
% of Median HH Income Needed to Afford Care (calculated using statewide cost of care)		
Infant in family ECCE services	16.2%	15%
Infant in center-based ECCE services	21.6%	20%
Toddler in family ECCE services	15.6%	14%
Toddler in center-based ECCE services	20.0%	19%

READY REGION: CHESAPEAKE BAY

DEMOGRAPHICS	Chesapeake Bay	Statewide
Child population by single-year of age¹		
Under 1	7,024	97,752
1 year	7,079	98,819
2 years	7,362	101,420
3 years	7,489	101,096
4 years	7,388	104,378
5 years	7,550	103,992
Race/ethnicity of population ages 0-4²		
American Indian	0.3%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.4%	6.6%
Black	33.5%	20.1%
Hispanic	12.3%	16.2%
Multiracial	8.0%	6.7%
White	43.6%	50.1%
ECONOMICS AND POVERTY		
% of children 0-4 under 100% FPL ³	16.2%	13.9%
% of children 0-4 under 200% FPL ⁴	38.3%	32.6%
Median household income ⁵	\$64,988	\$76,398
% of children 0-5 with all available parents in the workforce ⁶	65.7%	67.9%
INFANTS/TODDLERS		
Sites serving infants ⁷	142	2,716
Number of infants (<16 months) in population per infant-serving site ⁸	66	48
Sites serving toddlers ⁷	197	3,734
Number of toddlers (16-35 months) in population per toddler-serving site ⁹	61	45
Number of publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers ¹⁰	1,275	13,685
BARRIERS TO CARE AMONG PARENTS OF INFANTS & TODDLERS¹¹ (N=28-49)		
% who need non-parental care outside of traditional working hours	22.5%	26.0%
% reporting "Very Difficult" to find:		
Programs with openings	47.7%	43.8%
Affordable programs	28.3%	25.4%
ECCE services for multiple children	14.3%	22.7%
Programs with hours needed	11.4%	17.9%
Programs that were easy to get to/provide transportation	2.8%	13.6%
AFFORDABILITY¹²		
Annual cost of care by age & setting		
Infant in family ECCE services		\$11,492
Infant in center-based ECCE services		\$15,288
Toddler in family ECCE services		\$11,024
Toddler in center-based ECCE services		\$14,144
% of Median HH Income Needed to Afford Care (calculated using statewide cost of care)		
Infant in family ECCE services	17.7%	15%
Infant in center-based ECCE services	23.5%	20%
Toddler in family ECCE services	17.0%	14%
Toddler in center-based ECCE services	21.8%	19%

READY REGION: NORTH CENTRAL

DEMOGRAPHICS	North Central	Statewide
Child population by single-year of age¹		
Under 1	17,926	97,752
1 year	18,497	98,819
2 years	19,765	101,420
3 years	19,974	101,096
4 years	20,884	104,378
5 years	20,910	103,992
Race/ethnicity of population ages 0-4²		
American Indian	0.2%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	10.2%	6.6%
Black	14.6%	20.1%
Hispanic	25.0%	16.2%
Multiracial	7.5%	6.7%
White	42.5%	50.1%
ECONOMICS AND POVERTY		
% of children 0-4 under 100% FPL ³	6.4%	13.9%
% of children 0-4 under 200% FPL ⁴	21.0%	32.6%
Median household income ⁵	\$111,642	\$76,398
% of children 0-5 with all available parents in the workforce ⁶	66.3%	67.9%
INFANTS/TODDLERS		
Sites serving infants ⁷	564	2,716
Number of infants (<16 months) in population per infant-serving site ⁸	43	48
Sites serving toddlers ⁷	689	3,734
Number of toddlers (16-35 months) in population per toddler-serving site ⁹	47	45
Number of publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers ¹⁰	1,788	13,685
BARRIERS TO CARE AMONG PARENTS OF INFANTS & TODDLERS¹¹ (N=47-75)		
% who need non-parental care outside of traditional working hours	20.0%	26.0%
% reporting "Very Difficult" to find:		
Programs with openings	37.1%	43.8%
Affordable programs	25.4%	25.4%
ECCE services for multiple children	29.8%	22.7%
Programs with hours needed	14.9%	17.9%
Programs that were easy to get to/provide transportation	18.9%	13.6%
AFFORDABILITY¹²		
Annual cost of care by age & setting		
Infant in family ECCE services		\$11,492
Infant in center-based ECCE services		\$15,288
Toddler in family ECCE services		\$11,024
Toddler in center-based ECCE services		\$14,144
% of Median HH Income Needed to Afford Care (calculated using statewide cost of care)		
Infant in family ECCE services	10.3%	15%
Infant in center-based ECCE services	13.7%	20%
Toddler in family ECCE services	9.9%	14%
Toddler in center-based ECCE services	12.7%	19%

READY REGION: SOUTHEASTERN

DEMOGRAPHICS	Southeastern	Statewide
Child population by single-year of age¹		
Under 1	15,213	97,752
1 year	15,306	98,819
2 years	15,541	101,420
3 years	15,293	101,096
4 years	15,720	104,378
5 years	15,629	103,992
Race/ethnicity of population ages 0-4²		
American Indian	0.3%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.5%	6.6%
Black	32.0%	20.1%
Hispanic	12.0%	16.2%
Multiracial	7.8%	6.7%
White	44.4%	50.1%
ECONOMICS AND POVERTY		
% of children 0-4 under 100% FPL ³	17.1%	13.9%
% of children 0-4 under 200% FPL ⁴	39.3%	32.6%
Median household income ⁵	\$69,345	\$76,398
% of children 0-5 with all available parents in the workforce ⁶	65.8%	67.9%
INFANTS/TODDLERS		
Sites serving infants ⁷	322	2,716
Number of infants (<16 months) in population per infant-serving site ⁸	63	48
Sites serving toddlers ⁷	485	3,734
Number of toddlers (16-35 months) in population per toddler-serving site ⁹	53	45
Number of publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers ¹⁰	2,268	13,685
BARRIERS TO CARE AMONG PARENTS OF INFANTS & TODDLERS¹¹ (N=44-74)		
% who need non-parental care outside of traditional working hours	40.5%	26.0%
% reporting "Very Difficult" to find:		
Programs with openings	48.3%	43.8%
Affordable programs	25.8%	25.4%
ECCE services for multiple children	18.2%	22.7%
Programs with hours needed	23.3%	17.9%
Programs that were easy to get to/provide transportation	17.3%	13.6%
AFFORDABILITY¹²		
Annual cost of care by age & setting		
Infant in family ECCE services		\$11,492
Infant in center-based ECCE services		\$15,288
Toddler in family ECCE services		\$11,024
Toddler in center-based ECCE services		\$14,144
% of Median HH Income Needed to Afford Care (calculated using statewide cost of care)		
Infant in family ECCE services	16.6%	15%
Infant in center-based ECCE services	22.0%	20%
Toddler in family ECCE services	15.9%	14%
Toddler in center-based ECCE services	20.4%	19%

READY REGION: SOUTHSIDE

DEMOGRAPHICS	Southside	Statewide
Child population by single-year of age¹		
Under 1	5,326	97,752
1 year	5,434	98,819
2 years	5,526	101,420
3 years	5,380	101,096
4 years	5,539	104,378
5 years	5,670	103,992
Race/ethnicity of population ages 0-4²		
American Indian	0.2%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.1%	6.6%
Black	27.5%	20.1%
Hispanic	5.9%	16.2%
Multiracial	5.8%	6.7%
White	59.5%	50.1%
ECONOMICS AND POVERTY		
% of children 0-4 under 100% FPL ³	21.7%	13.9%
% of children 0-4 under 200% FPL ⁴	49.0%	32.6%
Median household income ⁵	\$51,056	\$76,398
% of children 0-5 with all available parents in the workforce ⁶	68.7%	67.9%
INFANTS/TODDLERS		
Sites serving infants ⁷	95	2,716
Number of infants (<16 months) in population per infant-serving site ⁸	75	48
Sites serving toddlers ⁷	150	3,734
Number of toddlers (16-35 months) in population per toddler-serving site ⁹	61	45
Number of publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers ¹⁰	776	13,685
BARRIERS TO CARE AMONG PARENTS OF INFANTS & TODDLERS¹¹ (N=44-83)		
% who need non-parental care outside of traditional working hours	22.9%	26.0%
% reporting "Very Difficult" to find:		
Programs with openings	62.5%	43.8%
Affordable programs	19.5%	25.4%
ECCE services for multiple children	29.6%	22.7%
Programs with hours needed	23.4%	17.9%
Programs that were easy to get to/provide transportation	11.9%	13.6%
AFFORDABILITY¹²		
Annual cost of care by age & setting		
Infant in family ECCE services		\$11,492
Infant in center-based ECCE services		\$15,288
Toddler in family ECCE services		\$11,024
Toddler in center-based ECCE services		\$14,144
% of Median HH Income Needed to Afford Care (calculated using statewide cost of care)		
Infant in family ECCE services	22.5%	15%
Infant in center-based ECCE services	29.9%	20%
Toddler in family ECCE services	21.6%	14%
Toddler in center-based ECCE services	27.7%	19%

READY REGION: SOUTHWEST

DEMOGRAPHICS	Southwest	Statewide
Child population by single-year of age¹		
Under 1	4,786	97,752
1 year	4,856	98,819
2 years	4,973	101,420
3 years	5,121	101,096
4 years	5,213	104,378
5 years	5,270	103,992
Race/ethnicity of population ages 0-4²		
American Indian	0.1%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.4%	6.6%
Black	2.9%	20.1%
Hispanic	3.7%	16.2%
Multiracial	4.2%	6.7%
White	87.8%	50.1%
ECONOMICS AND POVERTY		
% of children 0-4 under 100% FPL ³	23.3%	13.9%
% of children 0-4 under 200% FPL ⁴	46.3%	32.6%
Median household income ⁵	\$45,737	\$76,398
% of children 0-5 with all available parents in the workforce ⁶	68.7%	67.9%
INFANTS/TODDLERS		
Sites serving infants ⁷	105	2,716
Number of infants (<16 months) in population per infant-serving site ⁸	61	48
Sites serving toddlers ⁷	160	3,734
Number of toddlers (16-35 months) in population per toddler-serving site ⁹	51	45
Number of publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers ¹⁰	1,022	13,685
BARRIERS TO CARE AMONG PARENTS OF INFANTS & TODDLERS¹¹ (N=44-83)		
% who need non-parental care outside of traditional working hours	16.8%	26.0%
% reporting "Very Difficult" to find:		
Programs with openings	53.3%	43.8%
Affordable programs	32.0%	25.4%
ECCE services for multiple children	30.8%	22.7%
Programs with hours needed	21.9%	17.9%
Programs that were easy to get to/provide transportation	17.8%	13.6%
AFFORDABILITY¹²		
Annual cost of care by age & setting		
Infant in family ECCE services		\$11,492
Infant in center-based ECCE services		\$15,288
Toddler in family ECCE services		\$11,024
Toddler in center-based ECCE services		\$14,144
% of Median HH Income Needed to Afford Care (calculated using statewide cost of care)		
Infant in family ECCE services	25.1%	15%
Infant in center-based ECCE services	33.4%	20%
Toddler in family ECCE services	24.1%	14%
Toddler in center-based ECCE services	30.9%	19%

READY REGION: WEST

DEMOGRAPHICS	West	Statewide
Child population by single-year of age¹		
Under 1	4,479	97,752
1 year	4,605	98,819
2 years	4,425	101,420
3 years	4,608	101,096
4 years	4,911	104,378
5 years	4,855	103,992
Race/ethnicity of population ages 0-4²		
American Indian	0.2%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.0%	6.6%
Black	17.3%	20.1%
Hispanic	8.4%	16.2%
Multiracial	5.5%	6.7%
White	66.7%	50.1%
ECONOMICS AND POVERTY		
% of children 0-4 under 100% FPL ³	24.8%	13.9%
% of children 0-4 under 200% FPL ⁴	46.3%	32.6%
Median household income ⁵	\$53,443	\$76,398
% of children 0-5 with all available parents in the workforce ⁶	67.7%	67.9%
INFANTS/TODDLERS		
Sites serving infants ⁷	99	2,716
Number of infants (<16 months) in population per infant-serving site ⁸	81	48
Sites serving toddlers ⁷	160	3,734
Number of toddlers (16-35 months) in population per toddler-serving site ⁹	80	45
Number of publicly funded slots for infants and toddlers ¹⁰	1,055	13,685
BARRIERS TO CARE AMONG PARENTS OF INFANTS & TODDLERS¹¹ (N=44-83)		
% who need non-parental care outside of traditional working hours	18.3%	26.0%
% reporting "Very Difficult" to find:		
Programs with openings	45.5%	43.8%
Affordable programs	23.6%	25.4%
ECCE services for multiple children	15.8%	22.7%
Programs with hours needed	15.3%	17.9%
Programs that were easy to get to/provide transportation	12.3%	13.6%
AFFORDABILITY¹²		
Annual cost of care by age & setting		
Infant in family ECCE services		\$11,492
Infant in center-based ECCE services		\$15,288
Toddler in family ECCE services		\$11,024
Toddler in center-based ECCE services		\$14,144
% of Median HH Income Needed to Afford Care (calculated using statewide cost of care)		
Infant in family ECCE services	21.5%	15%
Infant in center-based ECCE services	28.6%	20%
Toddler in family ECCE services	20.6%	14%
Toddler in center-based ECCE services	26.5%	19%

READY REGION PROFILE CITATIONS

¹ Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) Program. (2022). U.S. Population Data 1969-2020. Retrieved from <https://seer.cancer.gov/popdata>.

² U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). Annual County Resident Population Estimates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2021 (CC-EST2021-ALLDATA). Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-counties-detail.html>

*Hispanic includes individuals of any race and that all other racial groups identified are non-Hispanic. All other races includes American Indian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Multiracial.

³ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). Table B17001 POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS BY SEX BY AGE. 2016-2020 5-Year American Community Survey. Retrieved from: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Table%20B17001&tid=ACSDT5Y2020.B17001>.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). Table B17024 AGE BY RATIO OF INCOME TO POVERTY LEVEL IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS. 2016-2020 5-Year American Community Survey. Retrieved from: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B17024&tid=ACSDT5Y2020.B17024>. [This estimate is derived from the 0-5 population at the 200% FPL; children ages 0-4 are assumed to have the same rate calculated for the 0-5 population].

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). Table B19001 HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2021 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS). 2016-2020 5-Year American Community Survey. Retrieved from: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B19001&tid=ACSDT5Y2020.B19001>. [Regional medians based on cumulative distribution of localities within region; income assumed to be evenly distributed within income bin].

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). Table B23008 AGE OF OWN CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS IN FAMILIES AND SUBFAMILIES BY LIVING ARRANGEMENTS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF PARENTS. 2016-2020 5-Year American Community Survey. Retrieved from: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=%20B23008.%20&tid=ACSDT5Y2020.B23008>.

⁷ Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs. Licensing database (DOLPHIN) as of 1/30/2023. Provided by request from Virginia Department of Education.

⁸ Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs. Licensing database (DOLPHIN) as of 1/30/2023. Provided by request from Virginia Department of Education. Estimate based on population age <16 months divided by total providers reporting serving ages <16 months. The population age <16 months was calculated by summing the population age 0 with 1/3 of the population age 1 (months 12-15), based on the assumption that population by age in months is evenly distributed within a single year of age.

⁹ Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs. Licensing database (DOLPHIN) as of 1/30/2023. Provided by request from Virginia Department of Education. Estimate based on total population ages 16-35 months divided by total providers reporting serving ages >=16 months and <36 months. Population 16-35 months was calculated by summing 2/3 of the population age 1 with the population age 2.

¹⁰ Publicly-funded slots for infants and toddlers represent the sum of Child Care Subsidy enrollment (as of September 2022), Mixed Delivery slots (FY23), and Early Head Start slots (FY22). Early Head Start slots were assigned to geographic region based on the geographic location of the Head Start grantee.

¹¹ SEE-Partnerships. 2021. Virginia families with young children survey [Unpublished tables]. University of Virginia.

¹² Child Care Aware of America. (2022, November 15). Child care affordability in Virginia. https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2021%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Virginia_Price%20Fact%20Sheet%202021.pdf

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The research team conducted focus groups of families with infants and toddlers, administered a brief survey of participating families, synthesized secondary data from recent statewide surveys collected by researchers with the University of Virginia (UVA), and analyzed administrative, state, and federal data such as licensing and census datasets.

Secondary Data Supply, Demand, and Affordability

The research team estimated supply and demand using a combination of VDOE data and population data from the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) program at the National Institutes of Health. To estimate the affordability of care, we used cost of care data from Child Care Aware of America, income data from the American Community Survey (ACS), and Child Care Subsidy reimbursement rates from VDOE.

Supply. Researchers estimated the supply of ECCE services using data from the child care licensing data base (DOLPHIN) maintained by the Division of Social Services. This represents licensed and regulated ECCE providers in Virginia as of January 30, 2023. We estimated the supply of care for infants and toddlers based on the minimum age each provider is licensed to serve according to information included in the database. These data are based on publicly available statewide data and may not precisely reflect the actual supply of care for specific age groups.

Demand. The team used data from the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program (SEER) to determine demand. These data are unique in that they break down the population of children within each year of age in each county. Researchers compared regional site availability from the licensing database to infant and toddler population data within each Ready Region to understand the potential demand vs availability. The team also used this data to calculate a ratio of the number of infants and toddlers in each region relative to the number of sites serving children in those age ranges. This metric indicates how many children in the population are potentially competing for service at each available ECCE site.

Affordability. This study defines affordability as the percent of household income necessary for families to afford ECCE services. This metric is based on the federal standard that families can afford to pay no more than 7% of their income on ECCE services. Researchers used data on cost of ECCE services from Child Care Aware of America and data on median household income from the U.S. Census Bureau to estimate the percentage of median income Virginia families are currently spending to access ECCE services. Due to data limitations at the county level, this is different than the State Median Income scale used for subsidy eligibility. The team also used Mixed Delivery FY24 Reimbursement Rates to further calculate the gaps between affordability, the average cost of ECCE services, and the cost of quality ECCE services.

University of Virginia

VDOE has contracted with researchers at the University of Virginia's Study of Early Education through Partnerships (UVA) to study early childhood care and education in the state, including provider and family experiences, and the implementation and use of Child Care Subsidy. Because VECF and VDOE are committed to minimizing duplicative data collection efforts that cause a burden to providers and families, the current gap analysis uses data recently collected as part of the VDOE-UVA partnership. ECE Insights collaborated with UVA to obtain aggregate data drawn from two surveys: The 2021 Virginia Child Care Provider Survey and the 2021 Virginia Families with Young Children Survey. These surveys are described in more detail below.

2021 Virginia Child Care Provider Survey

As part of their partnership with VDOE, UVA researchers administered a survey to center- and home-based leaders (e.g., site owners, site directors) of ECCE sites throughout Virginia between November 2021 and February 2022. The survey asked site leaders about their enrollment, staffing, teacher compensation, and financial well-being, as well as their experiences with Virginia's Child Care Subsidy Program. To support VECF's infant/toddler gap analysis, UVA researchers shared deidentified tabulations with the ECE Insights research team. Table 3 describes the survey sample.

Table 3. 2021 Virginia Child Care Survey Sample (n=2,996)

Responses by Provider Type	
Center Leaders	1,605 (54%)
Family day homes	1,391 (46%)
Responses by Ready Region	
Blue Ridge	8%
Capital Area	35%
Central	12%
Chesapeake	5%
North Central	16%
Southeastern	11%
Southside	4%
Southwest	5%
West	4%

SOURCE: SEE-Partnerships. 2021. Virginia Child Care Provider Survey [Unpublished tables].

2021 Virginia Families with Young Children Survey

Between November 2021 and January 2022, UVA researchers administered the 2021 Virginia Families with Young Children Survey to parents/guardians of children aged 0-5 who were not yet in kindergarten and who were attending a child care program participating in Virginia's Preschool Development Grant (PDG) initiative. Only sites that receive some form of public funding (e.g., Child Care Subsidy) were eligible to participate in PDG. As a result, family survey results are generalizable to families who attend programs that are publicly funded. The anonymous survey asked parents/guardians about their experiences with early childhood education in Virginia. Table 4 describes the sample of people with children under 3 years of age participating in the UVA family survey.

Table 4. 2021 Virginia Families with Young Children Survey Sample for Respondents with Children under 3 (n=1,161)

Child Ages	
Under 12 months	16%
12-23 months	29%
24-35 months	55%
Race/Ethnicity	
Asian, Pacific Islander, Asian-American	2%
Black, African, African-American	18%
Hispanic/Latino/a	9%
White, Caucasian, Euro-American, European	65%
Multiracial	5%
All Other Races	0.3%
Child Care Type	
Public School	16%
Caregiver Home	24%
Center/Private School	55%
Other	4%
Ready Region	
Blue Ridge	14%
Capitol Area	21%
Central	19%
Chesapeake	4%
North Central	7%
Southeastern	7%
Southside	8%
Southwest	12%
West	9%

PRIMARY DATA

Family Focus Groups

Between June and August 2022, ECE Insights partnered with Ready Region leads and other family-serving organizations across Virginia to recruit families with infants and toddlers to participate in six 90-minute focus groups. In particular, we focused on recruiting families with little to no connection to regulated ECCE services so that we could understand more about needs, preferences, and experiences of families who are unserved or underserved by Virginia’s current public early childhood system. As a first step, researchers asked interested families to complete an online registration form to indicate their interest in participating in a focus group. The outreach included both English and Spanish materials and resulted in family registrations from each of the nine Ready Regions. In the second step, the research team used stratified random sampling to select family members to participate in one of the six focus groups, including two that offered Spanish interpretation. Sampling criteria included language, Ready Region, type of ECCE services used, and race/ethnicity. We invited sixteen to eighteen participants to attend each focus group, resulting in an average of 12 attendees per session. The study provided a \$100 egift card to all participants who also completed a brief survey (see below). Table 5 provides a breakdown of participant characteristics.

Table 5. 2022 Virginia Unserved/Underserved Family Focus Group Sample³⁸

FAMILY FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS	
Child Ages (n=72)	
Under 12 months	31%
12-23 months	40%
24-under 36 months	29%
Race/Ethnicity (n=71)	
Asian, Pacific Islander, Asian-American	3%
Black, African, African-American	35%
Hispanic/Latino/a	11%
White, Caucasian, Euro-American, European	40%
Multiracial	7%
All Other Races	1%
Prefer not to answer	1%
ECCE Service Type (n=71)	
Babysitter/nanny	10%
Center	34%
Family day home	6%
Family member (such as a grandparent or aunt)	17%
Friend or neighbor	0%
Does not use ECCE services	34%
Ready Region (n=72)	
Blue Ridge	15%
Capital Area	6%
Central	15%
Chesapeake	10%
North Central	3%
Southeastern	18%
Southside	15%
Southwest	13%
West	6%

³⁸Some values may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Researchers used a semi-structured interview protocol to facilitate each session, with topics that included current and desired ECCE arrangements, availability of ECCE services, and affordability. The team recorded each session and coded transcripts using both a defined code list and open coding within Atlas.ti™ qualitative coding software.

Survey of Unserved/Underserved Families

All participants in the family focus groups completed a brief survey that asked about participant demographics, current ECCE arrangements, and ECCE needs, preferences, hours, and costs. Additionally, researchers invited registrants who were not selected to participate in a focus group to take the survey and randomly selected 10 of these respondents to receive a \$50 egift card. The survey had 101 valid responses. Table 6 summarizes respondents' demographic characteristics. Note that some categories total more than 100% since respondents could select all that applied.

Table 6. 2022 Virginia Survey of Unserved/Underserved Families Sample

VA SURVEY OF UNSERVED/UNDERSERVED FAMILIES RESPONDENTS	
Child Ages (n=101)	
Under 12 months	36%
12-23 months	45%
24-under 36 months	37%
Race/Ethnicity (n=101)	
Asian, Pacific Islander, Asian-American	4%
Black, African, African-American	41%
Hispanic/Latino/a	6%
White, Caucasian, Euro-American, European	52%
All Other Races	4%
Prefer not to answer	2%
Language (n=101)	
English	92%
Spanish	6%
Other	2%
Income (n=101)	
Up to \$40,000	37%
\$40,001-\$70,000	24%
\$70,001-\$100,000	18%
Over \$100,000	16%
Special Needs (n=101)	
Yes	19%
No	81%
ECCE Service Type (n=101)	
Babysitter or nanny	7%
Center	44%
Family day home	3%
Family member (e.g., grandparent, aunt)	14%
Friend or neighbor	0%
Does not use ECCE services	32%
Ready Region (n=101)	
Blue Ridge	18%
Capital Area	4%
Central	15%
Chesapeake	4%
North Central	3%
Southeastern	26%
Southside	16%
Southwest	8%
West	7%