



Missouri Economy Indicators

Childcare Access

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While private-sector employment has mostly rebounded from COVID-19-related job losses, childcare employment still lags other industries. This trend poses a problem for Missouri's post-pandemic economic recovery as parents returning to in-person work struggle to find care. As of February 2022, Child Care Aware of America reports that [16,000](#) (nearly 9% of all U.S. programs) childcare programs in the U.S. have closed since the coronavirus pandemic began. United Women's Empowerment, a Missouri women's advocacy organization, reports that roughly [400](#) Missouri childcare providers have closed during this same period. A joint 2021 study from the Missouri and U.S. chambers of commerce found that childcare shortages are estimated to cost Missouri \$1.35 billion annually.

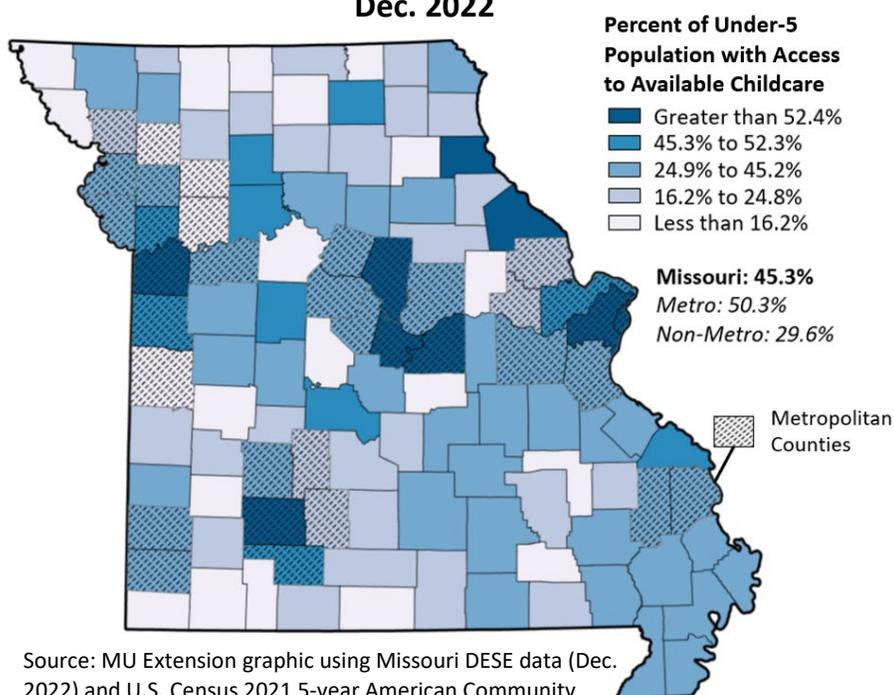
Childcare Availability Falls Short in Missouri's Nonmetro Areas

On average, there are roughly 4.5 available childcare slots for every 10 children under the age of 5 in Missouri. This figure drops to around 3 slots for every 10 children in nonmetro counties, compared to 5 in metropolitan counties.

Cole County has the most available childcare, with 74.2% of children under the age of 5 covered, followed by Boone (69.2%), Osage (67.0%) and Pike (63.1%). Mercer County has the least, with only 4.4% of children covered. Approximately 1 in 4 Missouri counties (23.5%) have 4 or fewer childcare facilities.

Childcare Availability in Missouri

Dec. 2022



Source: MU Extension graphic using Missouri DESE data (Dec. 2022) and U.S. Census 2021 5-year American Community Survey estimates

The childcare industry faces a number of challenges to its recovery, as even before the pandemic, [98%](#) of occupations paid higher wages. Americans working in childcare earn a rough average of \$13 per hour, with many earning just above minimum wage. Beyond the challenges facing workers in the industry, childcare is a leading household expense. According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, childcare is unaffordable for [60%](#) of American families that need it. A 2019 [report](#) from Child Care Aware found that the annual cost of Missouri center-based infant care was \$9,880. The Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry's 2022 CEO [poll](#) found that 78% of business leaders cite childcare as a significant workforce barrier.

Following COVID, Childcare Employment has not Recovered

Following the coronavirus pandemic, Missouri's childcare industry employment has been reduced by 1,012 individuals (-4%), less than the national average of -8% (see table). Among neighboring states, Illinois and Nebraska saw similar declines, with Kentucky seeing the greatest employment decrease of -12%. Of neighboring states, Missouri lost the third most childcare employees between 2019 and 2022. Missouri's decline, while less severe than the national average, was more substantial than most neighboring states. Counter to the trend, Arkansas grew its childcare industry employment over this period.

In addition to industry employment declines, turnover for childcare workers also increased during the pandemic. In 2021, 30% of childcare workers left the profession, compared with 27% in 2019, according to Census data analyzed by USAFacts.org. Most of those who have left the industry have joined the retail sector, followed by social and human services and administrative assistant professionals.

Most childcare businesses are small, with fewer than 50 employees, and are not required to offer health insurance to their employees under federal law. Recently, the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry has encouraged childcare providers to provide healthcare benefits to retain and attract employees. Other approaches to addressing the childcare crisis involve increasing the number of children a caretaker can supervise and allowing 16-year-olds to care for up to 15 children — strategies implemented in states like Iowa and Montana. However, these approaches come with increased safety concerns. Likely, many strategies will be required to address childcare employment challenges.

Area	2019 Jobs	2022 Jobs	2019 - 2022 Change	2019 - 2022 % Change
United States	1,251,531	1,148,348	-103,183	-8%
Missouri	23,324	22,312	-1,012	-4%
Arkansas	12,314	12,369	54	0%
Illinois	50,915	47,660	-3,255	-6%
Iowa	22,212	21,901	-311	-1%
Kansas	12,405	12,345	-60	0%
Kentucky	15,538	13,605	-1,933	-12%
Nebraska	14,355	13,816	-539	-4%
Oklahoma	13,145	12,853	-292	-2%
Tennessee	19,082	18,913	-169	-1%

Source: 2022 EMSI Burning Glass estimates of payroll and self-employed childcare industry employment

Additional Resources and Notes

- The Missouri [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#)'s (DESE) Show Me Childcare Provider Search is a tool for finding available childcare across the state. The childcare availability analysis used total county childcare capacity from DESE's Regulated Childcare Provider Listing (December 2022) normalized with U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates (2021) of each counties' under-5 population.
- To combat the state's worker shortages, the [Missouri of Chamber of Commerce and Industry](#) offers childcare providers access to its healthcare plans. Providers can join a plan as a single pool, which lowers costs. Businesses buy the plans and pay at least half of the premium costs for their workers.

All Missouri Economy Indicators briefs in this series are available at <http://muext.us/MissouriEconomyIndicators>

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