



Missouri Economy Indicators

Childcare Trends

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Since January 2025, Missouri has lost 94 registered childcare facilities and is now serving 2,349 fewer children. Over this period, the childcare workforce also shrank by 215 individuals, a 1% decrease. Although disruptions resulting from COVID-19 accelerated these declines, the downward trend predated the pandemic. Across the U.S., the childcare workforce remained relatively steady until 2018, with 2.7% growth from 2017 to 2018. Between 2018 and 2019 this trend reversed (-2.9% growth) and by 2019-20 had started to accelerate (-10.7% growth). Growth in the childcare workforce is uneven as many states, including Missouri, are experiencing shifts towards an older population with fewer children in need of care. Other states, such as Idaho and South Carolina, which are experiencing rapid population growth, are seeing a corresponding increase in their childcare workforce. An aging population creates additional challenges for addressing the lack of childcare.

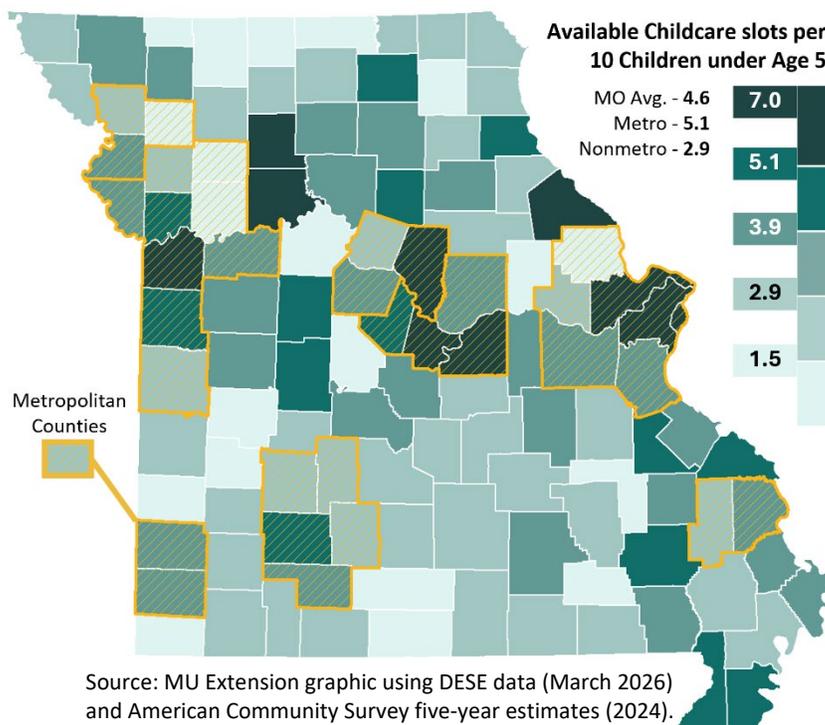
Childcare Availability Struggles in Nonmetro Missouri

On average, Missouri has 4.6 available childcare slots for every 10 children under age 5. Access remains uneven, with nonmetro counties averaging 2.9 slots, down from 3.1 in 2025, compared to 5.1 in metro counties, unchanged since January 2025.

According to Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) data, Boone County has the highest childcare availability relative to its population, with seven slots for every 10 children, followed by Cole (6.9) and Osage (6.7) counties. More than a quarter of Missouri counties (26.1%) had four or fewer childcare facilities, down from 27.8% in 2025.

Childcare Availability in Missouri

March 2026



The Tri-Share Childcare Model Comes to Missouri

[The Tri-Share childcare model splits the cost of childcare evenly](#) among the employee, employer, and state government or philanthropic funders, making care more affordable while supporting workforce participation. With each partner contributing a portion, childcare can be made more affordable and predictable. Piloted in

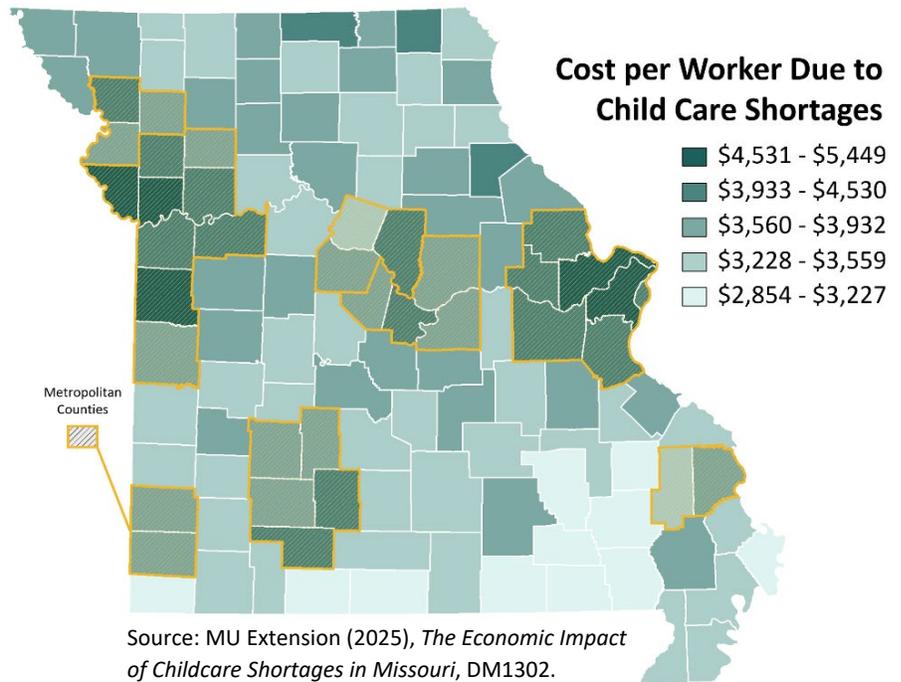
Michigan, the model has been replicated by other states, including Indiana, Kentucky, New York and Ohio. Launched at the end of 2025, Missouri Child Care Works is the state's first Tri-Share program.

[The average annual cost for full-time childcare in Missouri is \\$12,432.](#)

Under the Tri-share model, the annual cost per partner would be roughly \$4,144. Given that businesses face losses ranging from \$2,850 to \$5,450 when a parent exits the workforce, the cost of contributing to the program is comparable.

Each year, businesses across the state incur an estimated \$951 million in lost productivity and employee turnover costs. Wage losses resulting from parents exiting the workforce contribute to a \$194 million reduction in state and local tax revenues.

[Together, the annual cost exceeds \\$1.14 billion.](#)



MU Extension Workforce Initiative Tailors Childcare Solutions to Local Needs

Another effort to help address childcare workforce challenges, funded by a Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development MoExcels grant, is supporting MU Extension's development and expansion of employer-driven childcare training programs. Through this effort, MU Extension is developing resources to lower barriers to entry for individuals entering the childcare workforce and for those looking to open a childcare center. In collaboration with local stakeholders in Kansas City and Moberly, MU Extension is working on two pilot projects tailored to addressing the unique needs of each community. **[Moberly is focusing on strengthening the local childcare workforce](#)** through the Registered Apprenticeships in Skills and Education (RAISE) program, and **[Kansas City is working to connect individuals seeking a career change or post-retirement work](#)** with opportunities to provide childcare services for their neighbors.

Additional Resources and Notes

- **[Sign up for upcoming virtual training webinars](#)** through the *Community Change* childcare series.
- **[The Missouri Child Care Works](#)** operates the state's cost-sharing model to improve accessibility and affordability for Missouri families. The program is currently open for enrollment.

[All Missouri Economy Indicators briefs in this series are available online.](#)

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