



BELLINGHAM REGIONAL
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Whatcom County Child Care Crisis: Business Impacts

Opportunity Council/Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington

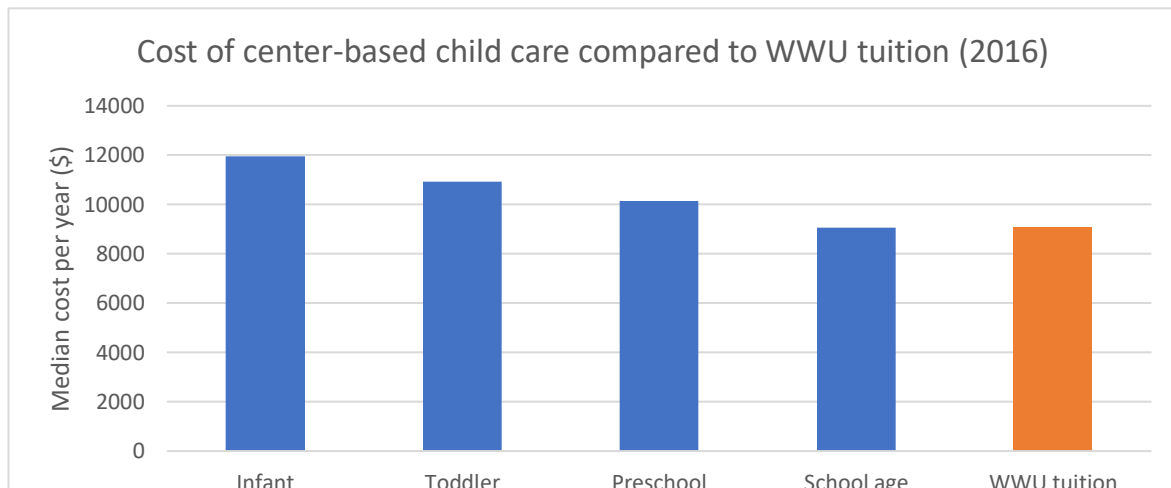
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When parents cannot find or afford child care, they are unable to work. As a recent US Chamber of Commerce report *Workforce of Today and Tomorrow: The Business Case for Childcare* highlights, there is strong evidence that investing in child care provides a significant boost to local economies.

The Opportunity Council partnered with the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce to survey the impact of child care barriers on Whatcom County employers. **The survey results were clear: 88% of Whatcom County business owners reported child care barriers affecting their employees' work performance.**

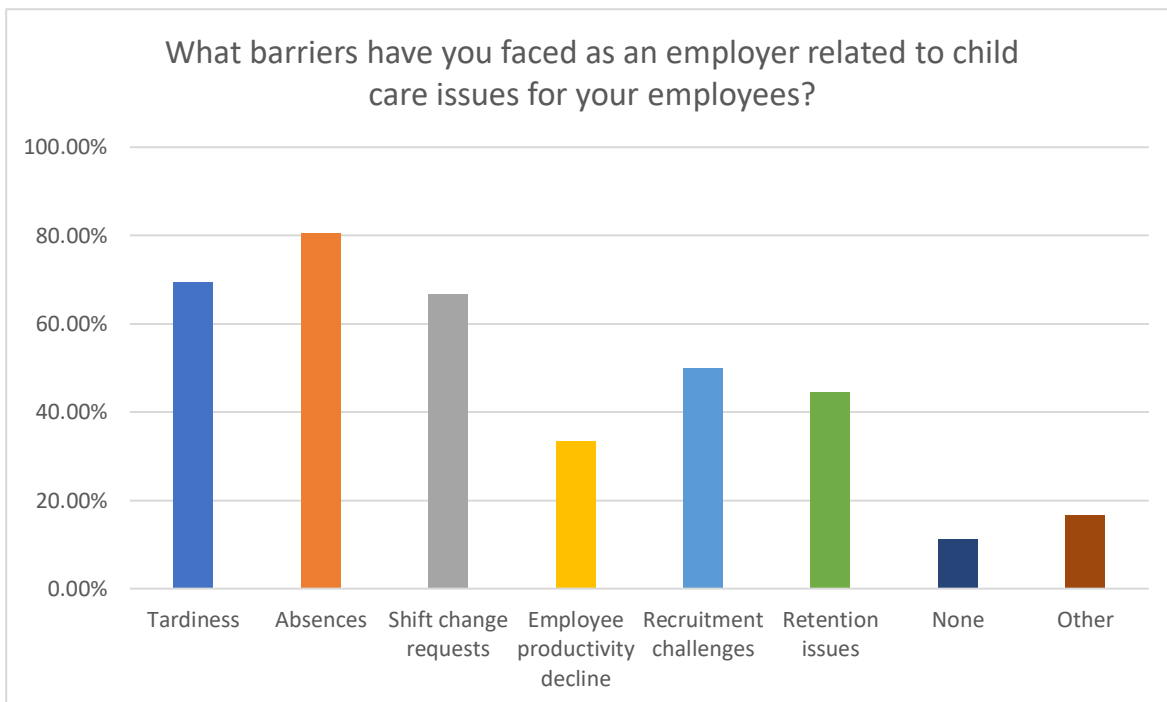
Whatcom County child care facts

- 58% of Whatcom County children under 5 with working parents are potentially left without the option to attend licensed child care.
- In 2017, the Whatcom Family YMCA reported over 300 children on its waiting list between its two child care locations.
- A full year of infant child care in Whatcom County is more expensive than Western Washington University tuition.
- For a family of four struggling to make ends meet, child care expenses account for 28% of the household budget according to United Way of Whatcom County's 2018 ALICE report.



Survey responses:

- 33 Whatcom County employers responded. In total, survey respondents employ over 5,900 Whatcom County residents.
- Businesses ranged in size from two employees to over 750 employees. The median respondent had 50 employees.
- 88% of businesses experienced at least one challenge due to child care barriers. Most employers mentioned the lack of child care availability and cost burden it imposes on employees.
- 80% of respondents to the employer survey cited employee absences due to child care barriers.
- 69% of respondents reported employee tardiness due to child care barriers.
- 50% of respondents reported recruitment issues due to child care barriers.
- 44% of respondents cited retention issues due to child care barriers.



Testimony from employers

"[We need] more infant day care options. We've had employees resign after having a child due to lack of infant daycare."

"Bellingham needs more childcare options that do not have months long waits for children to enroll in programs."

"People are limited in availability to work or even interview."

"Seems like this issue is much like affordable and available housing of all kinds. There are too few child care options in our community and they are costly..."

"We need more affordable child care options, especially for infant. Our employees make an above living wage and don't qualify for assistance but can't afford to pay child care and living costs."

"It's difficult to find facilities and a lot of the licensed day care providers are very strict on hours on drop-off and pick-up that don't work for working parents. It would be beneficial to promote companies to have on-site day care providers."

"[It's] difficult to find good child care options for either full or part-time employees."

"Lack of quality child care availability and affordability is an increasing burden on more employees. Especially in this tight labor market, this negatively impacts both the quality and quantity of the labor pool."

"Whatcom County is a child care desert. As a parent myself the lack of resources for working parents in this town is truly depressing."

"[Community partners should] work towards addressing the high costs of child care, and the child care options for working families."

"I love working at a family friendly workplace with a flexible work schedule. Even with this, challenges with child care interrupt my and other staff's productivity. Even with willingness to pay, and relative lack of price sensitivity, there simply is not accessibility and capacity."

"Our staff is fortunate enough to earn relatively good wages. The biggest challenge with day care for our staff, despite their wages, would be the cost of day care, the challenge of finding good quality day care, and the emotional struggle parents feel. They want to work less and be with their child more, but they also have to support their family. It is not easy."

Child care solutions

Allow employees flexibility with their schedules

Child care hours often differ from traditional work hours, leaving parents to scramble for a friend to pick their child up or leave early. By offering flexibility to their employees, businesses can make the life of a working parent easier.

Offer on-site child care or partner with a licensed child care center

Finding child care in Whatcom County is more difficult than ever. Helping parents secure child care by partnering with a child care center can improve employee productivity and retention. For instance, apparel company Patagonia estimates an 115%–125% return on investment for its on-site child care program, due to improved employee retention, employee engagement, and tax benefits.

Speak out for child care

Share your concerns about child care access with policymakers and the local media. Discuss the importance of child care at speaking engagements or write an op-ed in a local paper. Make it clear to the community that child care not only affects parents and children – it impacts the growth of business in Whatcom County.

Sources for employers

- US Chamber of Commerce Foundation – [Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Child Care](#)
- Fast Company – [Patagonia’s CEO Explains How to Make On-Site Child Care Pay for Itself](#)
- Opportunity Council – [Child Care Supply, Demand, and Cost in Whatcom County](#)
- Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington/Opportunity Council – [Resources for families and child care providers](#)
- Harvard Business Review – [How some companies are making child care less stressful for their employees](#)

The Opportunity Council thanks the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce and its members for their participation in this survey.