

The 2003 Data

Understanding Child Care Issues in California.

How the data was collected

R&Rs have close ties to families, communities, and child care providers. This enables them to compile standardized data about child care supply and demand, and to gain insight into parent concerns and provider issues in each county in California. The California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, a statewide association of member R&R agencies that supports recruitment and training of providers and advocates for quality, affordable, and accessible child care throughout the state, collected the data for this Portfolio from the 61 state-funded California R&Rs in 2002.

The findings on the supply of child care are based on R&R databases of licensed providers as of January 2002. These databases are updated regularly.

Information about requests for child care comes from documentation by the R&Rs of calls they receive from parents. Each year tens of thousands of parents contact local R&Rs for child care referrals. Parents often request specific types of care in the referral process, and they provide information about their work schedules and language needs. These calls represent an important sample of information about families. However, not all families who use or need child care call their local R&R. Thus, the county and state pages also include Census and other demographic data about children and families. The aggregate of these diverse pieces of information brings a more complete picture to each county's and the state's need for child care services. "Understanding the County Data Pages" notes the sources used in the Portfolio and for each county page.

The California Child Care Resource & Referral Network compiled the information on the county and state pages in this Portfolio to help readers understand the issues of child care availability, both at the state level and in each of California's 58 counties. With standardized data about the supply and demand of child care, the Portfolio can help policymakers, community leaders, private businesses, nonprofit organizations, and others address the challenges of providing quality, affordable care and early education for children throughout the state.

Since 1997, the Portfolio, which is published every two years, has provided reliable information about the amount of licensed child care and the estimated demand for care in each county. As with the three prior publications, this 2003 report is based on data gathered from the 61 state-funded resource and referral (R&R) agencies. The R&Rs obtained information from approximately 45,000 child care providers and from a sampling of thousands of parents over a three-month period in 2002. To supplement this information, data from the U.S. Census, the California Department of Industrial Relations, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and other public and private sources is also included. Profiles, developed for each county and available at rnetwork.org, include information on the demographic, economic, and geographic factors that affect local child care availability and quality.

But behind every statistic is a child, a parent, or a provider. Every day, staff at California's R&Rs talk with families doing their best to find safe, nurturing, stimulating environments for their children. To support parents with their child care needs, the R&Rs also work with existing and potential child care providers to help them become trained to offer the best and highest quality care possible. The R&Rs understand local child care issues and concerns, and recognize the trends that can impact families and child care supply.

The data, presented statewide and county by county, indicates important trends and needs.

- **More child care providers needed to care for and educate California's diverse population.**

The number of Spanish-speaking households increased by 43 percent between 1990 and 2000, and the number of households speaking an Asian language went up 48 percent. More child care providers are needed who can speak these, as well as the many other languages spoken by California families.

- **Working parents need child care.**

More than half of California's children (52 percent) are in families with either both parents or a single head-of-household in the labor force. Statewide, 80 percent of parents calling resource and referral (R&R) agencies report needing child care because they are working.

- **Shortage of care for infants and toddlers.**

Only 5 percent of slots in licensed child care centers, statewide, serve infants. Most centers do not accept children under age two. This is especially significant because 64 percent of all licensed care in California is center-based.

- **Licensed child care remains in short supply.**

Care in licensed centers and family child care homes is available to only 25 percent of children ages 0-13 with parents in the labor force.

- **Not enough child care available during non-traditional hours.**

An estimated 20 percent of California's employed residents work early mornings, evenings, and overnight shifts. But only 4 percent of licensed child care centers offer care during these times. Although 37 percent of family child care homes offer care during non-traditional hours, these homes make up only 36 percent of the total licensed care in the state.

- **Child care costs out of reach for many California families.**

The annual cost of housing (rent for a two-bedroom apartment) plus child care (for one preschooler in a center) is greater than the annual salary of a family earning minimum wage. For families earning \$30,000 annually, the combined housing and child care costs are more than half their income.

What the data *doesn't* explain

Although the county and state pages provide the most detailed snapshot available of the licensed child care picture in California, they do not tell the whole story. Until more research can capture the entire child care marketplace, important questions remain.

The number of licensed slots available

The data shows that in most counties, the supply of licensed care does not meet the estimated demand. However, the supply data portrays a best-case scenario because it is based on the assumption that licensed providers keep all of their slots open. In fact, many child care centers and family child care homes do not operate at full capacity because of the shortage of qualified staff and the complexities of serving young children.

The number of children in license-exempt care

The R&R data shows the supply of licensed care, but thousands of families rely on license-exempt care provided by relatives, friends, neighbors, and nannies. Often, families find license-exempt care more convenient or more flexible. The R&Rs work hard to encourage license-exempt providers to attend training workshops in child health, safety, and development.

How many new slots were created

The numbers shown on the state and county pages reflect the total supply of licensed slots in both centers and family child care homes. Throughout the state, child care centers close due to rising operating costs. And, turnover among providers is high. Despite efforts to recruit and retain licensed providers, new providers often replace others who have left, keeping the supply stagnant at best.