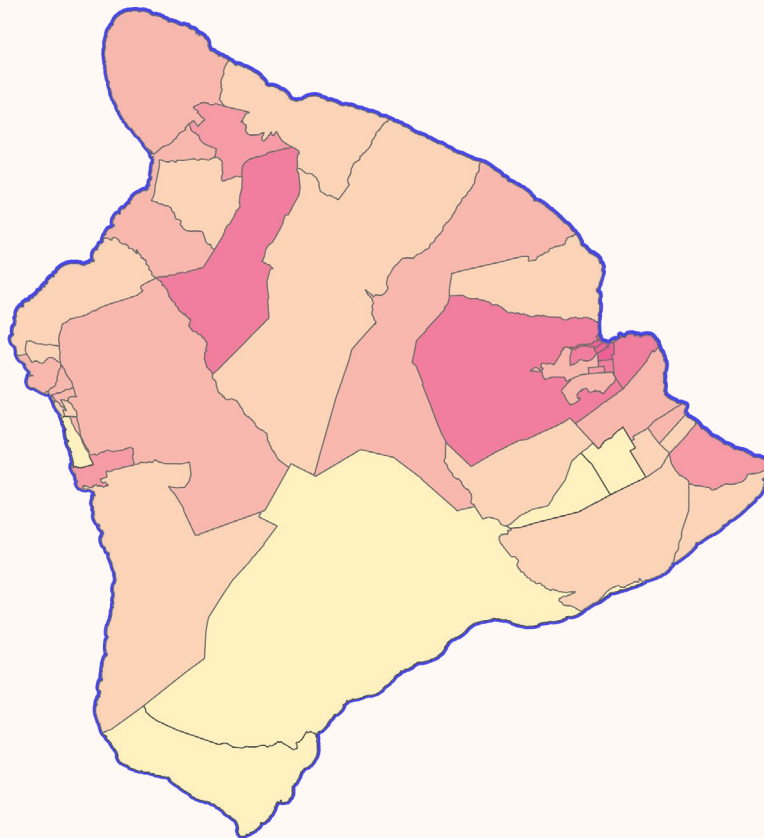


# Access to Early Childhood Care and Education:

## Hawai'i County



### Seat Density Index

- < 0.1
- 0.1 - 0.2
- 0.2 - 0.33
- 0.33 - 0.5
- 0.5 - 0.67
- 0.67 - 1.33
- > 1.33

## Introduction

Access to affordable, conveniently located, and high-quality early care and education (ECE) supports the well-being of Hawai‘i’s youngest keiki and helps their families and our local communities thrive. High-quality ECE programs set the stage for lifelong learning, health, and well-being.<sup>1</sup> ECE is also essential to working parents and promotes women’s workforce participation, pay equity, and career advancement.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, economists estimate that the benefits realized for workforce productivity, family self-sufficiency, and long-term child outcomes make ECE one of the best-known returns on the public dollar.<sup>3</sup>

Hawai‘i’s current ECE supply is insufficient—especially for infants and toddlers—and expensive, with access depending on where a family lives.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, the state is taking steps to expand affordable, high-quality ECE. However, as Hawai‘i moves toward universal access for 3- and 4-year-olds by 2032,<sup>5</sup> the needs of children under age 3 must also be addressed.

The equitable allocation of ECE resources requires data on which communities and populations are underserved. With this need in mind, the [Access to Early Childhood Education and Care in Hawai‘i](#) web tool was created to inform Hawai‘i’s expansion planning. The interactive maps posted there show (a) the supply of nearby ECE seats, (b) the average cost as a percentage of family income, and (c) whether these seats are high quality. Using data from the web tool, this snapshot provides a profile of how Hawai‘i County fares on these measures of ECE access. We highlight two communities with high needs, one with low ECE access and another with more favorable access. We also offer recommendations for improving equitable access in Hawai‘i County.

Note that the ECE data included in this snapshot were collected July–October 2022 and do not reflect subsequent changes that may have occurred. We present this profile as a baseline for setting goals and measuring future progress.

### ECE Access Indexes

This project provides a new method for measuring the availability, affordability, and quality of ECE within a set distance of each home in the state. For every house, condominium, and apartment building, we took into account the number and characteristics of ECE seats as well as the number of young children living nearby. The resulting indexes provide a highly localized measure of the ECE resources available to families within their neighborhoods.

The **seat density** index represents the number of ECE seats per child within a five-mile radius of a family’s home. It indicates whether capacity is sufficient to serve the number of children who live nearby. Scores lower than .33 (i.e., more than three children per seat) are often considered to indicate a shortage of ECE seats.

The **cost burden** index expresses the average cost of a nearby seat as a percentage of that area’s median family income. The federal government defines affordable costs as no more than 7% of family income and has set this level as the copayment cap for families receiving child care subsidies.<sup>6</sup>

The **quality** index measures the likelihood that a nearby seat is in a center with a national ECE accreditation (NAEYC, NECPA, NAFCC), a public pre-K classroom, or a Head Start/Early Head Start program.<sup>7</sup> Because these programs meet standards beyond those required for state licensing, they are likely to provide developmentally appropriate, responsive, and thoughtfully planned care; this does not mean that other programs cannot also be of high quality. High-quality ECE is associated with better child outcomes and is especially important for children facing challenges such as poverty, homelessness, or developmental delays.

## Hawai'i County ECE Access Profile

An estimated 11,800 children under the age of 5 live in Hawai'i County, about 14% of the state's population of young children. The median family income is \$77,500, well below the state median of \$97,813. Approximately four in 10 children under 18 (41.0%) are from poor or low-income households.<sup>8</sup>

Hawai'i County has a total of 3,077 ECE seats (see Table 1). The majority of seats (77.6%) are in licensed child care centers serving preschool-age children. One in 10 seats are in public preschool classrooms, with a similar share (9.7%) in family or group child care homes. Less than 3% of seats are in infant-toddler centers, compared to the state average of 6.3%. Early Head Start and Head Start programs provide about one in 10 of the county's ECE seats. The average cost of ECE in Hawai'i County is \$936, lower than the state average of \$1,063.

**Table 1: ECE Program Characteristics and Cost<sup>9</sup>**

Variable	Hawai'i County		State	
<i>Seats by Provider Type</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>
Family or Group Child Care Home	298	9.7	1,622	6.6
Licensed Infant-Toddler Center	84	2.7	1,528	6.3
Licensed Preschool Center	2,388	77.6	20,538	84.1
Public Pre-K*	307	10.0	742	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,077</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>24,430</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Seats by Other Provider Characteristics</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>
Early Head Start or Head Start	324	10.5	2,411	9.9
Accredited Private Providers	759	24.7	9,313	38.1
<i>Cost</i>				
All Providers**	\$936	---	\$1,063	---
Fee-based Providers	\$1,171	---	\$1,215	---

\*Includes Executive Office on Early Learning and Public Charter School classrooms

\*\*Includes public pre-K, Head Start, and Early Head Start at \$0 tuition

## Hawai'i County ECE Access Profile

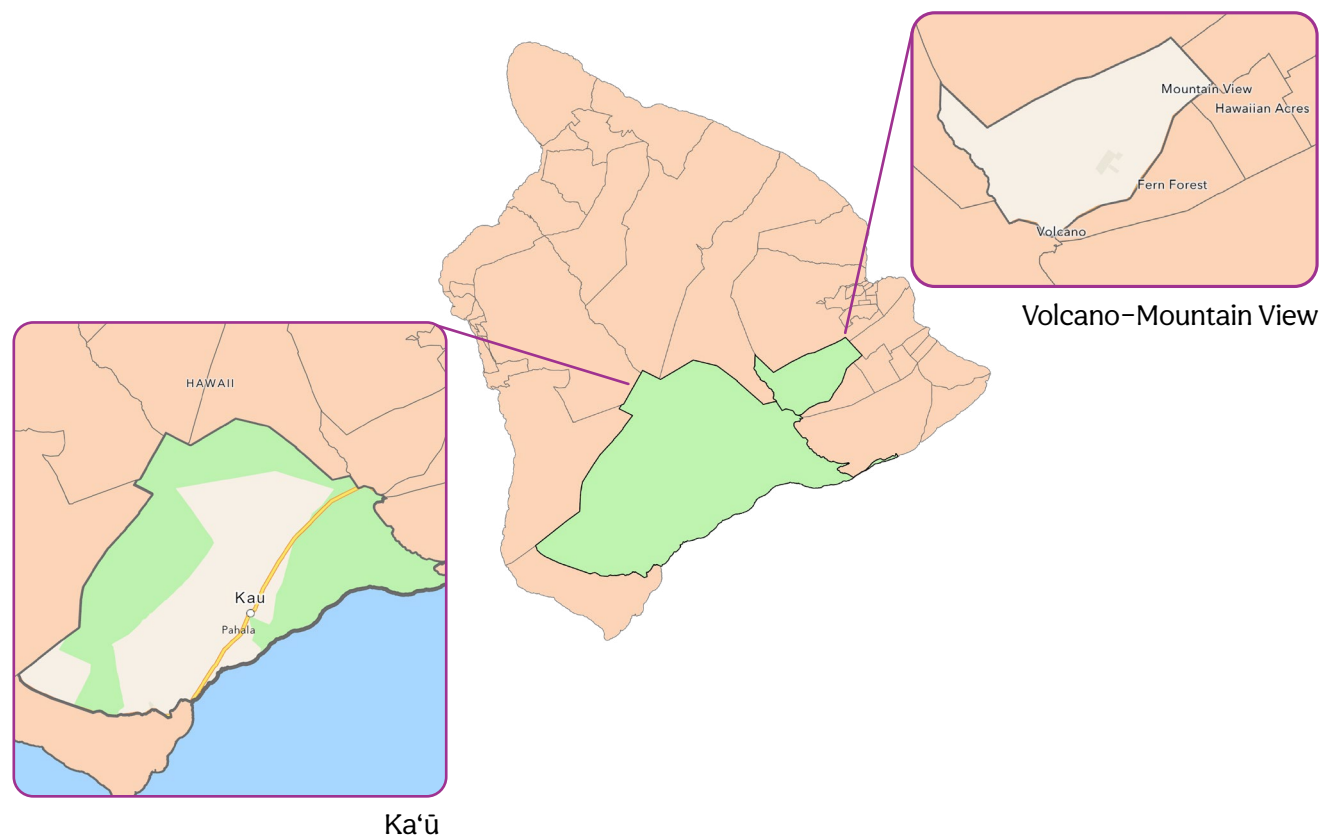
Hawai'i County has a low supply of nearby ECE seats (those within a five-mile radius of a family's home) and costs are high relative to family income. However, quality is a bright spot, second only to Honolulu County (see Table 2). The Big Island has an average .26 nearby seats per child age 0-4, below the state average of .31 seats. Seat density varies by age group, with the supply of nearby seats being much greater for children 3 to 4 years of age than for infants and toddlers (.62 vs. .05 seats per child, respectively). On average, a nearby seat costs 15.3% of the median area family income, the highest cost burden in the state. Infant-toddler seats are slightly more affordable than seats for 3- to 4-year-olds, with costs representing 13.0% vs. 15.8% of median family income, respectively. Over four in 10 nearby seats (46.1%) are in programs likely to be of high quality (i.e., accredited providers, public pre-K, Head Start, and Early Head Start). Quality access varies by age group; only 22.8% of nearby infant-toddler seats are in high-quality programs compared to 45.6% of seats for 3- and 4-year-olds.

**Table 2: ECE Access Within 5 Miles<sup>10</sup>**

ECE Access Index	Hawai'i County	State
Seat Density (overall)	.26	.31
Seat Density (ages 0-2)	.05	.09
Seat Density (ages 3-4)	.62	.63
Cost Burden (overall)	15.3	13.6
Cost Burden (ages 0-2)	13.0	14.9
Cost Burden (ages 3-4)	15.8	13.2
Quality (overall)	46.1	51.1
Quality (ages 0-2)	22.8	46.3
Quality (ages 3-4)	45.6	51.2

## A Closer Look: Ka'ū and Volcano–Mountain View

Below we highlight two Big Island communities that differ on ECE access.



**Table 3: Community Profiles<sup>11</sup>**

Indicator	Ka'ū	Volcano–Mountain View
Children under age 5	890	567
Median family income	\$43,750	\$68,636
% of low-income children	17.3	14.1
% of children in poverty	32.7	33.1
Seat density ages 0-4	.03	.11
Cost burden ages 0-4	31.0	2.0
Quality ages 0-4	5.9	82.7

## A Closer Look: Continued

### **Ka'ū**

With an estimated 890 children under the age of five, Ka'ū (census tract 15001021203) represents a community with high needs and low ECE access. This remote rural area is in the top 20% of Hawai'i County for economic risk and the bottom 10% for overall ECE access. This area's median family income is \$43,770, and half of its children are from poor or low-income households. Ka'ū also has high shares of residents of Pacific Island heritage (10.6%) and limited English-speaking households (6.2%). With very few child care providers, Ka'ū has only .03 nearby seats per young child, i.e., over 33 children in potential competition for each seat. A nearby ECE seat costs 31% the median family income, and only 5.9% of seats are in high-quality programs. The Ka'ū area has among the worst ECE access in the state and is home to a sizable number of young children. This community should be prioritized to receive an influx of ECE resources. Attention to language access and cultural responsiveness is also warranted.

### **Volcano-Mountain View**

The area north of Highway 11 including Volcano Village, Glenwood, and Mountain View (census tract 15001021011) represents a community with relatively high economic needs that is strong in some aspects of ECE access. An estimated 567 children under age five live in Volcano-Mountain View. The area's median family income is \$68,636, and 47.2% of its children live in poor or low-income households. This community has high shares of Native Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian residents (37.5%) and limited English-speaking households (9.6%). While the supply of ECE seats is insufficient (only .11 seats per young child, enough to serve about one in every 10 children), costs are extremely low (2.0% of median family income), and 82.7% of seats are in high-quality programs. The presence of Head Start, public pre-K, and accredited private programs explains the advantages in cost and quality access for Volcano-Mountain View families. However, this community remains underserved in terms of the number of ECE seats.

## Recommendations for Hawai'i County

The provisions of Act 46 require statewide planning for the rapid and equitable expansion of public and private preschool access, increased support for providers to attain accreditation and demonstrate high-quality care, and constraining out-of-pocket costs to families. While working towards these goals, the need for infant-toddler care cannot be overlooked, along with the challenges of staffing and inflation. Suggestions to inform ECE expansion in Hawai'i County are given below.

- With a preschool seat density index of .62 seats per child, the county is able to serve about six out of every 10 preschool-age children (i.e., 3- and 4-year-olds). However, this still falls short of the goal of having sufficient seats to serve 80% of preschoolers set for the Lieutenant Governor's Ready Keiki initiative.<sup>12</sup> The ECE access web tool along with site location data on recently planned or opened public pre-K sites can identify underserved, low-income Big Island communities to prioritize, followed by middle-income, then high-income areas.
- With an infant-toddler seat density of .05 seats per child, only one in every 20 very young children can be served in infant-toddler centers or family child care homes. Develop a strategic plan to increase infant-toddler seats and address the issues of pay equity, the shortage of qualified infant-toddler staff, and the very high cost to providers of serving our youngest keiki.
- Almost half of Hawai'i County's seats for preschool-age children are in programs likely to be of high quality; this is a positive starting point for continued improvement. In contrast, fewer than one-quarter of infant-toddler seats are high quality. Offer supports such as coaching, technical assistance, and financial incentives to raise overall quality, and encourage more private providers to seek accreditation.
- Although the absolute cost of ECE is low, Hawai'i County families face the state's highest cost burden because family incomes are also low. As policies to reduce family copayments are enacted, monitor progress to ensure widespread awareness and enrollment of eligible children in subsidy programs.
- Collect data on the needs and preferences of commuting parents and those working nontraditional schedules to address the availability of ECE options close to employment centers and providers offering evening and weekend care. Given the long distances, transportation to ECE sites is another likely challenge for Big Island families.

For ECE access data in other parts of the state or specific communities within Hawai'i County, please visit [Access to Early Childhood Care and Education in Hawai'i](#).



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007). *The timing and quality of early experiences combine to shape brain architecture: Working paper No. 5*. [https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/Timing\\_Quality\\_Early\\_Experiences-1.pdf](https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/Timing_Quality_Early_Experiences-1.pdf); Phillips, D., Lipsey, M., Dodge, K. A., Haskins, R., Bassok, D., Burchinal, M., & Weiland, C. (2017). *The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects*. New York: Brookings Institution and Duke Center for Child and Family Policy; Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2016). When does preschool matter? *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 21–35.
- <sup>2</sup> Malik, R. (2018). *The effects of universal preschool in Washington, DC: Children's learning and mothers' earnings*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress; Morrissey, T. W. (2017). Child care and parent labor force participation: A review of the research literature. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 15, 1–24; OECD (2019). *Education at a glance 2019: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- <sup>3</sup> Council of Economic Advisors (2015). *The economics of early childhood investments*. Washington, DC: Author. <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=Council+of+Economic+Advisors+%282015%29,+The+economics+of+early+childhood+investments>; Karoly, L.A. (2016). The economic returns to early childhood education. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 37–56.
- <sup>4</sup> DeBaryshe, B., Stern, I., Nguyen, M., Azuma, J., & Chen, Q. (2023). *Hawaii's critical shortage of infant-toddler care*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Center on the Family. <https://uhfamily.hawaii.edu/publications>; Center on the Family (2024). *Access to early childhood education and care in Hawai'i*. [Website] <https://ecemaps.uhfamily.hawaii.edu>
- <sup>5</sup> Relating to access to learning, Act 46 (2020). <https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/sessions/session2020/bills/GM1151.PDF>.
- <sup>6</sup> Improving child care access, affordability, and stability in the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) (Final rule). *Federal Register*, 89:42 (March 1, 2024) pp 15366–15415. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/03/01/2024-04139/improving-child-care-access-affordability-and-stability-in-the-child-care-and-development-fund-ccdf>
- <sup>7</sup> National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Early Childhood Program Accreditation, National Association for Family Child Care.
- <sup>8</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B01001: Sex by age*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B19125: Median family income in the past 12 months by presence of own children under 18 years*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B17024: Age by ratio of income to poverty level in the past 12 months*.
- <sup>9</sup> Data sources: State of Hawai'i Executive Office on Early Learning, People Attentive to Children (PATCH), Hawai'i State Public Charter School Commission, State of Hawai'i Department of Human Services Child Care Office.
- <sup>10</sup> Data source: Center on the Family (2024). *Access to early childhood care and education in Hawai'i*. [Website] <https://ecemaps.uhfamily.hawaii.edu>. For age-specific indexes, seat counts were based on license type and reported enrollment of children 0–2 vs. 3–4
- <sup>11</sup> Data sources: Center on the Family (2024). *Access to early childhood care and education in Hawai'i*. [Website] <https://ecemaps.uhfamily.hawaii.edu>; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B01001: Sex by age*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B19125: Median family income in the past 12 months by presence of own children under 18 years*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B17024: Age by ratio of income to poverty level in the past 12 months*.
- <sup>12</sup> Office of the Lieutenant Governor (2023). *Ready Keiki*. [Website] <https://www.readykeiki.org/>

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