



Hawaii's Critical Shortage of Infant-Toddler Care

Policy Issue

Hawai'i has an especially severe shortage of child care seats for infants and toddlers. The needs of children under age 3 should not be neglected while the state focuses on universal access to pre-K.

Data Issue

There is no clear count of licensed child care seats for younger children (seats for children under age 3). Infant-toddler centers serve this age range, but not all sites enroll young infants. Family child care homes are a crucial source of infant-toddler care, but regulations cap the number of children under age 18 months that these providers may serve. Preschool centers can serve 2- through 5-year-olds, but many do not accept 2-year-olds. Nor does Department of Human Services (DHS) prescribe how providers allocate seats or classrooms by age group.

Data Sources

We used public-access data sets from the National Center on Health Statistics¹ and the state child care licensing database² to estimate the system's capacity to serve young children.

¹ National Center for Health Statistics (2020). *Vintage 2019 postcensal population estimates* (April 1, 2010, July 1, 2010–July 1, 2019), Retrieved from: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/bridged_race.htm.

² State of Hawai'i Department of Human Services and People Attentive to Children (PATCH) (2022). Unpublished data from the state child care licensing database. Downloaded: July 2022 and October 2022.

Estimation

We estimated the percentage of young children that can be served based on the following definitions and assumptions:

- **Child population:** The number of children statewide under age 5.
- **Licensed capacity:** The maximum number of seats allowed in DHS-regulated family child care homes (FCCH), infant-toddler centers, and pre-K centers. Note that not all providers operate at full capacity. This number does not include public pre-K, military child care, or informal child care arrangements (e.g., care by family members or babysitters).
- **Ages served:** We assumed that FCCH providers and infant-toddler centers all served children under age 3. For pre-K centers, we used the reported minimum age group admitted (cut point = 36 months) to categorize pre-K centers as serving or not serving 2-year-olds.
- **Known enrollment:** Obtained from the 69% of providers who voluntarily reported actual enrollment by age group.
- **Estimated enrollment:** We used the distribution of known enrollment by age group to estimate enrollment for providers who did not report these data. For example, if FCC providers who reported enrollment said 60% of the children they served were under age 3, we assumed the same for FCC providers who did not report enrollment.

According to our estimates:

- Fewer than one in ten children under age 3 are enrolled in licensed child care.
- Twelve percent (12%) of 1- and 2-year-olds and 3% of infants are served.
- The current system capacity is woefully inadequate to meet the needs of working parents.

Table 1: Characteristics of DHS-Regulated Providers (July 2022)

Provider Type	License Count	Licensed Capacity	Desired Capacity	Reporting Enrollment Data
FCCH ³	259	1,542	1,494	81%
Infant-Toddler	67	1,544	1,422	75%
Pre-K (accepts 2)	211	13,721	11,521	64%
Pre-K (3-5 only)	191	7,046	6,516	55%
Grand Total	728	23,853	20,953	69%

Table 2: Known Age Distribution of Enrolled Children

Provider Type	<1 Year		1-2 Years		3 Years and Up	
	Enrolled	%	Enrolled	%	Enrolled	%
FCCH	105	10%	583	53%	408	37%
Infant-Toddler	285	27%	760	71%	19	2%
Pre-K (accepts 2)	0	0%	987	16%	5,347	84%
Pre-K (3-5 only)	0	0%	17	<1%	3,707	>99%
Grand Total	390	3%	2,347	19%	9,481	78%

Note. Based on 501 providers who reported enrollment

³ Data reported for Family Child Care Homes also includes Group Child Care Homes.

Table 3: Estimated System Capacity by Age Group

Age Group	Population	Estimated Seats	% Served
< 1 Year	16,800	562	3.3%
1-2 Years	33,761	4,093	12.1%
Birth-2 Years	50,561	4,655	9.2%
3-4 Years	34,658	19,199	55.4%

Note. DHS-regulated providers only

Limitations

Enrollment reporting is voluntary and these reports are not necessarily up to date. Enrollment also changes over time and tends to be lower and less stable at the start of the of the school year. Data in Table 2 are based on provider self-report at a single point in time, so accuracy is a potential concern. The estimates in Table 3 should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Suggested Citation

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