

Children Receiving Child Care Subsidies

DEFINITION

Children receiving child care subsidies is the number of children receiving child care that is either fully or partially paid for with a child care subsidy through the Rhode Island Department of Human Services' Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). Child care subsidies can be used for care in a licensed child care center, a licensed family child care home, or by a license-exempt provider (family, friend, or neighbor).

SIGNIFICANCE

Families rely on child care to enable them to work and to provide the early education experiences needed to prepare their children for school. Yet the high cost of child care puts quality care out of reach for many low-income families. State child care subsidy programs help low-income families access child care.¹

Child care is the biggest living expense in most family budgets. In Rhode Island, nearly nine out of 10 families cannot afford the average cost of child care for one infant.² A 2019 Rhode Island study of families with children under age six found that affordable child care was consistently reported as the greatest family need.³ Using the federal child care affordability guideline (no more than 7% of family income should be spent on child care), a Rhode Island family would need to earn at least \$240,000 to afford the

average annual cost for one infant at a licensed center in 2024.^{4,5}

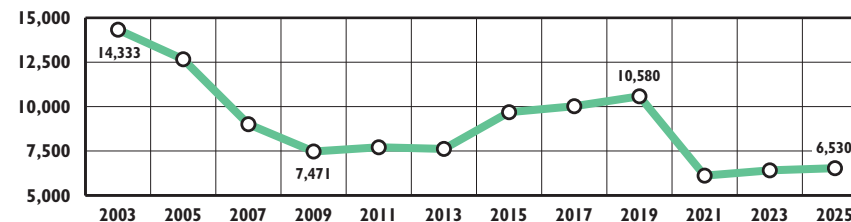
Rhode Island's payment rates for child care providers do not meet the federal benchmark established to ensure low-income families have equal access to the child care market. Inadequate payment rates make it difficult for families to find a program that will accept a subsidy and prevent child care programs from offering competitive wages to recruit and retain qualified early educators.¹ Nationally, funding for state child care subsidy programs is so low that less than 20% of federally income-eligible children and families actually receive assistance. A 2021 report from the U.S. Treasury identifies several market failures that make the current child care system "unworkable" for most families.⁶

Child care educators, almost all of whom are women and who are disproportionately Women of Color, are responsible for the safety, health, learning, and development of our youngest children yet make very low wages, and many cannot meet their basic needs. As of 2024, 19 states and DC offer regular wage supplements to improve the retention of skilled child care teachers.⁷

In Rhode Island in 2024, the average hourly wage for a child care educator was \$16.74, among the lowest average hourly wages of all occupations in the state.⁸



Child Care Subsidies, Rhode Island, Selected Years 2003 – 2025



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2003 - December 2025.

- ◆ In December 2025, there were 6,530 child care subsidies in Rhode Island, down 38% from 2019 (pre-pandemic) and 54% from the 2003 peak (14,333 children).⁹
- ◆ As of December 2025, 27% of children participating in CCAP were enrolled in programs with high-quality BrightStars ratings (four or five stars). From 2024 to 2025, the percentage of children with a child care subsidy who were enrolled in high-quality programs increased from 22% to 25% for infants and toddlers and 30% to 32% for preschool-age children and decreased from 26% to 25% for school-age children.⁹
- ◆ In December 2025, almost half (49%) of subsidies were used by families with incomes at or below the federal poverty level (FPL) and only 5% were used by families with incomes over 200% FPL. Three out of four (75%) child care subsidies were used by low-income working families not receiving cash assistance and 19% were used by families receiving cash assistance. Another 6% of child care subsidies were used for children involved in the child welfare system.⁹



Median Annual Market Price for Full-Time Child Care, Rhode Island, 2024

PROGRAM TYPE	MEDIAN PRICE PER CHILD
Child Care Center (infant care)	\$16,770
Child Care Center (preschool care)	\$14,560
Family Child Care Home (infant care)	\$14,040
Family Child Care Home (preschool care)	\$12,870

Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations based on 50th percentile market price of child care, unpublished data provided by RI Department of Human Services from the 2024 Rhode Island Child Care Market Rate Survey

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Table 32.

Child Care Subsidies, Rhode Island, December 2025

CITY/TOWN	SUBSIDY USE BY CHILD RESIDENCE*				SUBSIDY USE BY PROGRAM LOCATION			
	UNDER AGE 3	AGES 3-5	AGES 6-12+	TOTAL CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES	CENTER	FAMILY CHILD CARE	LICENSE EXEMPT	TOTAL CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES
Barrington	2	2	8	12	25	0	0	25
Bristol	6	12	5	23	20	0	0	20
Burrillville	10	16	21	47	47	0	0	47
Central Falls	53	76	82	211	176	56	0	232
Charlestown	0	5	2	7	6	0	0	6
Coventry	30	39	44	113	115	4	0	119
Cranston	100	135	146	381	406	176	1	583
Cumberland	16	35	35	86	110	0	0	110
East Greenwich	2	12	11	25	50	0	0	50
East Providence	61	87	91	239	215	0	0	215
Exeter	2	2	1	5	2	0	0	2
Foster	2	3	0	5	7	0	0	7
Glocester	1	4	2	7	7	0	0	7
Hopkinton	1	1	0	2	2	0	0	2
Jamestown	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Johnston	30	53	43	126	192	19	0	211
Lincoln	16	27	27	70	110	12	0	122
Little Compton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Middletown	15	19	26	60	103	0	0	103
Narragansett	4	2	1	7	0	0	0	0
New Shoreham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newport	34	56	56	146	118	0	11	129
North Kingstown	10	25	12	47	56	0	0	56
North Providence	38	46	42	126	123	10	0	133
North Smithfield	2	5	6	13	21	0	0	21
Pawtucket	206	247	247	700	591	69	0	660
Portsmouth	3	2	0	5	17	0	0	17
Providence	623	831	1,004	2,458	1,234	1,285	8	2,527
Richmond	4	2	4	10	0	0	0	0
Scituate	3	5	5	13	4	0	0	4
Smithfield	7	6	4	17	43	0	0	43
South Kingstown	2	7	6	15	24	9	0	33
Tiverton	6	2	1	9	10	2	0	12
Warren	5	13	6	24	19	3	0	22
Warwick	67	91	97	255	402	18	0	420
West Greenwich	0	3	0	3	12	0	0	12
West Warwick	52	82	78	212	134	4	0	138
Westerly	12	16	15	43	44	0	0	44
Woonsocket	106	154	207	467	378	17	0	395
DCYF	131	174	80	385	NA	NA	NA	NA
Undetermined Address	3	3	0	6	NA	NA	NA	NA
Out-Of-State	NA	NA	NA	NA	3	0	0	3
Five Core Cities	1,022	1,364	1,596	3,982	2,497	1,427	19	3,943
Remainder of State	509	760	739	2,008	2,326	257	1	2,584
Rhode Island	1,665	2,301	2,415	6,381	4,826	1,684	20	6,530

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2025.

DCYF is the number of children in the care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families who are receiving child care subsidies.

Out-of-State is subsidies used by Rhode Island resident children who attend child care located outside of Rhode Island; they are included in the total count for Rhode Island.

Five core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

NA=Not applicable

Subsidy data by age of child are reported by the child's residence. Subsidy use by program type is reported by location of the program.

*Total subsidy use by program location does not match total subsidy use by child residence, because children may be enrolled in more than one program.

The median annual market price for full-time child care was determined by multiplying the 50th percentile weekly tuition rate by 52 weeks.

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