



2025 Child Care Survey

Survey Format

We conducted the survey electronically, using Microsoft Forms, for 2 separate surveys- a survey targeted toward Flathead Valley businesses and a survey targeted toward Flathead Valley families.

Survey Questions Formulation

Questions were modeled after the questions asked in our previous survey, conducted in Fall of 2021, and were minorly updated/tweaked for more source data clarity and to reflect current time-frame, 5 years post-Covid.

Survey Distribution/timing

The surveys were opened in the month of May 2025 and were closed in early August 2025. The surveys were promoted in several channels:

- Facebook, including paid boosts
- Kalispell Chamber e-news
- Kalispell Chamber emails
- At in-person Kalispell Chamber events
- Emails to local school districts, board members, childcare partners
- Requests to other local chambers to share

Survey Response Numbers

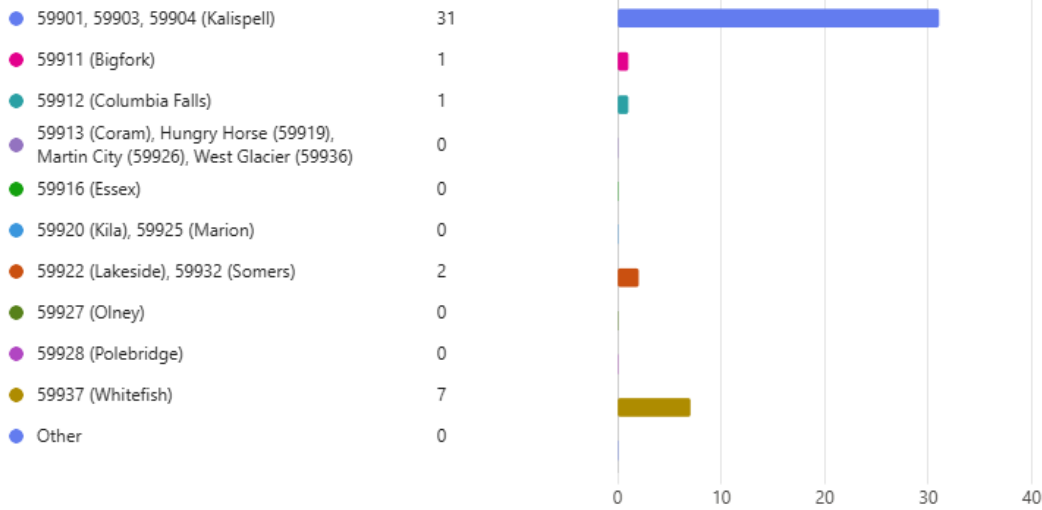
Business Survey: 42 responses

Family Survey: 403 responses

2025 Business Child Care Survey Review

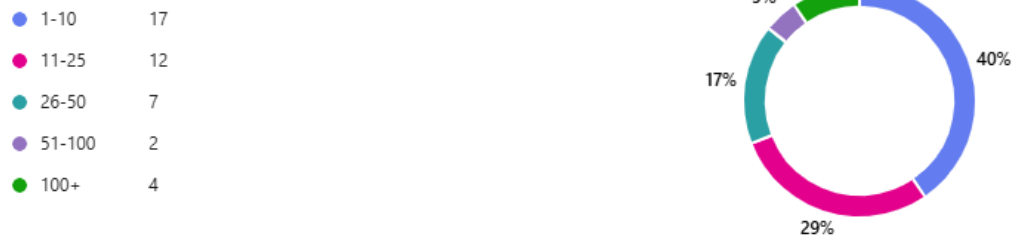
1. What is the Zip Code for your primary operations/headquarters in Flathead County?

[More details](#)



2. Please indicate the number of employees (FTE) at your business:

[More details](#)

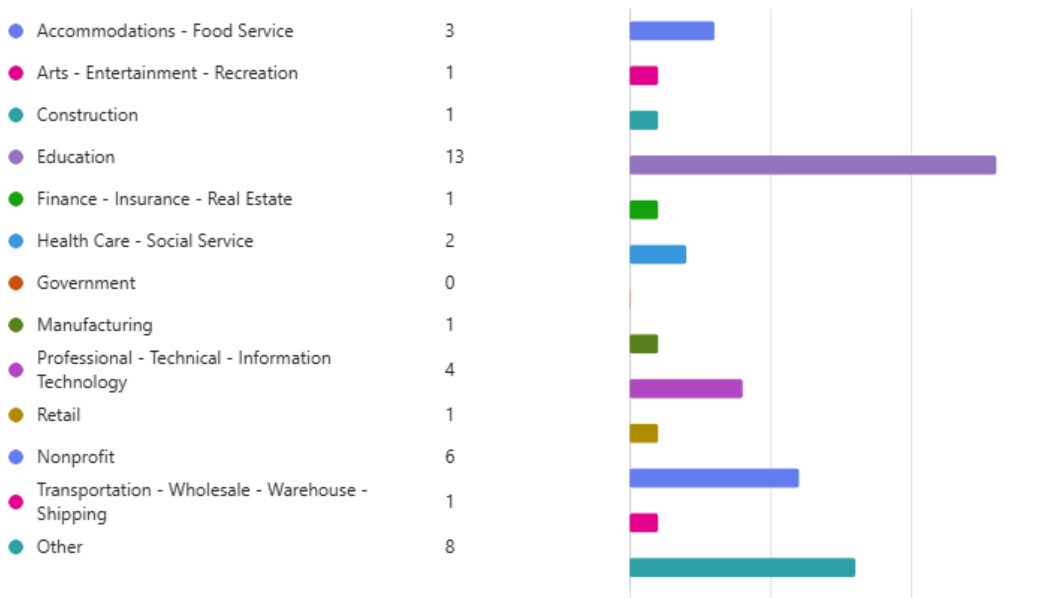


3. Do you work in the early child care education or child care sector?

[More details](#)



4. Please indicate the category that best describes your type of business/operation (if selecting other, please specify in the 'other' space): [More details](#)



Industries Represented

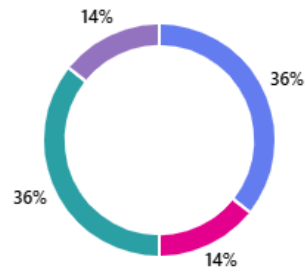
- 42 Business survey responses
- Business industries represented in the responses:
 - 16 child care or education*
 - 6 non-profit
 - 5 professional-technical-IT-tech
 - 3 accommodations-food service
 - 2 healthcare-social service
 - 1 each for: architecture, arts/entertainment/recreation, construction, finance/insurance/real estate, manufacturing, restoration/carpet cleaning, retail, transportation/wholesale/warehouse/shipping, utility, veterinary

*A number of businesses that responded that they are in the education sector are also in the child care sector. Question #3's responses reflect that 14 of 42 businesses identified themselves as being in the early childhood education or child care sector.

5. Over the last two years, please indicate which of the following descriptions is most like your experience with hiring employees at your place of business?

[More details](#)

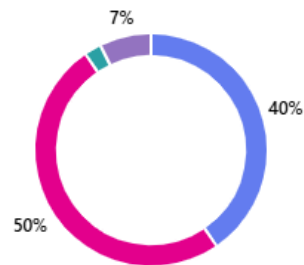
- Stayed about the same 15
- Improved/gotten easier 6
- Declined/gotten more difficult 15
- Don't know/not applicable 6



6. In the next two years, please indicate the anticipated growth in employment at your place of business:

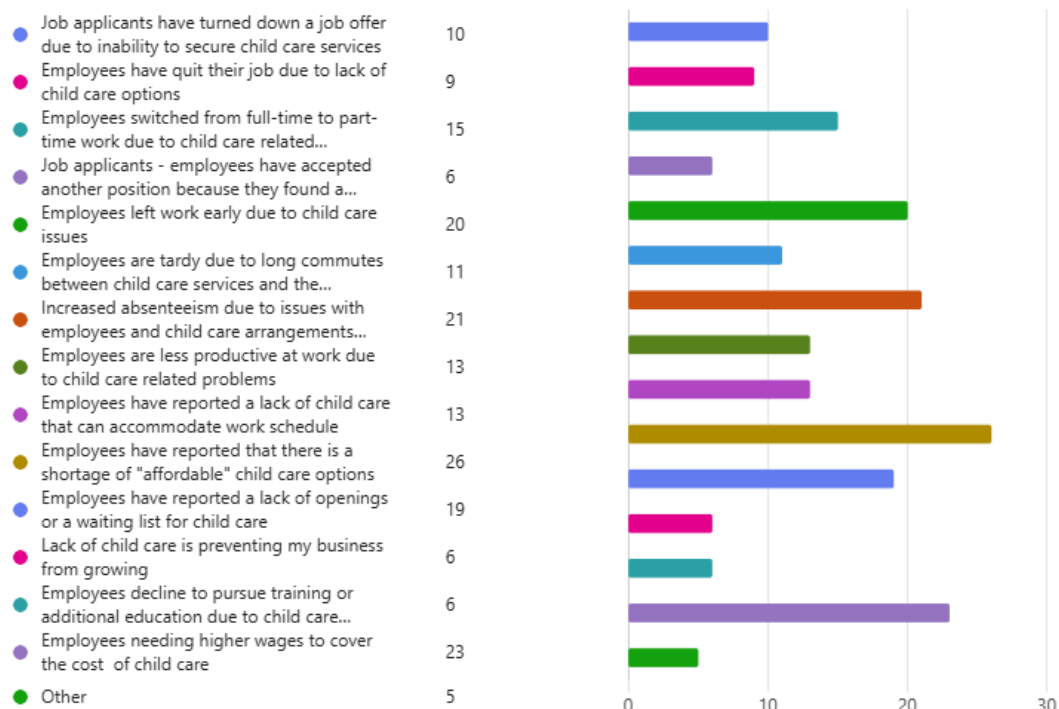
[More details](#)

- Stay about the same 17
- Increase in the number of employees 21
- Decrease in the number of employees 1
- Dont know/not applicable 3



7. Please indicate if your business/organization has experienced the following issues in the last year? (check all that apply; if selecting other, please specify in the 'other' space)

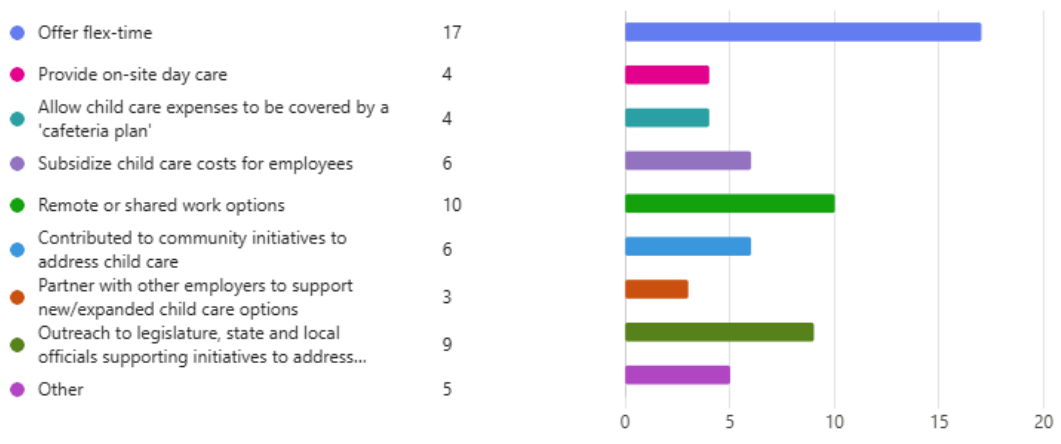
[More details](#)



Notable points from question 7:

- 14% of businesses didn't respond to this question // 9% responded that it/this question was not applicable (and/or to their situation) and/or they don't hire
- **76% reported one or more issues related to child care impacting their business- some of the issues included:**
 - Employees switched from full-time to part-time work due to child care related problems
 - Employees left work early due to child care issues
 - Increased absenteeism due to issues with employees and child care arrangements (such as lack of back-up care)
 - Employees have reported that there is a shortage of "affordable" child care options
 - Employees have reported a lack of openings or a waiting list for child care
 - Employees decline to pursue training or additional education due to child care related problems
 - Employees needing higher wages to cover the cost of child care
 - Employees are tardy due to long commutes between child care services and the workplace
 - Job applicants have turned down a job offer due to inability to secure child care services

8. What actions has your business taken to address the child care issues (if selecting other, please specify in the 'other' space)? [More details](#)



Notable points for question 8:

- 19% didn't respond to this question / 4% responded either n/a or have not been involved / 2% responded that they are an early childhood organization and are unable to do much = 25% of business respondents]
- **Of the remaining 75% of business respondents, the most popular actions included (many business offered more than 1):**
 - 54% offering flex time
 - 32% offering remote and/or shared work options
 - 17% subsidize cost for employees or attempting to offer greater discount if possible

9. Please indicate your level of support for the following policies:

[More details](#)

● Do Not Support
 ● Somewhat Supportive
 ● Support
 ● Strongly Support
 ● Don't Know



One-time grants to remodel space or offset other start-up costs for new or expanding child care business

- Blank 1 (2%)
- Don't know 1 (2%)
- Do not support 3 (7%)
- Somewhat support 4 (10%)
- **Support 14 (33%)**
- **Strongly Support 14 (33%)**

Scholarships for early childhood degrees (link to working in child care in Flathead County post-graduation)

- Don't know 1 (2%)
- Do not support 1 (2%)
- Somewhat supportive 6 (14%)
- **Support 8 (19%)**
- **Strongly support 26 (62%)**

Apprenticeship opportunities in early childhood education

- Don't know 2 (5%)
- Do not support 1 (2%)
- Somewhat supportive 4 (10%)
- **Support 16 (38%)**
- **Strongly support 19 (45%)**

Insurance pool for child care businesses to provide healthcare benefits for employees

- Blank 1 (2%)
- Don't know 4 (10%)
- Do not support 3 (7%)
- Somewhat supportive 3 (7%)
- **Support 11 (26%)**
- **Strongly support 20 (48%)**

Increase income eligibility levels for programs that offer reduced child care tuition such as Head Start and Best Beginnings

- Blank 1 (2%)
- Don't know 3 (7%)
- Do not support 2 (5%)
- Somewhat supportive 5 (12%)
- **Support 7 (17%)**
- **Strongly support 24 (57%)**

Expand technical assistance for child care providers

- Don't know 7 (17%)
- Do not support 1 (2%)
- Somewhat supportive 4 (10%)
- **Support 11 (26%)**
- **Strongly support 19 (45%)**

Referral services for families to get information about child care providers, tuition scholarships and other programs

- Blank 1 (2%)
- Don't know 3 (7%)
- Somewhat supportive 3 (7%)
- **Support 12 (29%)**
- **Strongly support 23 (55%)**
- **NOTE: no votes for do not support.**

Outreach to employers on flex time, cafeteria plans, and other policies for addressing workplace issues regarding child care

- Blank 1 (2%)
- Don't know 4 (10%)
- Do not support 2 (5%)
- Somewhat supportive 4 (10%)
- **Support 10 (24%)**
- **Strongly support 21 (50%)**

Build space for child care providers to share services, kitchen, and playground to reduce operational costs

- Blank 1 (2%)
- Don't know 7 (17%)
- Do not support 6 (14%)
- Somewhat supportive 6 (14%)
- **Support 5 (12%)**
- **Strongly support 17 (40%)**

Bonuses to child care workers to offset low pay

- Blank 1 (2%)
- Don't know 6 (14%)
- Do not support 3 (7%)
- Somewhat supportive 4 (10%)
- **Support 11 (25%)**
- **Strongly support 17 (40%)**

Expand publicly funded early childhood education programs

- Don't know 3 (7%)
- Do not support 5 (12%)
- Somewhat supportive 3 (7%)
- **Support 12 (29%)**
- **Strongly support 19 (45%)**

Employer cooperatives or other partnerships to expand child care capacity

- Don't know 6 (14%)
- Do not support 5 (12%)
- Somewhat supportive 3 (7%)

- **Support 12 (29%)**
- **Strongly support 16 (38%)**

Streamline regulations and licensing requirements for child care

- Don't know 4 (10%)
- Somewhat supportive 6 (14%)
- **Support 9 (21%)**
- **Strongly support 23 (55%)**
- **NOTE: no blank or do not support votes for this one.**

Business membership to secure child care spots in local childcare programs

- Blank 1 (2%)
- Don't know 7 (17%)
- Do not support 2 (5%)
- Somewhat supportive 10 (24%)
- **Support 9 (21%)**
- **Strongly support 13 (31%)**

Ranking of the combined support & strongly support business responses:

- **84% Referral services for families to get information about child care providers, tuition scholarships and other programs**
- **83% Apprenticeship opportunities in early childhood education**
- **81% Scholarships for early childhood degrees (link to working in child care in Flathead County post-graduation)**
- 76% Streamline regulations and licensing requirements for child care
- 74% Insurance pool for child care businesses to provide healthcare benefits for employees
- 74% Increase income eligibility levels for programs that offer reduced child care tuition such as Head Start and Best Beginnings
- 74% Outreach to employers on flex time, cafeteria plans, and other policies for addressing workplace issues regarding child care
- 74% Expand publicly funded early childhood education programs
- 71% Expand technical assistance for child care providers
- 67% Employer cooperatives or other partnerships to expand child care capacity
- 66% One-time grants to remodel space or offset other start-up costs for new or expanding child care business
- **65% Bonuses to child care workers to offset low pay**
- **52% Build space for child care providers to share services, kitchen, and playground to reduce operational costs**
- **52% Business membership to secure child care spots in local childcare programs**

10. Are there any other policies that you'd support, not listed above? If yes, please describe below

[More details](#)

5

Responses

Latest Responses

"Not Applicable"

...

4 respondents (80%) answered childcare for this question.



11. Please share information you have about initiatives, resources or best practices to address child care needs.

[More details](#)

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Responses

Latest Responses

"Not Applicable"

...

2 respondents (40%) answered true cost for this question.



Business Survey Comments

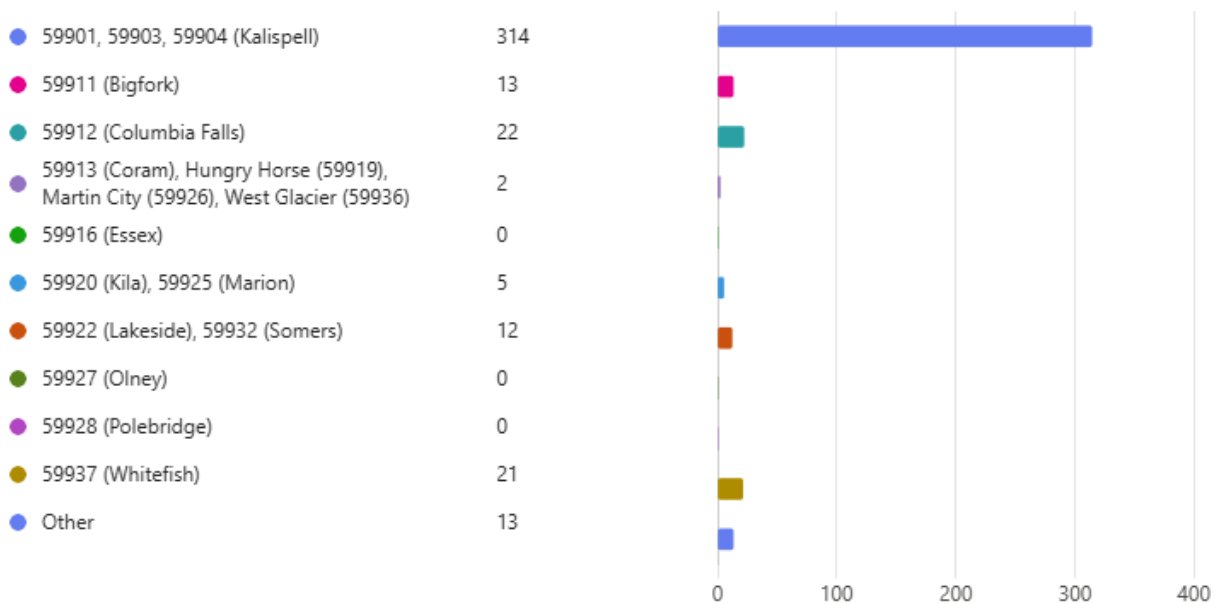
- This isn't solely an employer issue; it also includes students in high school and college. Students may be the group least able to afford childcare, but they need support to receive an education that will ultimately provide a financial return to our community.
- Reduced Property Tax for child care businesses located in residential or commercial property - to encourage renting/leasing to childcare or reduce childcare property owners expenses.
- Childcare worker tax credit.
- Childcare business owner tax credit.

- Change CACFP reimbursement for centers to be the same as for family/group - the program qualifies for tier 1 or tier 2 reimbursement vs each individual child qualifies based on family income.
- Anything that would bring more children to my childcare. I feel like a sinking ship.
- Currently employer sponsored childcare is a taxable benefit to the employee. This needs to change!
- A 3 way split that covers the true cost of childcare (i.e. covers livable wages for staff and in most states is around \$1500). The 3 way split is divided evenly between the child's family, the state, and one of the parent's employers.
- Kentucky - business match program to cover true cost of care...
- Colorado/Louisiana/Nebraska - incentives to retain ECE staff...
- Minnesota - grants to providers (increase wages by \$2/hour or a one-time bonus)...
- North Dakota - Best Beginnings scholarships 300% poverty level and business match to cover true cost of care (business pays 1/3, family pays 1/3, and state pays 1/3)...
- Model direct care wages for Nurses with ECE staff...
- ECE staff medical benefits association or program for all ECE staff in Montana to have access to affordable medical benefits
- I love the concept of employer cooperatives assisting with childcare services.

2025 Family Child Care Survey Review

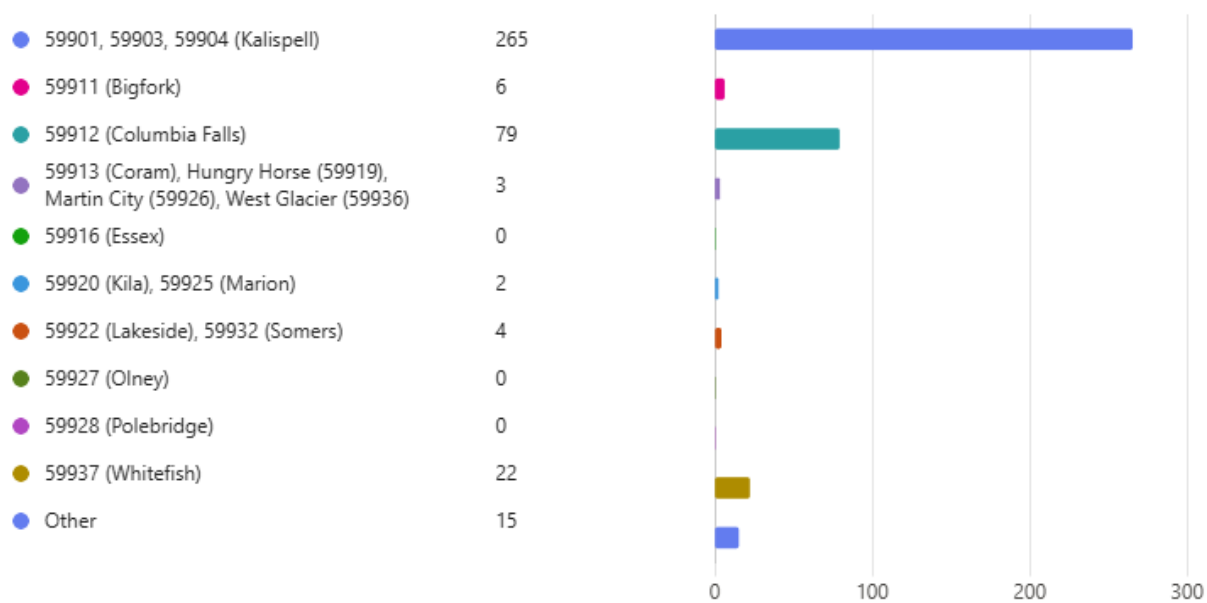
1. What is the Zip Code of your place of residence?

[More details](#)



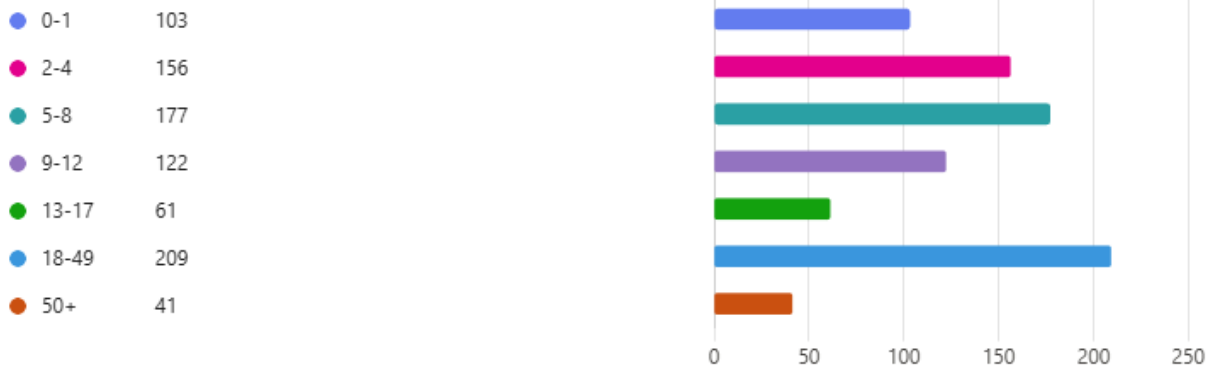
2. What is the zip code of your place of work?

[More details](#)



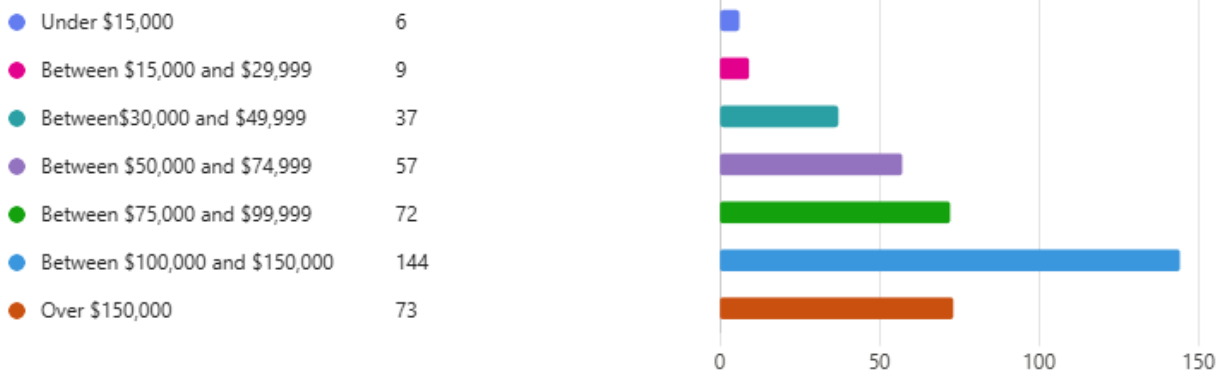
3. Please indicate if you have household members in the following age groups. (Check all boxes that apply.)

[More details](#)



6. Indicate your total household income range. (The sum total income of all adult wage earners in your household.)

[More details](#)

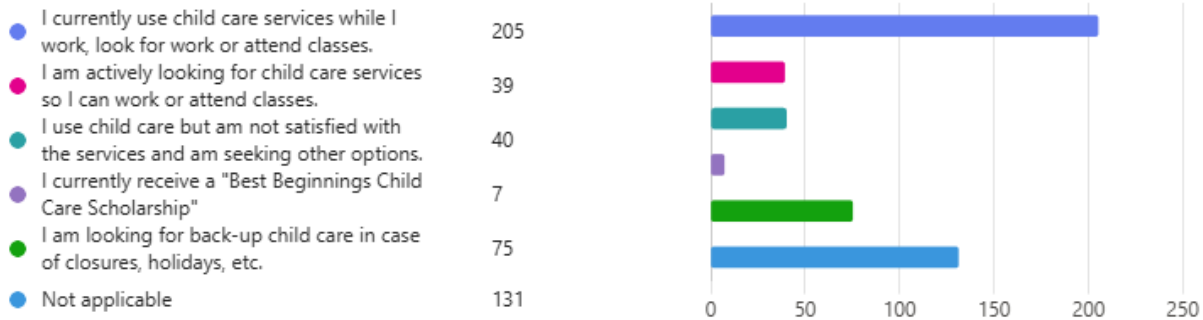


Family Survey Context

- 54% of respondents report household income > \$100,000
- 15% of survey respondents indicated they no longer have children of child care age and do not need child care and another 15% indicated that a parent or guardian is at home and thus no child care is needed; this combined 30% of respondents not requiring any child care or child care outside of that provided by the family in the home should be considered when evaluating overall response percentages.

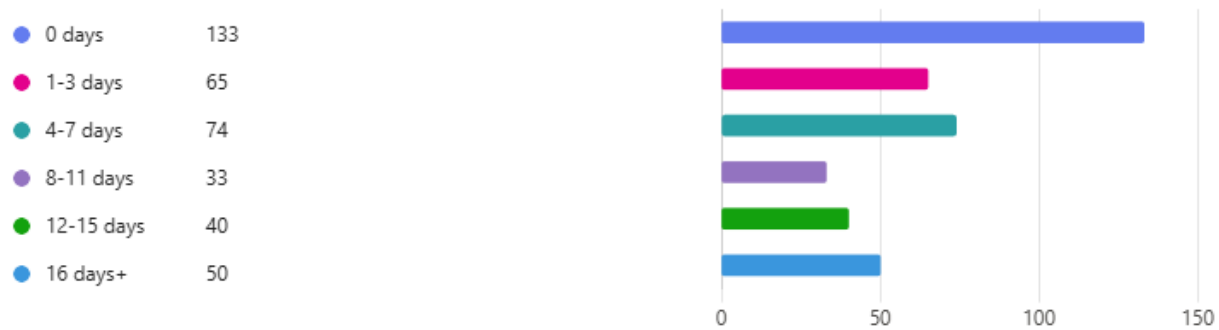
7. Please check all boxes that describes your current situation or preferences

[More details](#)



8. How many days has your work been disrupted due to lack of child care in the past year?

[More details](#)

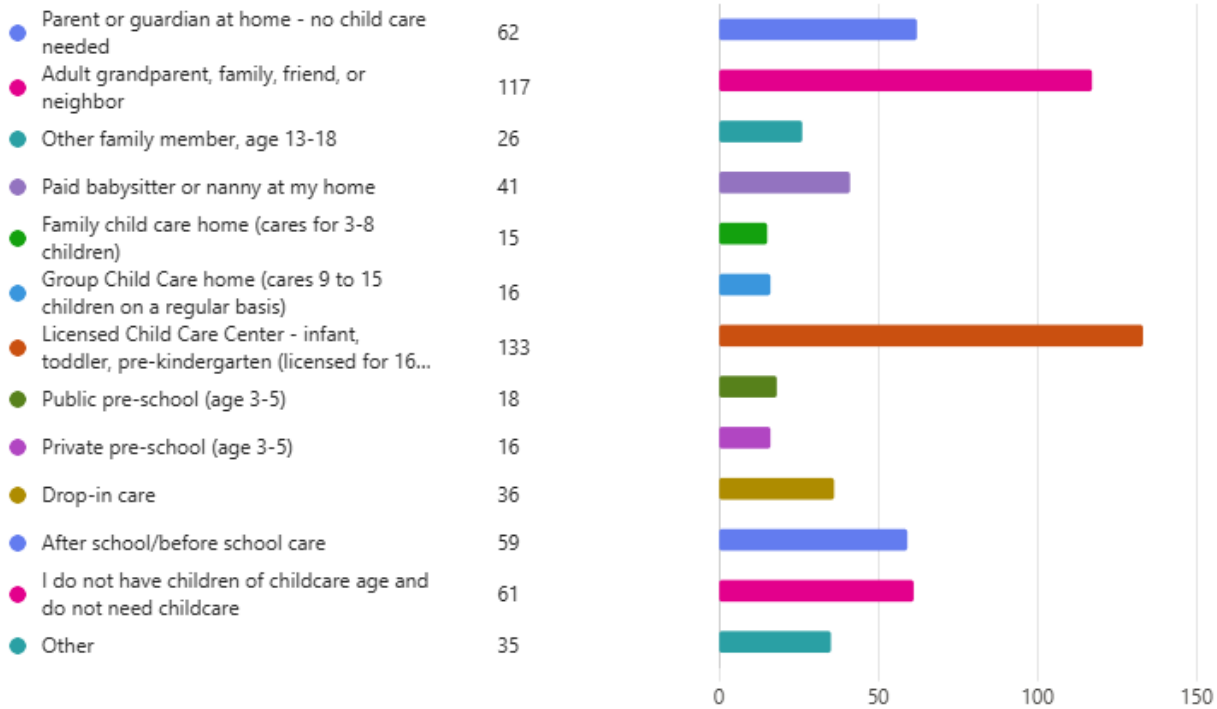


Notable points for question 8:

- 31% of overall respondents noted 8+ days of work disruption in the past year
- 12.4% reported experiencing 16+ days of work disruption in the past year
- 133 respondents reporting 0 days of disruption- these respondents include those who have also indicated that they either have no children of childcare age/do not need child care/ parent or guardian is at home (no child care needed). **The majority of these 133 aren't impacted by lack of child care; if we remove them from the calculation, the percentages of respondents whose work has been disrupted by lack of child care increases to the following:**
 - **46% of the net 270 respondents noted 8+ days of work disruption in the past year**
 - **16% of the net 270 respondents noted 16+ days of work disruption in the past year**

9. Please check all boxes that best describe your current child care situation. If marking "other." please specify in the response box.

[More details](#)

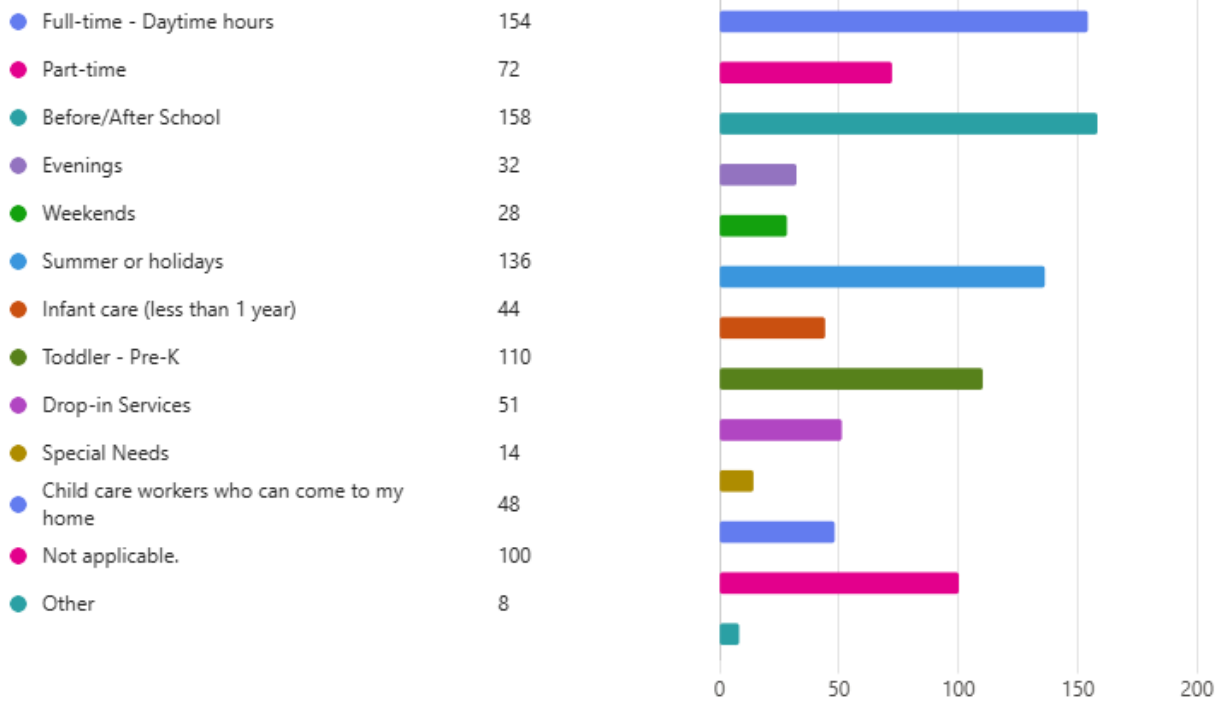


Notable points from question 9:

- 33% are using licensed child care center
- 29% are using adult grandparent, family, friend or neighbor care
- 6% are using a teenage family member
- 15% have a parent or guardian at home- no child care needed
- 15% marked that they do not have children of child care age and do not need child care

10. In the next five years, please check if you anticipate using any of the following types of child care services (check all that apply).

[More details](#)



11. Please check all boxes that describe your current situation.

[More details](#)

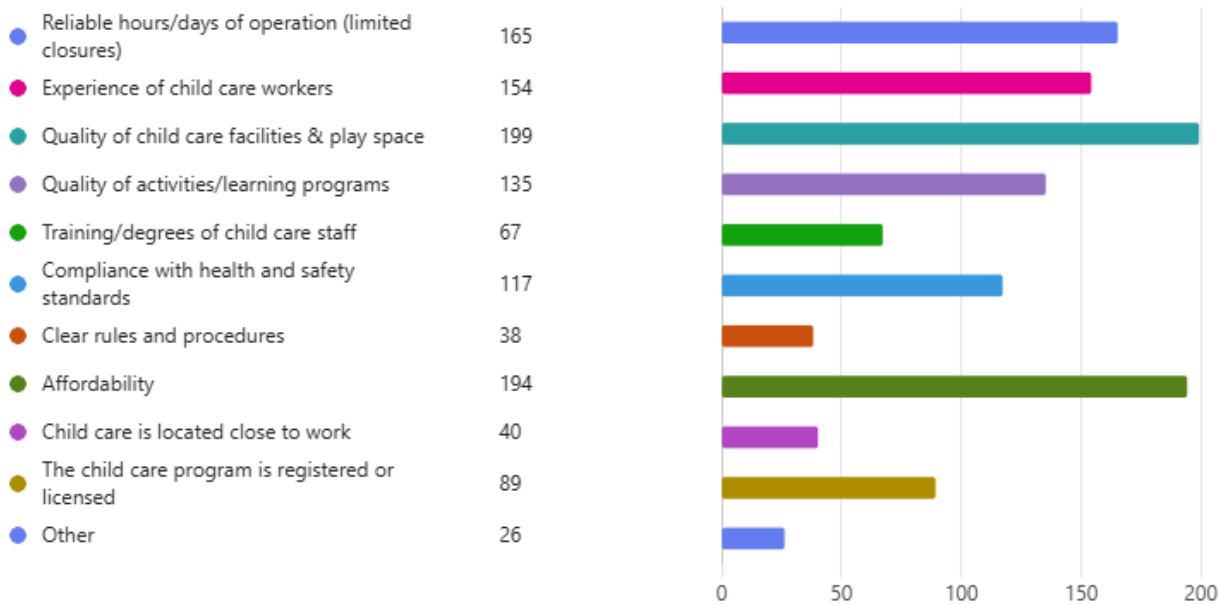


Notable points from question 11:

- 27% of respondents marked that they cannot afford child care at their current wages (or wage earned at last job)
- 27% of respondents marked that they use multiple care options to accommodate their child care needs
- 24% of respondents noted that their child care needs are met
- 13% of respondents marked that lack of child care restricts their ability to seek work outside the home or to attend school

12. Indicate the TOP THREE factors for choosing child care services.

[More details](#)



Notable points from question 12- The top three factors for choosing child care services:

- Quality of child care facilities and play space (49%)
- Affordability (48%)
- Reliable hours/days of operation (limited closures) (41%)

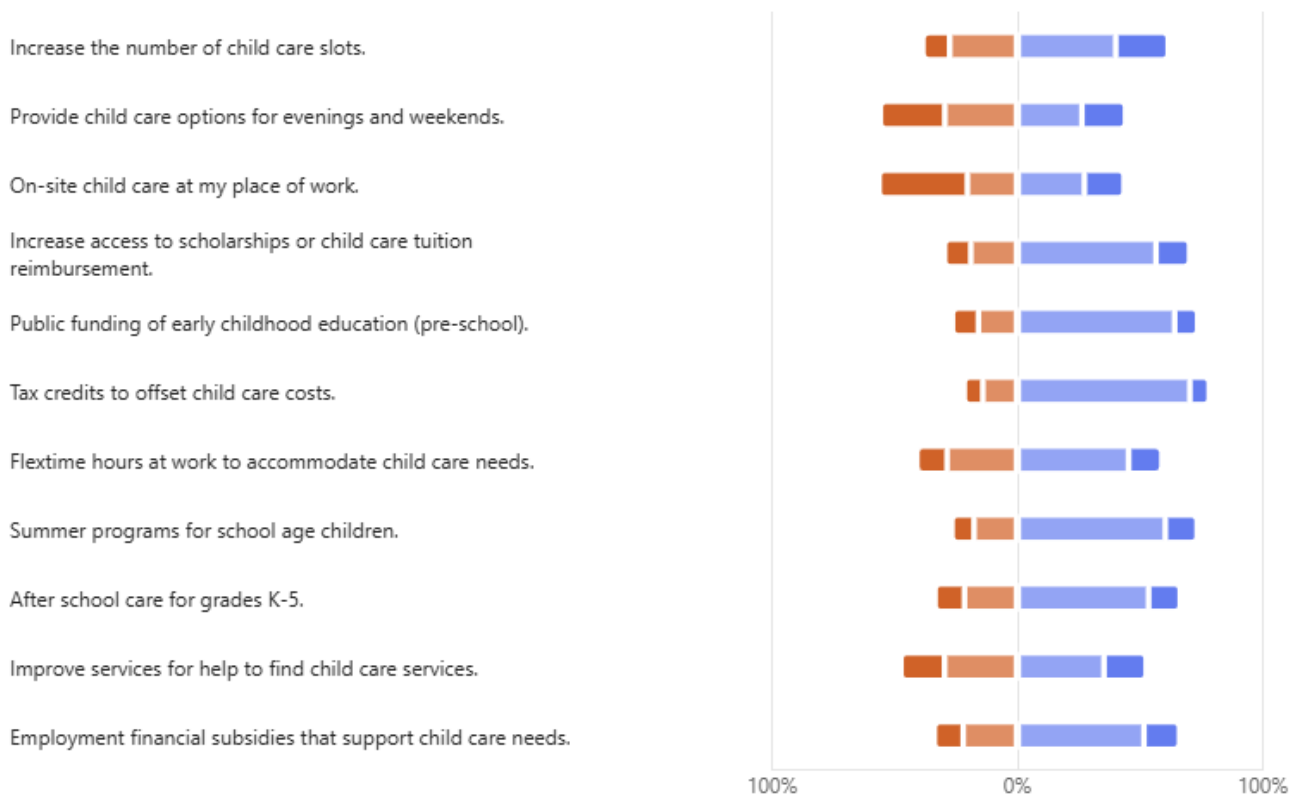
And the 3 lowest ranking factors for choosing a child care service:

- Training/degrees of child care staff (17%)
- Child care is located close to work (10%)
- Clear rules and procedures (9%)

16. Please indicate the types of programs - policies that would most improve child care services in Flathead County.

[More details](#)

● Low Priority ● Medium Priority ● High Priority ● Don't Know



Breakdown of responses to question 16:

Increase the number of child care slots.

- Blank 38 (9%)
- Don't know 72 (18%)
- Low Priority 37 (9%)
- Medium Priority 91 (23%)
- **High Priority 133 (33%)**

Provide child care options for evenings and weekends.

- Blank 65 (16%)
- Don't know 60 (15%)
- Low Priority 89 (22%)
- Medium Priority 100 (25%)
- **High Priority 89 (22%)**

On-site child care at my place of work.

- Blank 70 (17%)
- Don't know 54 (13%)
- Low Priority 120 (30%)
- Medium Priority 68 (17%)
- **High Priority 91 (23%)**

Increase access to scholarships or child care tuition reimbursement.

- Blank 67 (17%)
- Don't know 46 (11%)
- Low Priority 35 (9%)
- Medium Priority 64 (16%)
- **High Priority 188 (47%)**

Public funding of early childhood education (pre-school)

- Blank 63 (16%)
- Don't know 32 (8%)
- Low Priority 36 (9%)
- Medium Priority 54 (13%)
- **High Priority 218 (54%)**

Tax credits to offset child care costs

- Blank 60 (15%)
- Don't know 27 (7%)
- Low Priority 26 (6%)
- Medium Priority 48 (12%)
- **High Priority 220 (55%)**

Flextime hours at work to accommodate child care needs.

- Blank 65 (16%)
- Don't know 46 (11%)
- Low Priority 42 (10%)
- Medium Priority 93 (23%)
- **High Priority 146 (36%)**

Summer programs for school age children.

- Blank 58 (14%)
- Don't know 45 (11%)
- Low Priority 31 (8%)
- Medium Priority 61 (15%)
- **High Priority 207 (51%)**

After school care for grades K-5.

- Blank 61 (15%)
- Don't know 44 (11%)
- Low Priority 41 (10%)
- Medium Priority 74 (18%)
- **High Priority 172 (43%)**

Improve services for help to find child care services.

- Blank 66 (16%)
- Don't know 58 (12%)
- Low Priority 58 (12%)
- Medium Priority 100 (25%)
- **High Priority 119 (30%)**

Employment financial subsidies that support child care needs.

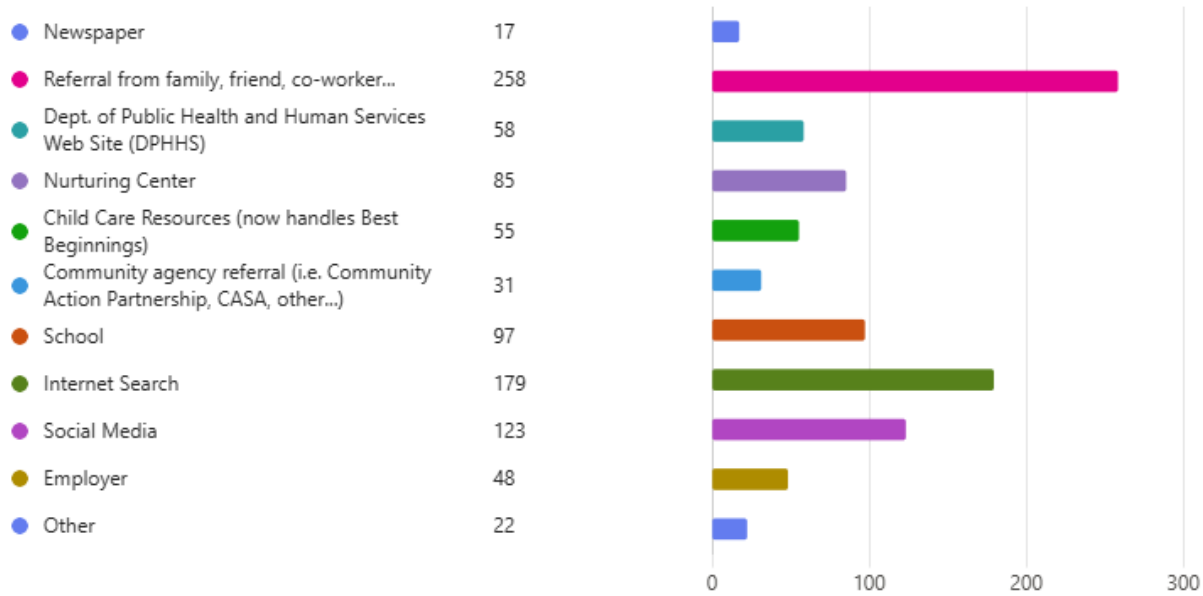
- Blank 63 (16%)
- Don't know 49 (12%)
- Low Priority 40 (10%)
- Medium Priority 75 (19%)
- **High Priority 175 (43%)**

Ranking of the High Priority % responses for the types of programs-policies that would most improve child care services in Flathead County, from most high priority responses to least.

- **Tax credits to offset child care costs (55%)**
- **Public funding of early childhood education (pre-school) (54%)**
- **Summer programs for school age children. (51%)**
- Increase access to scholarships or child care tuition reimbursement. (47%)
- Employment financial subsidies that support child care needs. (43%)
- After school care for grades K-5. (43%)
- Flextime hours at work to accommodate child care needs. (36%)
- Increase the number of child care slots. (33%)
- **Improve services for help to find child care services. (30%)**
- **On-site child care at my place of work. (23%)**
- **Provide child care options for evenings and weekends. (22%)**

17. What sources have you used to locate child care services (check all that apply-if marking 'other,' please specify).

[More details](#)



Notable points from question #17, ranking child care services source responses from most popular to least:

- **Referral from family, friend, co-worker 258 (64%)**
- **Internet search 179 (44%)**
- **Social Media 123 (31%)**
- School 97 (24%)
- Nurturing Center 85 (21%)
- Left Blank- no response 61 (15%)
- DPHHS Web Site 58 (14%)
- Child Care Resources (now handles Best Beginnings) 55 (14%)
- Employer 48 (12%)
- Community agency referral (CAP, CASA, other) 31 (8%)
- Newspaper 17 (4%)
- Other 22 (5%) – includes:
 - **NA/none/does not apply 14 (3%)**
 - **I only allow family to watch my children 2 (-1%)**
 - **Word of mouth 1 (-1%)**
 - **Church 1 (-1%)**

13. If you have an infant (age 0-1), how much do you pay for one child in care? Indicate if the rate is daily, weekly, or monthly rate and how many days per week, on average, your child attends.

Infant care - 0-1	FT (5/days week) or mthly rate	4 days/week - daily rate	4 days/week - monthly rate	3 days/week - daily rate	3 days/week- pay monthly rate	2 days/week- daily rate	2 days/week - pay monthly rate	Just daily rate noted, no # days/wk	Just hourly rate noted
	1100	40	1150		1000	55	750	38	12
	880		1300		1200	65	650	53	17
	1300		900		1075	55	800	45	
	1565		1158		500		688	40	
	1500				750		700	50	
	1500				835			45	
	1035				600			60	
	1500				1070			20	
	1300				950			55	
	1100							55	
	800							50	
	1000							45	
	1000							50	
	1100							45	
	870								
	1143								
	1100								
	800								
	1200								
	400								
	1400								
	800								
	1100								
	1250								
	1200								
	2000								
	1200								
	1142								
	2400								
	1600								
	960								

	1000								
	800								
	850								
Average	1173	40	1127	887	58	718	47	15	
Other: \$75 day, 2-3 days/week // Grandparents // \$45 not specified // \$1150 not specified // \$150 no specified // \$56/mo // Currently cared for by parent - no direct cost but loss of second income // We currently alternate work schedules to not have to pay for child care // \$70 daily 3-4 days per week // \$100/day in home and \$45/day group day care // \$60/day 2-4 days a week // \$25 per hour 40 hours per week for nanny // \$55 not specified // \$880/mo attends 2.5 days/week									

*data hand tabulated from survey responses

**amounts listed as "\$x/monthly" were assumed to be FT 5/day week monthly rate

Notable points from question 13, infant care, based on reported costs:

- Average monthly full-time infant care rate: \$1173
- Average 4 day/week daily rate: \$40/day
- Average 4 day/week monthly rate: \$1127
- Average 3 day/week daily rate: no responses
- Average 3 day/week monthly rate: \$887
- Average 2 day/week daily rate: \$58/day
- Average 2 day/week monthly rate: \$718
- Average daily rate, no # of days/week noted: \$47
- Average hourly rate: \$15 (*only 2 responses)

14. If you have a toddler (age 2-4), how much do you pay for one child in care? Indicate if the rate is daily, weekly, or monthly rate and how many days per week, on average, your child attends.

Toddler Care 2-4 cross check final	FT (5/days week) or mthly rate	4 days/week - daily rate	4 days/week - monthly rate	3 days/week - daily rate	3 days/week- pay monthly rate	2 days/week- daily rate	2 days/week - pay monthly rate	Just daily rate noted, no # days/wk	Just hourly rate noted
	1300	55	890	50	879	45	623	10	14
	900	54	1040	58	868	50	780	40	12
	1400	45	1000		925		688	53	24
	880	60	400		1200			45	4.5
	1113		900		1075			55	25
	1200		800		400			55	5
	1300		1000		600			45	
	1200		800		300			50	
	675		1300		780			45	
	1195		1070		1070			45	
	1100		900		500			45	
	1300		1000		890			55	
	800		800		500			42	
	1200		1100		1200			45	
	900		800		1100			70	
	900		800					20	
	900		1300					55	
	960							50	
	1250							45	
	1100							45	
	1000							35	
	1250								
	1000								
	958								
	950								
	879								
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	1114								
	1400								
	650								
	800								
	1100								
	675								
	1083								
	1260								
	1000								
	800								
	1000								
	1200								
	1300								
	1065								
	1300								
	425								
	1250								
	850								
	1250								
	1100								
Total	60357	214	15900	108	12287	95	2091	950	84.5
Average	1041	54	935	54	819	48	697	45	14

Other: \$40 daily 4-5 days a week // \$0 stay-at-home-(parent) present at home // Grandparents // \$50 not specified // \$35 not specified // Have seen @ \$600-\$700/month for 2 days a week for 2 year old // \$50/month // We currently do not have child care for our 3 yr old twins // \$0 (spouse) is stay-at-home // \$424/month for 2 half days a week // \$50 not specified // \$440/mo attends 2.5 days/week // Currently use grandparent care, but would like an affordable quality option for my child to attend a program before (child) goes to kindergarten. //

*data hand tabulated from survey responses

**amounts listed as "\$x/monthly" were assumed to be FT 5/day week monthly rate

Notable points from question 14, toddler care, based on reported costs:

- Average monthly full-time toddler care rate: \$1041
- Average 4 day/week daily rate: \$54/day
- Average 4 day/week monthly rate: \$935
- Average 3 day/week daily rate: \$54/day

- Average 3 day/week monthly rate: \$819
- Average 2 day/week daily rate: \$48/day
- Average 2 day/week monthly rate: \$697
- Average daily rate, no # of days/week noted: \$45
- Average hourly rate: \$14/hour

If you have a school-age child (age 5+) how much do you pay for one child in care? Indicate if the rate is daily, weekly, or monthly rate and how many days per week, on average, your child attends.

School-aged care	FT (5/days week) or mthly rate	4 days/week - daily rate	4 days/week - monthly rate	3 days/week - daily rate	3 days/week- pay monthly rate	2 days/week- daily rate	2 days/week - pay monthly rate	Just daily rate noted, no # days/wk	Just hourly rate noted
	220	52	610	20	600	45	480	40	18
	500	35		15	250	44		35	15
	1450			43	520	50		45	4
	1000			12	750			41	6.75
	1280			50	600			45	20
	800			12	700			45	40
	200			40	800			10	28
	400							15	10
	820							45	
	860							30	
	300							10	
	600							40	
	400							40	
	1200							45	
	480							45	
	250							55	
	1250							15	
	250							35	
	230							35	
	900							55	
	280							50	
	250							10	
	2400							50	
	400							45	
	600							70	
	300							25	
	160								
	360								
	800								
	1000								

	640								
	900								
	300								
	650								
	540								
	820								
	400								
	240								
	100								
	180								
	1100								
	1300								
	2400								
Total	29510	87	610	192	4220	139	480	976	142
Average	686	44	610	27	603	46	480	38	18

Other: \$0- stay at home (parent) present at home // in the summer \$800 weekly due to no options besides an in-home nanny that meets my work schedule. // \$200 not specified // \$50+ not specified // \$35 per day plus \$5 for lunch 2-3 days during school years, \$80 per week for 3 kids 3 days/week // \$13-\$15 hourly, 10 hours monthly // \$325 monthly 2 kids after school care // Free public preschool // \$30-\$60/day for summer camps // (Grandparent) watches (my child) but I pay \$400 a month for food and activities 5 days a week for 8-9 hours a day // \$150 per day (I work nights and sleep for 5-6 hours when I get home) // \$40-\$75/day and \$5-\$15/hr // \$200 not specified // \$2300/3 months for 4 days a week only in the summer // \$150/ 3 week days // \$250+ not specified // \$150 not specified // Rotate with grandparents, parents, and friends for after school care // 5 yr old 5 days a week or sometimes 3 days is \$995. Needed weekend care 8 days \$240 a month. 10 year old after school care 5 days a week \$400 a month. // \$0 – (parent) is stay-at-home // \$1000 or more/year. Days varies. Summer and holidays are most difficult. // \$700 monthly M-F every other week (split custody) // \$3500 for drop-in daycare twice a week for 2 kids last year

*data hand tabulated from survey responses

**amounts listed as “\$x/monthly” were assumed to be FT 5/day week monthly rate- which could reflect before school/after school care, preschool, summer camp rates (reflecting an extrapolated monthly cost).

Notable points from question 15, school-aged care, based on reported costs:

- Average monthly full-time school-aged care rate: \$686
- Average 4 day/week daily rate: \$44/day
- Average 4 day/week monthly rate: \$610
- Average 3 day/week daily rate: \$27/day
- Average 3 day/week monthly rate: \$603
- Average 2 day/week daily rate: \$46/day
- Average 2 day/week monthly rate: \$480
- Average daily rate, no # of days/week noted: \$38
- Average hourly rate: \$18/hour

Note: Answers to this question were challenging to interpret as respondents reported a wide-range of rates reflecting after-school care, before school care, weekend care, drop-in care, care for kids who were potentially not yet enrolled in kindergarten, and/or summer camps/summer care. Commentary that didn't appear to fit into any of the categories is listed in "other."

Family Survey Comments

<p>A before school program seems to be nonexistent. How can I be at work at 7:30am if school grounds don't open until 8? After school and summer programs that run until 6pm instead of 5:30 or 5:45 would accommodate parents like me that work until 5:30.</p>
<p>Affordability I think is the biggest struggle for finding quality care. Especially for families with multiple children.</p>
<p>Affordability is the big issue.</p>
<p>Any family with children born with medical issues. There is no help, and no employer with offer help with families with special needs children</p>
<p>As a childcare provider, and a (parent) in need of childcare, it's a strange predicament. I do not get paid enough to pay for quality childcare. I have a bachelor's in early childhood education and child services and my skills are highly needed, but I don't get paid a livable wage. Yet everyone complains about how childcare is unaffordable, yet I don't get paid enough doing the job. So where does all the money that parents pay go?!? Not into my pocket that's for sure. Maybe the owner of the program? It's a serious issue... we need quality care and somehow it needs to be affordable and yet the workers need to make a livable wage.</p>
<p>As a foster (parent), my biggest needs have been finding care and transportation for children with special needs. Often, their school days are shorter and there are not options for children with high needs and parents who work.</p>
<p>As a (parent) of a child diagnosed with Autism, I find it extremely challenging to find public services that help locate child care for special needs. I've contacted the CDC in the past as well as Healthy Beginnings Pediatric Therapy and neither of them had any idea on facilities. They mentioned Sparks and Woodland Park but neither of those are suitable for a child with Autism. Essentially you have to find a private child care provider that will accommodate someone with special needs, but they are hard to find or extremely expensive. Plus they seem to not understand the gravity of the situation and just blame the child for behavioral issues.</p>
<p>As we transition to two school aged kids this year the most challenging this is the early out on Wednesdays-but not all Wednesdays, it is super hard to coordinate work off or child care, and it's constantly different depending on the week.</p>
<p>At the rate of 28/h at the end of a 12 hour shift I can buy a box of chocolate so I only work when my (spouse) is home which has decreased our home income.</p>
<p>Babysitting rates and child care rates are outrageously expensive</p>
<p>Based on limited options for summer child care, and the available options not supporting full time work schedules for a single parent, I've had to resort to an in-home babysitter/nanny for this summer. I had to take out a personal loan to pay for this as the monthly cost is greater than 50% of my take home pay.</p>
<p>Child care in this community has become very expensive. We are on the edge of affordability even with both parents working full time at good jobs. We can only afford to pay for three days a week and are lucky enough to have a family member to assist the other two days. If prices continue to increase (which they are) we will no longer be able to afford to send our child to care.</p>
<p>Childcare affordability is a challenge for most parents I have personally had discussion with. I most fear for my child's safety at care establishments. As much as I would love to trust people, you can't. Cameras in childcare facilities would ease minds a bit but no glitches and constant surveillance would be best.</p>
<p>Childcare is so expensive here. We are two full time working parents with good paying jobs and our childcare bills are a huge hit to us. We were lucky to find a center near us open 7am-6pm which is rare and a must for us.</p>

Childcare options are definitely necessary in the valley. We are blessed to be able to have (a parent) stay home and provide this for our own children.
Child care is expensive! Offering tax credits, reimbursements, etc to lower the cost would be ideal.
Early childhood/ daycare is one of the most important jobs. Taking care of young children is a big responsibility. What makes me sad is that childcare workers are worked too hard and underpaid. However the cost is outrageously high. I do not understand this financial hardship that parents face and childcare workers face. I feel the state does not offer enough help/ support to families or childcare workers. Having my (child) attend public preschool has been a huge financial relief to my family. It's frustrating that I make too much money and offer health benefits for my family that we depend on my job, but the majority of my paycheck goes to child care. My family is in a situation where I would stay home if we could afford it, however, we cannot afford to live in Kalispell with one person income, instead my job covers healthcare and childcare, making it extremely hard to save money. I wish young families did not have to struggle this much financially.
Early out days are difficult to navigate
Education about those interested in starting a daycare, or having a group care out of their home would be so critical to help people get going with the next steps! Clinics, or trainings, free classes.
Employers in Flathead County are well behind the national expectations being met for working parents. All members of the household that are working age must enter into the work field in order to sustain livings costs. No parents are home to care for underage children. Employers in Montana need to understand that they must be flexible with parents. Having children is a blessing, should not be a burden.
Finding infant care is nearly impossible and makes going back to work for moms stressful. Offices and schools should try and have on-site or close by childcare locations for infants, not just toddlers.
Flexible work hours is the #1 thing for professional women with children 10 or older. They don't need paid care, they just need us to be able to pick them up and get them all the places they need to go. This is critical to me and dictates where I work.
For our family, we have been lucky to been able to pay for child care at a reliable licensed provider. It is quite expensive and I am not sure how people pay for it without 2 solid incomes. We are fortunate and we still feel it is spendy!
Good news - It sounds like there is more childcare available now than there was when my kid was young enough that we really needed it. Bad news- the high cost of living and low average wages make childcare a major financial burden that can lead to debt.
Growing concerned about middle school child care. I am the only adult in my household and will lose half my income if we cannot find child care when (my child) finishes elementary school.
Changing rates mid school year. Closure days due to illness or providers not having enough employees willing to work.
Having food provided for kids a huge perk!
I am extremely concerned about finding full time childcare during the summer when my child is of public school age. Options are limited and piecing together camps, babysitter coverage seems like a nightmare for parents. Would be so nice to have more options to support working parents all year long.

<p>I am extremely happy with our situation, but I'm one of the lucky ones who knew the person who knew someone so I could get a spot. I know many people really struggle with finding GOOD childcare. One big thing I'm noticing is that is really hard to keep good people working in childcare. The turnover is huge. I hope we can support finding and KEEPing great people in childcare care. It's so important these are our most vulnerable little people. The thing I want most is that my kid is safe and loved. Let's help people who want to work with kids stay. We need to figure out how to play people better so we stop losing the great one to other jobs especially in the economy. We have to value these people and pay them much more our kids deserve it! 0-3 is such a critical age for development. We need to figure this out.</p>
<p>I didn't have a second child due to the cost of childcare. I'm very excited my (child) is now in public school and I only have to figure out transportation to and from after-school care (it's actually easier than when we were paying 1300\$ month for full time child care)</p>
<p>I do have a daycare site at my job. However, based on what I have seen from the adults while walking by, I would never send my child there. It doesn't seem like a healthy happy environment. It feels dirty. I often see kids walking around barefoot when they should have shoes on. The adults don't seem engaged or happy to be doing their job.</p>
<p>I do not need it now, but did when my kids were young, I was fortunate to work at the hospital at the time and utilize Kid Kare, I feel bad for the parents of children with my current employer looking for child care. I also use to work at FVCC and they used to have a great childcare, then when COVID closed it down, they are back to no day care. So hard on working parents and students that need childcare</p>
<p>I don't like the idea of not being with my kid, having to work 8 hours a day and getting 8 hours of sleep a day and have all the at home responsibilities on top of that feels unnatural, I just want to spend time with my family but I can't because it costs to survive, and then on top of that if I can't watch (my kid) I'm supposed to supply money to have someone else take my kid and spend that time with my kid that I can't, it feels wrong. I want to be the one to teach (my child), I want to be the one that's there for (my child), I want to be (my child's) parent but I have to sacrifice my time, my life, in order to provide food and shelter for us. I can't afford it but it's what has to be done :)</p>
<p>I don't understand how childcare is so expensive but childcare workers are not paid more!</p>
<p>I feel fortunate I have one child and can afford care. I feel I am a minority in this respect. I also feel positively about the center my child attends. If we needed to find care elsewhere, I'd be in a panic as I know the options are slim.</p>
<p>I have a (child) with special needs and have a hard time finding care for (them). The two daycares (my child's) attended have had to ask that (my child) leave because they cannot accommodate (my child's) needs with only a single teacher in the classroom. I am a single (parent) who works full time and am desperate to find a place that can care for my 3 year old so I can work.</p>
<p>I have experience daycares not following regulations for ratios of adults to babies/children and not following vaccine requirements. These and other safety concerns caused me to pull my child from daycare.</p>
<p>I struggle with making just over the limit for any help yet do not make enough to pay 8-900 dollars a month for child care. I work full time and should not have to struggle to pay child care where as the people barely working get free childcare. What about the single parents working a great job but only making enough month to month and paying that extra 900 dollars a month hurts. I am punished because I work full time. If I quit I would be sitting pretty with no rent, free childcare, snap benefits, cash assistance.</p>
<p>I took the survey solely to express that I believe the Wednesday early outs cause headaches in this arena of child care needs.</p>

<p>I was lucky to have my child at Kid Kare through Pre-K. There was a point in time when I was seeking care because of a potential job change. I was most concerned by the number of new programs because they were a lot more expensive, unvetted in my opinion, and I saw several open and close in a short amount of time.</p>
<p>I will have a third child in childcare next year and it's not feasible for us to pay for all 3 babies in childcare</p>
<p>I work full time, and my (spouse) is at home full time with (2 kids). We are struggling to find options that would allow my wife to return to work. Child safety & appropriate learning content are important to us. Thorough background checks, safety protocols, and the character/values of staff to earn our trust is key. We would consider in home care, but without understanding the available options/cost for 2x children, it is difficult to understand the minimum pay requirements needed for her re-entry to the workforce.</p>
<p>I would like to see universal access, high quality, and integration of education and care, with a focus on child-centered learning and development. I would like my tax dollars to go towards publicly funded or subsidized childcare options, including nurseries, preschools, and family day care, with variations in structure and curriculum.</p>
<p>I would love to have a child care facility at Linderman education center for both students and staff. We can support student learning with early childhood ed classes.</p>
<p>I would love to see more retired Grandmothers able to take short-shifts working in daycare facilities. Those ladies who don't get to see their own grandchildren, and small children getting the love and comfort of an older caregiver. ♥</p>
<p>I'm lucky but childcare cost for many parents is not affordable. Even myself I would like to send my kid to a better facility but either there's a waitlist or the cost is too much. We live in a country that is behind the times when it comes to making motherhood and fatherhood an investment. If employers can work with the government to provide good childcare then the rate of absent employees might go down. Longer maternity and paternity leave could also help new parents. Not everyone has family to help or can rely on family. Let's invest in the formative years of our kids by providing incentives to parents and childcare facilities to cultivate an environment that makes parents "feel" like the childcare they choose for their kids is the right choice. This positivity that parents experience can percolate into the community in other ways - socially and economically because they will feel they live in a place when raising kids is possible rather than consider leaving the valley.</p>
<p>If you could work with Flathead Electric to get a childcare in their facility that would be awesome!</p>
<p>In Kalispell, we only have two reliable after school care options. The one at Logan Health and Fitness Center and the one through Kalispell Parks and Rec. We need to have more options or transportation to the Spark program at Logan Health fitness center. There used to be buses that would take the kids to Sparks after school, but they lost their busing two years in a row. If that could've been fixed, I feel it would have improved many families after school plans.</p>
<p>In our valley, the cost of daycare versus how much people make just does not make sense. However, family still need health insurance so it has forced my family to work for health insurance, but daycare often cost more than what you make.</p>
<p>It is a necessity for all children and it seems the least priority for government officials. As we move into a greater thinning of our middle class, two parents required to work is creating an environment of discourse for our future generations. It is all very sad.</p>
<p>It is difficult to find providers who can handle the range of ages and disability/not in our family. We can't take each kid to a different place!</p>

It's almost impossible to get childcare for infants, especially affordable and in Whitefish. We've been so disappointed with the lack of licensed, quality childcare and cannot believe the waitlists! The businesses often don't even check to see if people still need it and they keep this insanely long list. Also tough to find good nannies and babysitters-it's been entirely word of mouth for us on that. I don't know of anywhere that does drop-in care except the Wave on a very limited basis.
It's just too expensive for a lot of people's income. Especially with everything so inflated. I can't wait to have both kids in school to free up some budget.
Just because the center is large and can take more kids does NOT make it a safer or better option, I worked at one of these centers and you couldn't pay me to take my own child there now. Just because you might legally have the space to jam it with kids you shouldn't because a lot of things end up happening with health and safety.
Lack of quality options in this area.
Lower the costs and have workers that actually care about kids and their needs.
Making childcare more affordable for the middle class. We do not qualify for any infant childcare scholarships/help but still find paying \$1300 a month very difficult.
Most child care is as much if not more than rent. It's killing us parents who do not qualify for food stamps for "making too much." When we have to make that much to make it by. It's hard at the same time because the increased demand is also increasing the risk of negligent people caring for children. It's a hard area to deal with. It doesn't help not many jobs pay enough for single parents to make it. Even a single father making well over minimum drowns in child care.
My child will begin early pre-k with the school district but the timeframe that I need someone to watch (my child) is very small but I'm finding that most daycares don't consider partial days but rather charge the full day rate/ full month
My concern is the lack of availability of child care in Flathead County.
My daycare bill is much higher than my mortgage. It feels like parents are punished for wanting to work and be involved in their community but the cost of daycare barely outweighs the income I would receive from working. If there were higher tax breaks, or if government subsidized daycares income so we would pay a lower bill, you would have more parents working in your community
My first child was on a waiting list for over 15 months (from my first trimester of pregnancy) before (my child) got a spot for 3 days a week
My (spouse) and I make a decent amount of money but still find it hard to afford child care. Summer is hard and there should be more options for school-based programs. I know so many people who work for the benefits, but their entire paycheck goes to childcare, and that is no way to live.
Need affordable childcare
No children at home.
No kids, not having any.
Offering before and after school and drop off before 7:30 as I start at this time
Our biggest concern is affordability for the middle class. We just barely make enough to make me still working worth it. But as we grow our family, I'll be forced not to work without financial help and that would put a strain on our family financially as well and my mental health.
Prioritizing early education and schools with outdoor based programs
Really need more after school programs. West Valley Elementary has presented an option to go to a four day school week. If this happens, there is nowhere near enough childcare to facilitate parents who work a five day work week. If this happens, this is a huge issue in the valley both cost, and resource wise.
Spouse works PT due to school and daycare hours/closures
SUMMER ACTIVITIES FOR WHEN KIDS ARE OUT OF SCHOOL IS MY GREATEST INTEREST

The biggest challenge for me is finding quality care with experienced educated professionals at an affordable rate for your average family.
The cost of childcare has gone up like everything else unlike the small increases in wages. Not very many locations are filling the needs of the community. I feel bad for both parents and daycare/school facilities.
The cost of childcare in the Flathead County does not work with the wages of the average persons or family's wages. With the cost of living here for 36 years, we can't afford it.
The cost of living and cost of child care is far out pacing wages. I can't afford to work full-time but I also can't afford not to. My older child needs to get a job but I also can't afford for (them) to work cause (they) are my childcare for (their) younger sibling. Wages, cost of living and childcare all need to be adjusted to make it possible to survive here.
The cost of living compared to wages in this area are ridiculous. Makes it hard to make ends meet. With high rent and inflation, child care is an added high expense that makes for most people not making ends meet. Things need to change (for) the better.
The current housing crisis + cost of childcare is significantly contributing to my (spouse's) and my decision to delay having kids // It is so confusing that daycare costs SO much, yet the actual daycare workers are paid mere pennies! What is causing that discrepancy? It can't all be the cost of physical locations.
The early outs on Wednesday's and Fridays are VERY difficult to work around and find ways to pick up my child. The schools need to provide childcare for students AT the schools for families that need a place for their kids to go while they work their regular schedule! Also- there is a huge need for summer camps that go all summer for 5 days a week. Most parents' jobs don't end for the summer months, so a consistent and long-term camp is desired by many. It's hard to piece together all the different short-term camps that usually only run 4-5 hours a day anyway.
The lack of safe and affordable childcare options for elementary students in the summer is a huge concern and problem. Every program is super competitive to get into, and if I don't register the second it opens, I am unable to secure care. I am unable to accept a full-time position because of this concern.
The options available are limited, wait lists are extremely long, and several places charge a lot of money for enrollment and tuition, even though we know that the business owners don't make much money and have to pay their child care workers fair wages. Lack of government subsidy and tax relief on a local level is leaving us in the lurch. Currently paying almost \$2,000 a month in childcare AND have \$2000 in monthly rent thanks to lack of affordable and quality housing as well. Thankfully I just got a raise at work, but before that, we made too much to qualify for any tuition assistance or any sort, but our income wasn't high enough to support the family and we struggled for a long time. How is a family supposed to get ahead?
The price of childcare is out of hand. It would cost half my paycheck to get childcare just for the summer, not even full time year round. My husband and I both make good money and yet currently we are paycheck to paycheck. We have no back up plan.
The price of finding quality care has been the biggest stresser.
The week after school gets out and a week before school starts is difficult to find daytime child care
The working (parent) uses all wages to pay for care. So you ask just why do I work? The hours of business and daycare 8:30-3pm don't match.
There needs to be more reliable child care providers that have the provider's background checked

<p>Top priority is ensuring that the child is safe and cared for. Teachers should be teaching social emotional skills and other age appropriate skills and not just babysitting. It's hard to find good childcare right now because the pay is so low and thus places are hiring inexperienced people. There always seems to be a sacrifice being made. They do a very important job and should be supported.</p>
<p>Under paid and under appreciated</p>
<p>We have childcare, and love how reliable it is. However we are paying twice as much as we did 8 years ago with our first child. The cost is very high!</p>
<p>We refuse to pay insurance companies the ridiculous rates that drive up daycare costs, the employees/owners there sure aren't getting rich so all that money is going to insurance premiums.... We refuse to vaccinate on the schedule they demand to be allowed into daycare. We believe in traditional family support for childcare. We don't believe in strangers raising our kids.</p>
<p>We will not pull our (child) from (our child's) current daycare, but if they are forced to accept religious exemptions, I'm afraid other parents will, along with staff leaving and our daycare and others being forced to close. (I fully believe in vaccinating children)</p>
<p>While I no longer need to find childcare services due to the age of my children, it was very difficult when they were small to find quality care that was even remotely affordable.</p>
<p>Without Best Beginnings I could not afford child care and would not be able to work. (No family here to help during work hours.)</p>
<p>Working families find themselves not qualifying for Best Beginnings but yet don't make enough to pay the daycare fees. Flathead Cost of living is taking up a large percentage of people's income so then to cover daycare is difficult. Need to figure out a better way to qualify families for best beginnings. Working families are struggling to make ends meet with their normal expenses and adding daycare on top of that is difficult.</p>

*Comments have been minorly edited to remove identifying child gender and for minor typos/punctuation; if a comment or phrase could potentially identify commenter, the comment/phrase was also deleted.

Key Themes from Respondent Comments/Questions/Concerns/Questions Regarding Child Care (Chat GPT-assisted analysis)

1. Affordability Crisis

- Nearly all respondents cited cost as the primary barrier to accessing quality child care.
- Many parents report paying \$1,000+ per child, per month
- Middle-income families are particularly strained—earning “too much” to qualify for subsidies like *Best Beginnings* but not enough to afford full fees.
- Some families have taken on personal loans or reduced work hours to manage costs.
- Parents frequently question why prices are so high when providers themselves earn low wages.

2. Availability & Waitlists

- Long waitlists—sometimes over 12–15 months—for licensed care, especially for infants and toddlers.
- Limited coverage for before- and after-school care, early-outs, and summer programs.
- Many families rely on informal, unlicensed providers or family members due to lack of openings.
- Rural areas and children with special needs face even fewer options.

3. Workforce & Provider Challenges

- Providers report low pay, burnout, and high turnover, making it difficult to maintain quality staff.
- Some facilities close unexpectedly or reduce hours due to staffing shortages.
- Families perceive a disconnect between tuition costs and worker pay, eroding trust in the system.
- Calls for investment in child care workforce training, livable wages, and incentives to retain qualified staff.

4. Hours & Schedule Gaps

- Parents struggle with mismatched hours—most centers close by 5:30 p.m., while many parents work until 5:30 or later.
- Early-outs, inconsistent school schedules, and lack of before-school programs create major scheduling stress.
- Shift and healthcare workers especially cite lack of flexible or extended-hour care.

5. Quality & Safety Concerns

- Mixed experiences with care quality—some praise reliable centers; others report poor supervision or hygiene.
- Parents request cameras, stronger licensing enforcement, and better background checks.

- Several respondents called for public preschool or school-based care as trusted options.

6. Special Needs & Inclusive Care

- Families with children who have medical or behavioral needs face near-total lack of options.
- Centers sometimes refuse children requiring additional support, forcing parents out of the workforce.
- Requests for specialized training, inclusion incentives, and coordination with healthcare providers.

7. Employer & System-Level Solutions

- Parents urge employer-supported or on-site child care, flexible work arrangements, and tax credits.
- Strong interest in publicly funded universal pre-K and expanded subsidies to make care accessible.
- Many see child care as a workforce development and economic issue, not just a family issue.

Families in the Flathead Valley describe child care as unaffordable, and unsustainable for both parents and providers. The mismatch between wages, cost of living, and care availability forces difficult trade-offs—parents reducing work, delaying family growth, or exiting the workforce. Sustainable solutions must address affordability, workforce compensation, availability, and coordination among employers, government, and education systems.

Diverging and Converging Points (Chat GPT- analysis of prior report)

CONVERGING PERSPECTIVES

1. Child Care as a Workforce Issue

Both businesses and families strongly recognize that child care access directly impacts the local workforce.

- → *Shared belief*: Child care is not just a family problem; it's a workforce and economic development challenge requiring collective solutions.
-

2. Affordability and Accessibility

Both groups identify affordability as the top barrier.

- → *Shared belief*: The current cost structure is unsustainable for families and limits workforce participation.
-

3. Support for Systemic Solutions

Both groups endorse public and collaborative solutions:

- → *Shared belief*: Long-term fixes must blend public investment, employer engagement, and education sector coordination.
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4. Value of Workforce Flexibility

Flex time, remote work, and flexible scheduling are valued by both groups.

- → *Shared belief*: Flexibility is an effective, low-cost strategy that immediately helps parents stay employed.
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DIVERGING PERSPECTIVES

1. Perception of Employer Role

- → *Gap*: Families view employer engagement as essential; business response is varied as to their role
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3. Urgency and Impact

- → *Gap*: Businesses acknowledge the issue conceptually; families feel it acutely and daily.
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4. Awareness of Special Populations

- → *Gap*: Family feedback reflects *on-the-ground complexity* that isn't yet integrated into most business or policy responses.
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Convergence/Divergence Table

Theme	Businesses	Families	Convergence/Divergence
Workforce impact	Report absenteeism, turnover	Report missed work, reduced hours	✔️ Converge
Affordability	Support more aid; note wage strain	Identify as a top barrier	✔️ Converge
Employer responsibility	Prefer flexibility, not cost-sharing	Want subsidies, some want on-site care	⚠️ Diverge
Public funding	Support early ed expansion	Strongly favor universal pre-K	✔️ Converge
Regulation & licensing	Prioritize streamlining	Rarely mentioned	⚠️ Diverge
Extended hours & summer care	Minimal mention	High priority need	⚠️ Diverge
Special needs inclusion	Not mentioned	High concern	⚠️ Diverge

Key Takeaway

Both businesses and families see child care as central to workforce stability and economic growth. They align on the need for affordability, accessibility, and shared responsibility—but diverge on who leads and funds solutions. Businesses seek systemic efficiencies; families demand immediate, practical relief. Bridging this gap will require policies and partnerships that blend employer flexibility with community and government investment.

