

THE WOMEN'S
FOUNDATION
OF COLORADO



NEWS RELEASE

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REPORT: CHILD CARE COSTS VARY WIDELY ACROSS COLORADO

Understanding costs first step to ensuring all families have access to quality care

DENVER—Working parents in Colorado pay widely different shares of their income on child care depending on their location according to a new analysis supported by The Women's Foundation of Colorado. A family headed by a single mother in Park County may dedicate up to half of household income to child care costs, but the same family living in Ouray County may spend only 12 percent of household income on child care costs.

The first brief in a three-part series of reports from The Women's Foundation of Colorado, Qualistar Colorado and the Colorado Children's Campaign explores the affordability of care statewide to better understand what is driving prices and what can be done to ensure more Colorado families can access the quality care they need to work and ensure kids have the stimulating experiences they need to learn and grow.

"By looking closely at what families across Colorado are experiencing as they search for affordable care, we can see what is driving differences in local communities and begin to look for solutions to making child care more affordable for families," said Louise Atkinson, President and CEO of The Women's Foundation of Colorado. "Working together, we can ensure Colorado families, especially low-income single working women, have the opportunity to achieve self-sufficiency."

Colorado is the fifth-least affordable state in the country for center-based care for infants and for 4-year-olds, according to Child Care Aware. Costs are so high that licensed child care in Colorado is more expensive than in-state tuition and fees at a public four-year university, according to the College Board.

The new report, "Child Care Prices and Affordability: A Struggle for Colorado Families and Providers" compares, county by county, the average cost of care relative to median annual income for married couples as well as households headed by single mothers to better understand the affordability of child care across the state.

The report found that child care is a labor-intensive industry, and personnel costs account for most of providers' budgets. This is driven by staff-to-child ratios needed to provide safe spaces and ensure children have the attention they need to learn and grow. Since families may need care for up to 12 hours a day,

multiple shifts are also required to ensure adequate staffing. Still, the report noted Colorado doesn't meet national recommendations for ratios.

At the same time, early childhood professionals are among the lowest-paid in the workforce, and many do not receive benefits. The median salary for child care workers in Colorado in 2012 was \$22,726, or \$10.93 per hour. Even though personnel costs are significant portions of budgets, child care workers are often low-wage workers themselves, thus making cutting these costs a challenging approach to addressing high prices. Subsequent briefs in the three-part series will explore potential solutions to the high cost of care.

"Finding affordable child care is one of many barriers Colorado women face when trying to achieve financial self-sufficiency," Atkinson said. "Women are nearly half of all workers in Colorado's workforce of 2.8 million, and a high ratio of those working women have dependent children."

The report builds on last year's publication, *The Status of Women and Girls in Colorado*, by The Women's Foundation of Colorado and is the first in a three-part series exploring the topic this year. The second report expected to be released in August will focus on the affordability of child care in Colorado compared to other states and the root causes for the state's low ranking for affordability. The final report to be released this winter will recommend strategies and policies to help families access affordable, high quality care.

To download a copy of the report and graphics, please visit: <http://www.qualistar.org/child-care-cost.html>

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The mission of The Women's Foundation of Colorado is to build resources and lead change so that every woman and girl in Colorado achieves her full potential. We are committed to boldly leading systemic change to advance economic opportunity for all women and girls in Colorado; using research to build knowledge and guide action; building philanthropy that supports and champions women and girls in Colorado; demonstrating and promoting inclusiveness and commitment to a diversity of people, partners and ideas; and creating strategic partnerships throughout the state to service our mission. For more information, visit www.wfco.org or call 303-285-2960.

Qualistar Colorado is a statewide non-profit dedicated to advancing quality early childhood education across Colorado. We believe that all children deserve a high-quality early childhood education experience. Qualistar works to improve early childhood education by helping families find child care through a free referral service, rating the quality of child care programs, providing college scholarships for child care teachers, managing grants to improve child care facilities and strengthening federal, state and local policy through the use of data and information.

The Colorado Children's Campaign is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization that works to create hope and opportunity in Colorado, more than one million kids at a time. The Campaign uses accurate, compelling data and research on child well-being to champion policies and programs that improve children's lives.