



**COVID-19 EC RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP**

# Impact of COVID-19 on Colorado Families

Suzanne Delap, Ph.D.; Meg Franko, Ph.D.; Nazia Hasan, M.C.J.; Laricia Longworth-Reed, M.A.; Andrew B. McGee, M.A.; Katherine Nicolaou, M.A.T.; Amy Roberts, Ph.D.; and Courtney Thornton

Issue brief 3 of 3

**January 2021**



**EARLY MILESTONES**  
COLORADO



**The Bell  
Policy Center**



**UNIVERSITY of  
DENVER**

BUTLER INSTITUTE FOR FAMILIES  
Graduate School of Social Work

# Impact on Colorado Families

Families already had trouble finding affordable child care before the pandemic.<sup>1,2</sup> COVID-19 has only made things worse. Many child care providers have shut down or reduced enrollment, family members are out of work, and school operations are shifting every day. The situation has hit Black and Hispanic families the hardest.

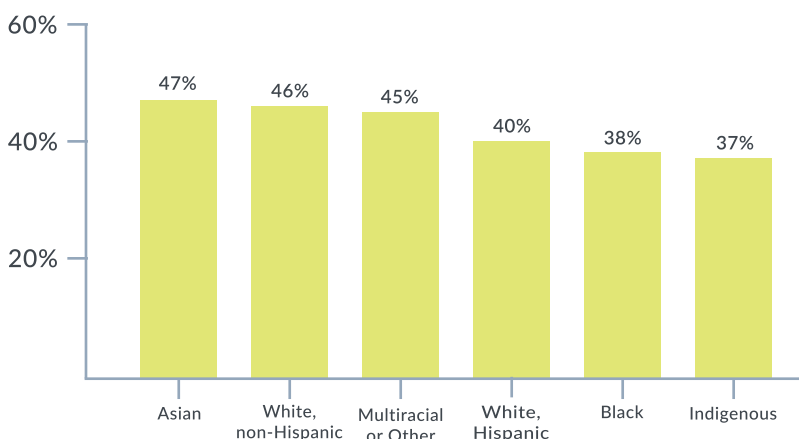
In the summer of 2020, Early Milestones and the Butler Institute surveyed over 11,000 Colorado families with children birth to age 12. This brief reports the findings.

## Access to Care

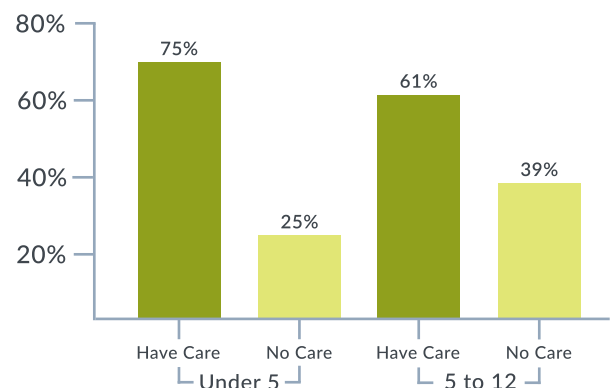
- More than 60% of families had to change their child care arrangements. Families with school-age children struggled the most.
- Families of color were *more* likely to have jobs that required work outside the home, but they were *less* likely to have found child care for the 2020/21 school year.
- 44% of families who speak a primary language other than English did not have needed child care, compared with 34% for families overall.

**"My 7-year-old stopped attending when COVID-19 hit. She lost her spot since, and we have moved. I do not know the facilities near me now, and I do not have transportation to get her to and from care."**

**Families with Finalized Care Plans for the 2020/21 School Year by Race/Ethnicity**  
(n = 7,997)



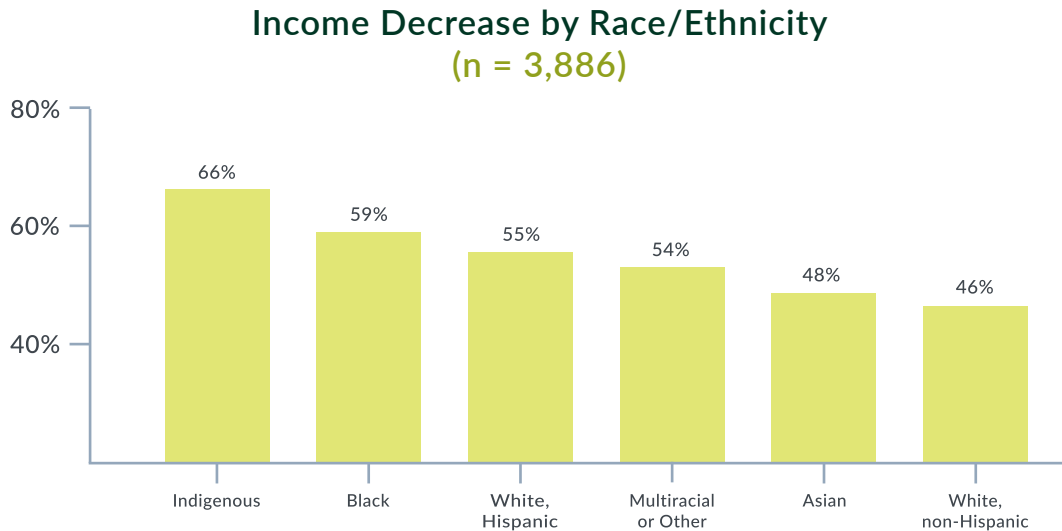
**Have Child Care by Age**  
(n=5,553 / n=3,860)



# Financial Well-Being and Affordable Care

---

Nearly half of all families have lost income since the beginning of the pandemic. Families of color were more likely to report income loss compared to their white, non-Hispanic peers. Many families struggled to afford child care prior to the pandemic, making the path to affordable child care that much more difficult now.



**"We spent the money we had been saving for childcare for 12 months on other critical needs during the pandemic, so we cannot afford an after-school program now."**

**"Both my husband and I saw major cuts to our pay back in March, and we can no longer afford child care. This has put a strain on our ability to work and make money."**

## Parental Preferences

---

The pandemic has created new challenges for Colorado families. Parents are worried about the health risks of returning children to care. Over 70% want children with groups of 10 or less and nearly half want to make sure social distancing guidelines are strictly followed. As a result, many parents are caring for their own children or relying on family, friends, and neighbors, even though that is not their first choice.

**"Schools and child care centers closed, so we had to have a family member watch our kids. She ended up watching more kids than she could handle and was exposed to COVID. I quit my job to stay home."**

**"Instead of sending my kids to school and before care, I had to quit my job so they can safely learn from home."**

# Policy Considerations to Support Families with Young Children

*Policies and practices that address this unique moment will help all families, but can be especially helpful to families of color and those with limited incomes.*

**Increase public confidence in formal child care options during the ongoing pandemic.** To support confidence that formal child care settings are safe and healthy, families need clear communication and guidance.

**Give families clear and accessible information about the health and safety guidelines providers are already following. Outreach can highlight what providers are doing to make sure children and educators are safe.**

**Stabilize and expand licensed child care capacity to serve families of color.** Families of color have had a hard time accessing needed child care during the pandemic.

**Create incentives for providers who serve families of color, non-English speakers, and regions with child care deserts. This might include priority points for stimulus grants or technical assistance for providers to support sustainability or expansion.**

**Maximize family access to Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP).** Families were already struggling to afford child care before the pandemic. With widespread income declines, more families need access to child care subsidy programs.

**Provide guidance and technical support to counties on CCCAP policy approaches and spending strategies that maximize family access to the program. This may include shifting dollars or expanding eligibility criteria temporarily until the economic crisis resolves.**

**Encourage businesses to create flexible work and child care options.** Families need supportive employers who allow schedule changes and understand the deep shifts in the current child care landscape.

**Engage business leaders and owners in creating flexible options for balancing work and child care. Consider ways to partner with businesses as they work toward policies that support family child care needs (e.g., flexible family leave, onsite childcare, and improved access to cafeteria plans).**

## Partners

Early Milestones is grateful to our project funders, without whom this effort would not be possible. We also thank our many partners who are helping to distribute surveys, interpret data, and develop communication tools. Bell Policy Center played a key role in developing the policy considerations included in this brief.



## References

<sup>1</sup> Office of Early Childhood, Colorado Department of Human Services (2019) Colorado Shines Brighter Birth through Five Strategic Plan, 2020-2025. <https://dcfs.my.salesforce.com/sfc/p/#410000012srR/a/4N000000AGyC/mrW1bt1kWUwXur3Ss0ZgYnC58C30CedVzb5qV3X2UXE>

<sup>2</sup> Economic Policy Institute, <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/CO>: Child care is considered affordable when families spend 7% of their household income on it. The average Colorado family spends over 20% of their income on infant care.