



2018 Child Care Affordability in Washington State

Child Care Affordability

Child care is often one of the largest expenses for families with young children, and the high cost of child care negatively impacts labor force participation among parents.¹ The median cost of care varies substantially across Washington State, with the most expensive care generally in more urban areas. These areas also tend to have the highest median household income, though, so comparing just median cost can give an incomplete picture of the relative affordability across the state. Affordability compares the median cost of child care with the median household income in a particular county.

Some counties with lower child care cost are actually less affordable for families because incomes in the area are lower. For example, King County has the highest median rates for child care, but it also has the highest median income. As a result, it is the 7th least affordable county for center care and 17th least affordable for family child care. In contrast, the median cost for a preschooler in a child care center in Okanogan County is less than half of King County, but because the median household income is also less than half, Okanogan is the second least affordable county for child care.

Methodology

To compare affordability across counties, CCA of WA calculated the percentage of median household income needed to enroll an infant and a preschooler in median-cost, licensed child care by provider type, for each county that has more than 10 providers of that type. Counties with fewer than 10 providers of a certain type were not included in the overall ranking. There are 24 counties with 10 or more centers, and 26 counties with 10 or more family child care providers. The counties are ranked by highest cost relative to median income, i.e., #1 is the least affordable county.

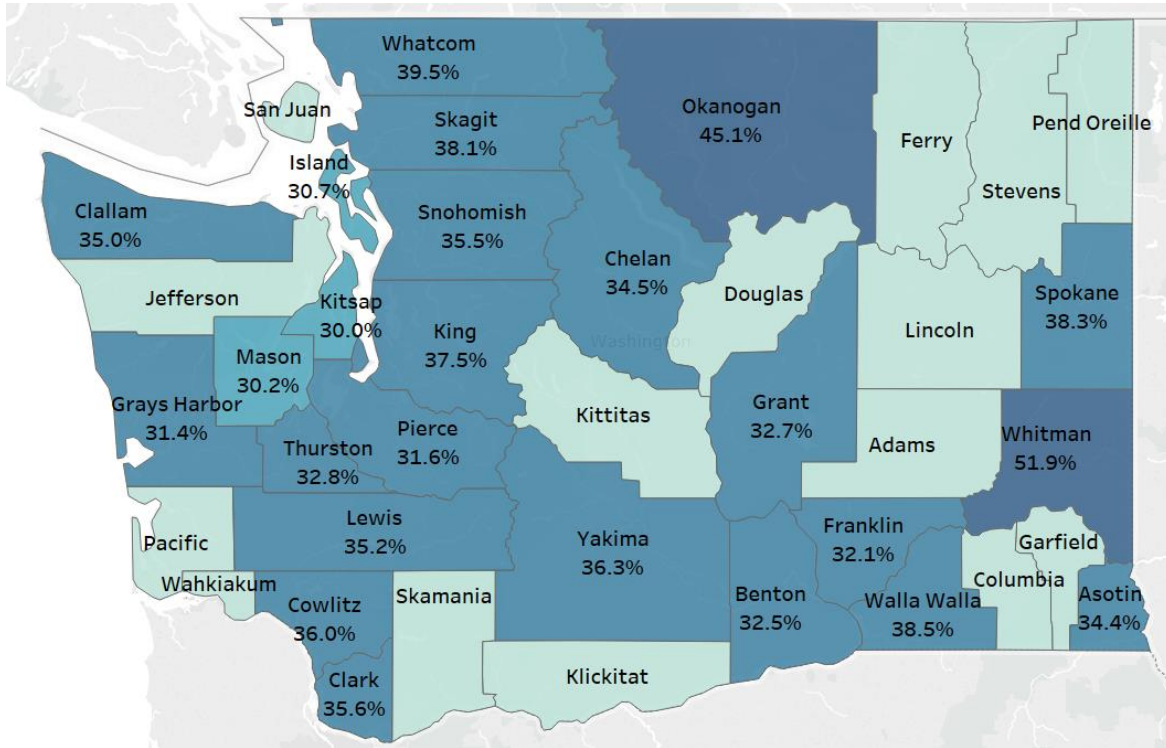
Least Affordable Care

Rank	Center Care	Family Child Care
1	Whitman	Whatcom
2	Okanogan	Okanogan
3	Whatcom	Skagit
4	Walla Walla	Clallam
5	Spokane	Lewis
6	Skagit	Adams
7	King	Kittitas
8	Yakima	Yakima
9	Cowlitz	Spokane
10	Clark	Walla Walla

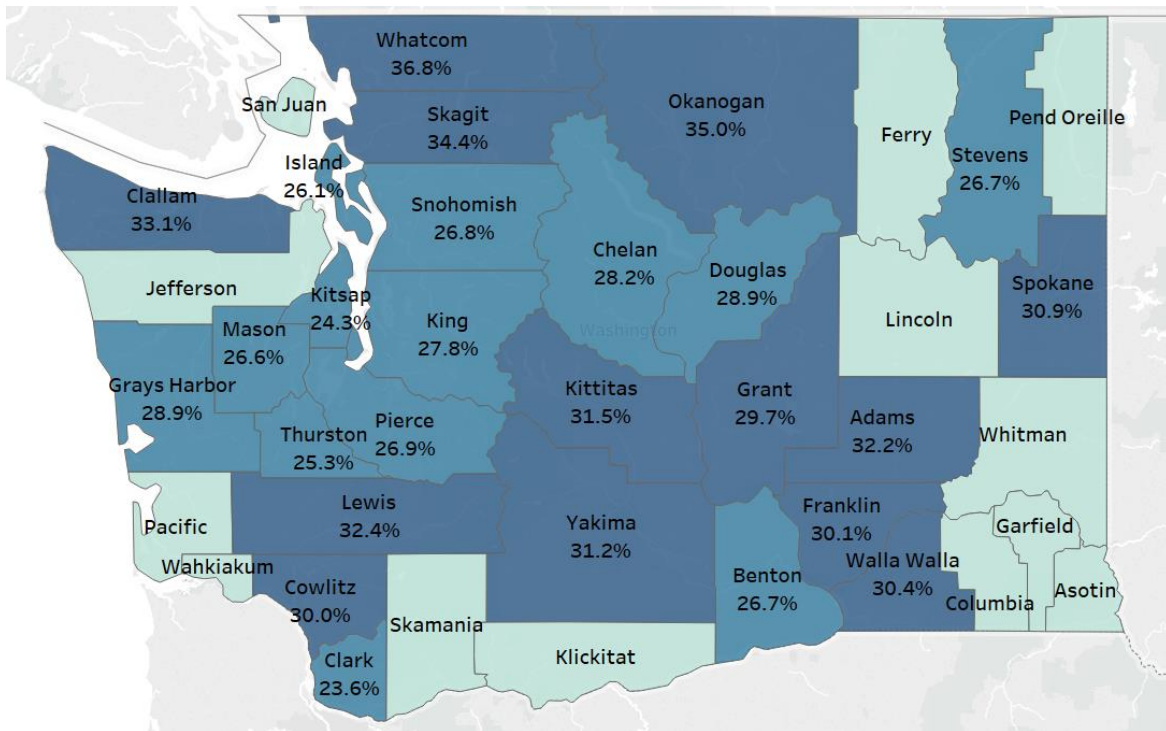
¹ U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Childcare.

https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Workforce%20of%20Today%2CWorkforce%20of%20Tomorrow%20Report_0.pdf. June 2017.

Median Cost of Center Care for an Infant & Preschooler, as a percentage of median household income



Median Cost of Family Child Care for an Infant & Preschooler, as a percentage of median household income



Full County Rankings

Child Care Affordability, annual median cost of child care for an infant and a preschooler as a percentage of median household income

County	Median Household Income ²	Median Cost of Center Care, as a percentage of median household income	Median Cost of Family Child Care, as a percentage of median household income	Unaffordability Rank for Center Care	Unaffordability Rank for Family Child Care
Adams	\$50,089		32.2%		6
Asotin	\$46,564	34.4%		15	
Benton	\$63,053	32.5%	26.7%	18	20
Chelan	\$53,388	34.5%	28.2%	14	16
Clallam	\$51,070	35.0%	33.1%	13	4
Clark	\$71,618	35.6%	23.6%	10	26
Cowlitz	\$49,420	36.0%	30.0%	9	12
Douglas	\$53,345		28.9%		15
Franklin	\$57,535	32.1%	30.1%	19	11
Grant	\$51,330	32.7%	29.7%	17	13
Grays Harbor	\$48,517	31.4%	28.9%	21	14
Island	\$65,671	30.7%	26.1%	22	23
King	\$89,142	37.5%	27.8%	7	17
Kitsap	\$69,495	30.0%	24.3%	24	25
Kittitas	\$52,429		31.5%		7
Lewis	\$47,398	35.2%	32.4%	12	5
Mason	\$54,364	30.2%	26.6%	23	22
Okanogan	\$40,912	45.1%	35.0%	2	2
Pierce	\$65,246	31.6%	26.9%	20	18
Skagit	\$58,990	38.1%	34.4%	6	3
Snohomish	\$80,579	35.5%	26.8%	11	19
Spokane	\$53,809	38.3%	30.9%	5	9
Stevens	\$53,245		26.7%		21
Thurston	\$66,725	32.8%	25.3%	16	24
Walla Walla	\$55,709	38.5%	30.4%	4	10
Whatcom	\$57,291	39.5%	36.8%	3	1
Whitman	\$48,665	51.9%		1	
Yakima	\$48,300	36.3%	31.2%	8	8

Limitations & Data Notes

There are several limitations to this analysis.

- The data on median household income is projected for 2017, which is a year older than the data on child care cost.
- Rankings can exaggerate and minimize differences by making the differences seem more standard. For example, the difference in the percentage of median income needed for child care between the first and second least affordable counties for centers is over 5 percentage points, while for family child care it's less 2 percentage points.

² Washington State Office of Financial Management. Median Household Income, 2017 Projected.

<https://www.ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/economy-and-labor-force/median-household-income-estimates>. March 2018

- This analysis uses median household income by county as a measure of family resources. This includes all households, and it may not be as accurate for specifically the type of household envisioned in this scenario (one with two young children and all parents in the workforce).
- There are some counties with substantial variability within the county, which would not be reflected in this analysis.
- The ranking does not factor in eligibility for subsidies or availability of Head Start and/or ECEAP alternatives for preschool age children.