

# North Carolina 2019 Policy Priorities for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

Think Babies™ NC Leadership Team



## *Increase Funding for Child Care Assistance for Working Families with Infants and Toddlers*

### Introduction

Children's development and learning in the first few years lay the foundation for all of the years that follow. Children who attend high-quality early education programs are better prepared for success in school—academically, socially and emotionally. However, few working poor families can afford the high cost of infant care, which averages \$9,255 annually.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, North Carolina provides child care financial assistance for low-income working families through the Child Care Subsidy Program. This two-generation program is designed to help families earning at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) pay for child care while they work or attend school and provide their children with access to quality early care and learning programs. Parents have a co-pay cost of up to 10% of their income, but child care is one of the largest expenses families face.

An acute shortage of child care assistance funding exists, especially for families of infants and toddlers. In North Carolina, an estimated 102,971 infants and toddlers whose parents are working could qualify for child care assistance under eligibility standards.<sup>2</sup> In 2018, 17,379 infants and toddlers received child care assistance—only 17% of all babies who could qualify in North Carolina.<sup>3</sup> Another way to estimate need at a specific point in time is by looking at the child care subsidy waitlist. Although waitlist numbers do not show the full extent of unmet need and not all families who could qualify apply for subsidy, in September 2018, 12,802 infants and toddlers remained on the waitlist. Of the children under age six waiting for subsidy, 56% were infants and toddlers.<sup>4</sup> By any measure of unmet need, there is a dramatic need to increase access to child care assistance and quality early care and learning programs in North Carolina.

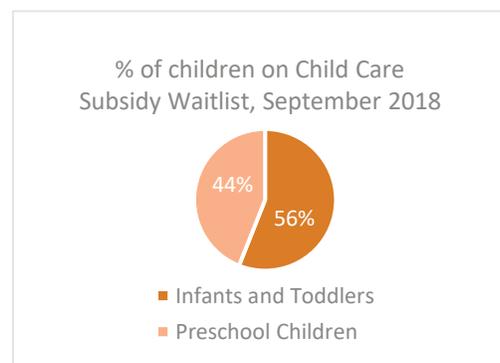
### Why Is This Important to Do Now?

**Infants and toddlers are missing out on opportunities for healthy development and early learning.**

A child's brain grows more quickly during their first three years of life than at any other point. Ensuring that infants and toddlers have access to quality early care and learning programs both lays the foundation for learning and lessens the need for remediation in the future.<sup>5</sup>

**Infants and toddlers wait longer for child care assistance, missing crucial developmental opportunities.**

Infants and toddlers make up more than half of children under six on the waitlist, but receive child care assistance less frequently than preschool children.<sup>6</sup> The lack of supply for subsidy and long waitlists means that infants and toddlers remain on the waitlist longer to receive child care assistance, and many don't receive it until their preschool years, missing a critical window in their development.

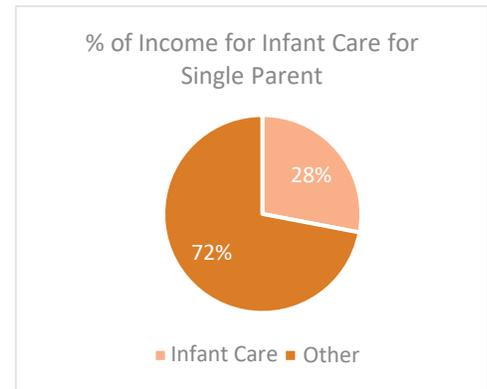


## Quality early care and learning opportunities are critical for family well-being and economic self-sufficiency.

Low-income working families with infants and toddlers need access to child care programs so that they can work and support their own families. Making child care more affordable increases parents' workforce participation, increasing economic self-sufficiency and decreasing the stress caused by economic instability.<sup>7</sup>

## Quality care and learning is out of reach for low-income working families.

Child care is one of the largest expenses families face. The average annual cost of infant care in North Carolina is \$9,255, 40.7% more per year than in-state tuition for a 4-year public college.<sup>8</sup> A single parent with one infant earning about \$32,920, which qualifies for child care assistance at 200% of the federal poverty level, would need to spend almost one third of their gross income on infant care. A single parent earning minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour) would need to spend 61.4% of their income on care for one infant.<sup>9</sup> Only 26.7% of families can afford child care without going over the federally recommended spending target of no more than 10% of their family income.<sup>10</sup>



## Child care subsidy shortages exist in every county in North Carolina.

All 100 North Carolina counties serve less than one third of infants and toddlers who could qualify for child care assistance under current eligibility standards. Seventy-five counties serve fewer than 20% of infants and toddlers who could qualify. Eleven of these counties serve less than 10%, several of which are clustered in the northeast corner of the state.<sup>11</sup>

Although waitlist numbers do not show the extent of unmet need, they provide one indicator of need at a specific point in time. There were 12,802 infants and toddlers on the child care subsidy waitlist statewide in September 2018. Nearly half (49) of North Carolina counties have at least 50 infants and toddlers on the waitlist. In 25 counties, there are at least 100 infants and toddlers on the waitlist. Another 22 counties have between 100 and 1000 infants and toddlers on the subsidy waitlist. Three counties, Guilford, Wake, and Mecklenburg, have more than 1000 infants and toddlers on the waitlist, showing the extensive unmet need for child care assistance among working families.<sup>12</sup>

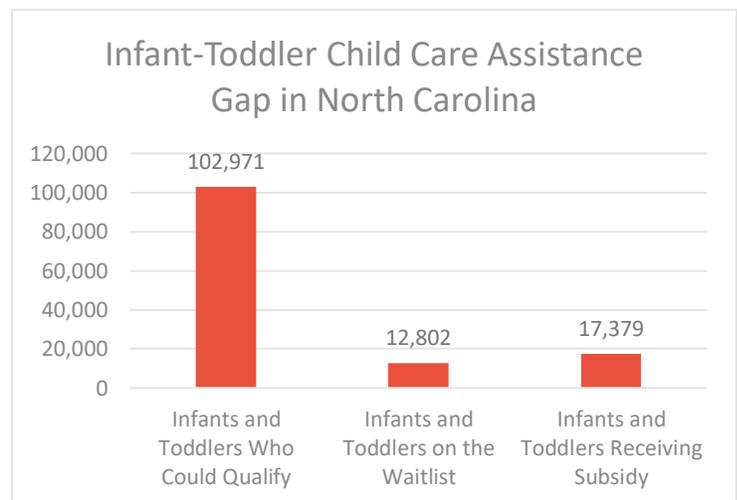
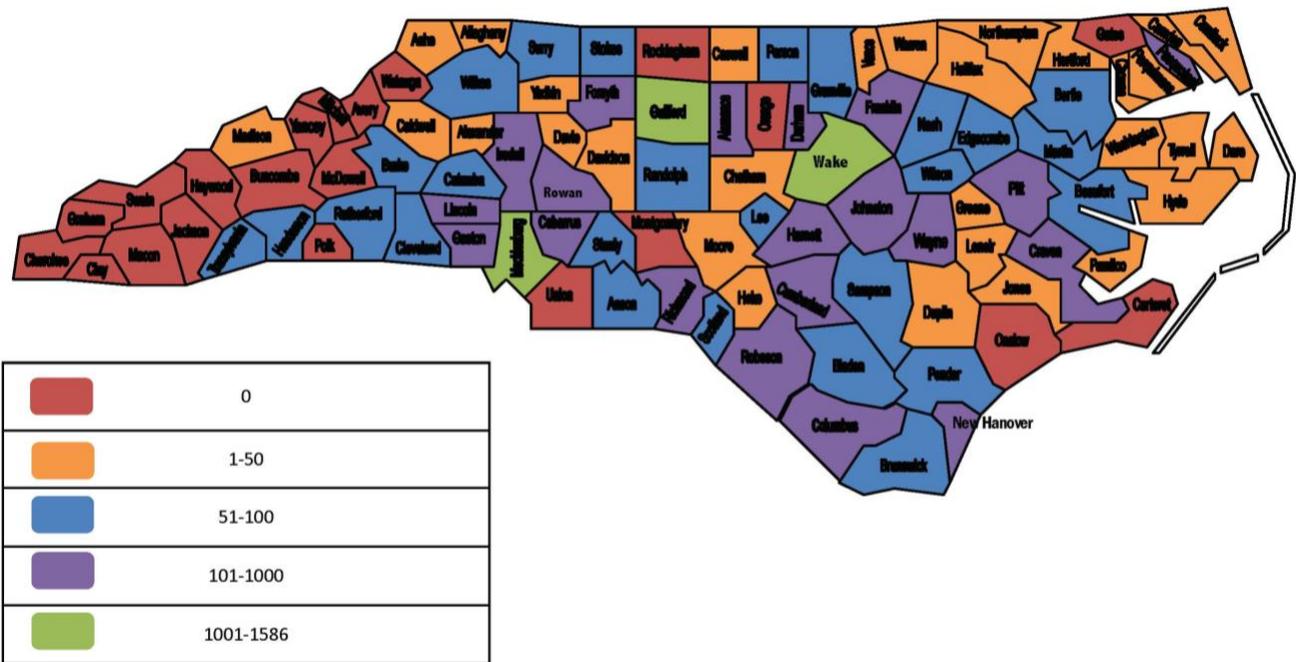


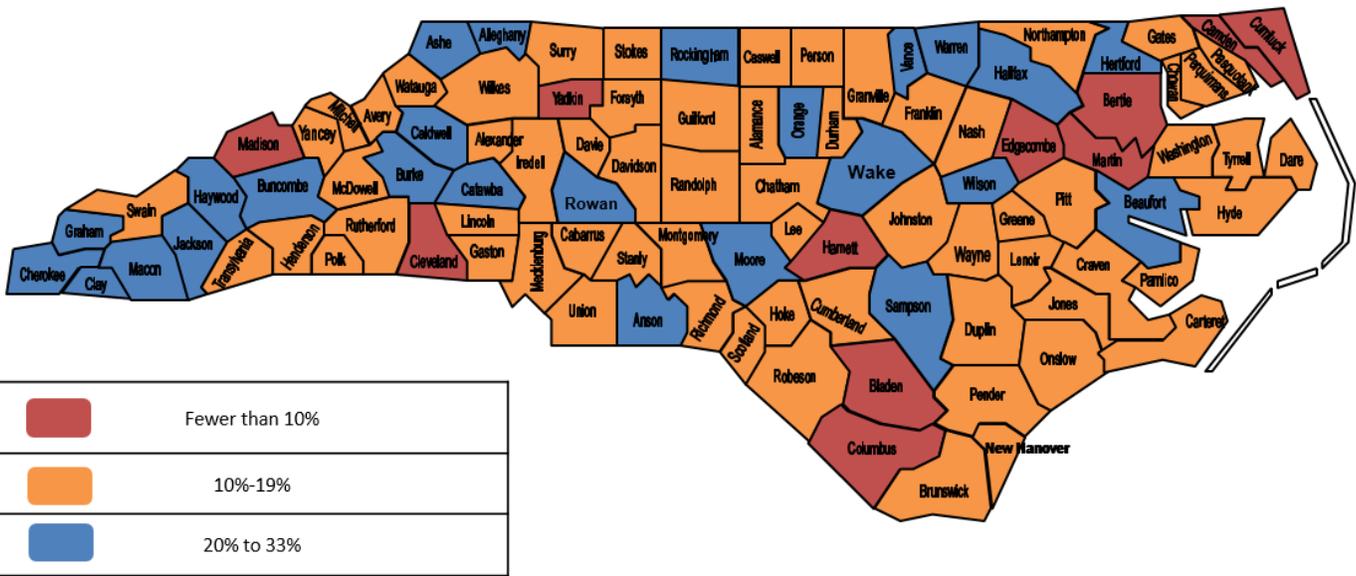
Figure 1: 12,802 Infants and Toddlers on the Subsidy Waitlist, September 2018



County	Number of Infants and Toddlers on the Wait List	County	Number of Infants and Toddlers on the Wait List	County	Number of Infants and Toddlers on the Wait List	County	Number of Infants and Toddlers on the Wait List
Alamance	453	Cumberland	811	Johnston	195	Randolph	71
Alexander	14	Currituck	22	Jones	6	Richmond	132
Alleghany	3	Dare	34	Lee	65	Robeson	661
Anson	63	Davidson	12	Lenoir	11	Rockingham	0
Ashe	3	Davie	39	Lincoln	116	Rowan	125
Avery	0	Duplin	27	Macon	0	Rutherford	74
Beaufort	83	Durham	116	Madison	38	Sampson	65
Bertie	71	Edgecombe	72	Martin	63	Scotland	98
Bladen	90	Forsyth	464	McDowell	0	Stanly	92
Brunswick	88	Franklin	206	Mecklenburg	1586	Stokes	86
Buncombe	0	Gaston	396	Mitchell	0	Surry	100
Burke	51	Gates	0	Montgomery	0	Swain	0
Cabarrus	293	Graham	0	Moore	6	Transylvania	57
Caldwell	48	Granville	93	Nash	56	Tyrrell	2
Camden	9	Greene	5	New Hanover	332	Union	0
Carteret	0	Guilford	1194	Northampton	49	Vance	49
Caswell	1	Halifax	19	Onslow	0	Wake	1299
Catawba	64	Harnett	254	Orange	0	Warren	34
Chatham	7	Haywood	0	Pamlico	27	Washington	40
Cherokee	0	Henderson	56	Pasquotank	124	Watauga	0
Chowan	12	Hertford	1	Pender	93	Wayne	251
Clay	0	Hoke	19	Perquimans	32	Wilkes	70
Cleveland	100	Hyde	1	Person	65	Wilson	90
Columbus	220	Iredell	121	Pitt	623	Yadkin	38
Craven	246	Jackson	0	Polk	0	Yancey	0

Data Source: NC Division of Child Development and Early Education, September 2018  
Map Compiled by the NC Early Education Coalition

**Figure 2: Child Care Assistance Gap for Working Parents of Infants and Toddlers:  
Percent of All Infants and Toddlers Who Qualify for Child Care Assistance and Received Services in 2018**



County	Number of Infants and Toddlers Who Received Subsidy	Number of Infants and Toddlers Who Qualify for Subsidy	Percent of Infants and Toddlers Served
Alamance	263	1,616	16%
Alexander	62	330	19%
Alleghany	34	136	25%
Anson	58	285	20%
Ashe	75	269	28%
Avery	30	160	19%
Beaufort	138	503	27%
Bertie	20	262	8%
Bladen	40	431	9%
Brunswick	167	1,229	14%
Buncombe	465	2,352	20%
Burke	198	864	23%
Cabarrus	172	1,580	11%
Caldwell	181	846	21%
Camden	5	75	7%
Carteret	64	581	11%
Caswell	30	201	15%
Catawba	361	1,514	24%
Chatham	89	499	18%
Cherokee	82	275	30%
Chowan	30	185	16%
Clay	34	121	28%
Cleveland	100	1,099	9%
Columbus	60	714	8%
Craven	171	1,399	12%
Cumberland	697	4,908	14%
Curruck	13	270	5%
Dare	33	342	10%
Davidson	236	1,699	14%
Davie	44	307	14%
Duplin	158	822	19%
Durham	702	3,894	18%
Edgecombe	66	712	9%
Forsyth	669	3,839	17%

County	Number of Infants and Toddlers Who Received Subsidy	Number of Infants and Toddlers Who Qualify for Subsidy	Percent of Infants and Toddlers Served
Franklin	96	616	16%
Gaston	367	2,099	17%
Gates	19	107	18%
Graham	21	81	26%
Granville	86	531	16%
Greene	44	239	18%
Gulford	952	5,105	19%
Halifax	180	679	27%
Harnett	164	1,921	9%
Haywood	196	632	31%
Henderson	152	995	15%
Hertford	81	327	25%
Hoke	150	1,035	14%
Hyde	6	59	10%
Iredell	264	1,358	19%
Jackson	80	409	20%
Johnston	323	1,926	17%
Jones	21	132	16%
Lee	94	731	13%
Lenoir	90	815	11%
Lincoln	108	618	17%
Macon	112	379	30%
Madison	17	194	9%
Martin	24	353	7%
McDowell	63	491	13%
Mecklenburg	1,684	9,132	18%
Mitchell	28	176	16%
Montgomery	62	361	17%
Moore	210	956	22%
Nash	121	880	14%
New Hanover	273	1,907	14%
Northampton	26	244	11%
Onslow	469	3,783	12%
Orange	216	791	27%

County	Number of Infants and Toddlers Who Received Subsidy	Number of Infants and Toddlers Who Qualify for Subsidy	Percent of Infants and Toddlers Served
Pamlico	21	113	19%
Pasquotank	70	652	11%
Pender	80	621	13%
Perquimans	19	153	12%
Person	66	421	16%
Pitt	306	2,088	15%
Polk	12	118	10%
Randolph	259	1,448	18%
Richmond	108	623	17%
Robeson	323	2,019	16%
Rockingham	217	1,019	21%
Rowan	342	1,393	25%
Rutherford	126	825	15%
Sampson	172	842	20%
Scotland	90	555	16%
Stanly	67	601	11%
Stokes	43	364	12%
Surry	113	761	15%
Swain	34	266	13%
Transylvania	37	246	15%
Tyrrell	7	50	14%
Union	228	1,648	14%
Vance	217	689	32%
Wake	1,351	6,256	22%
Warren	51	233	22%
Washington	34	190	18%
Watauga	41	323	13%
Wayne	207	1,728	12%
Wilkes	121	670	18%
Wilson	218	1,105	20%
Yadkin	24	363	7%
Yancey	29	210	14%
<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>17,379</b>	<b>102,971</b>	<b>17%</b>

The number of infants and toddlers who qualify for child care assistance is calculated by taking the number of children in working families under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, using Census data. The number of children who received child care assistance in November 2018 is then divided by the total number of children who could qualify to determine the child care assistance gap.

Data Sources: U.S. Census (2000), DCDEE (2017), NC FAST (November 2018)  
Map Compiled by the NC Early Education Coalition

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<sup>1</sup> Economic Policy Institute. (2016). "The Cost of Child Care in North Carolina."

<sup>2</sup> The number of infants and toddlers who could qualify for child care assistance is calculated by taking the number of children under age 3 in families under 200% of the FPL with all available parents working, using census data. The number of infants and toddlers who received child care assistance in November 2018 is then divided by the total number of infants and toddlers who could qualify to determine the child care assistance gap.

<sup>3</sup> Data retrieved from U.S. Census, (2000); DCDEE, (2017); and NC FAST, (November 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Waitlist data retrieved from DCDEE, September 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2016). 8 Things to Remember about Child Development.

<sup>6</sup> Child Care Service Association (CCSA). (2017). "Who's Caring for Our Babies.;" DCDEE, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2018). "The US and the High Cost of Child Care: A Review of Prices and Proposed Solutions in a Broken System."

<sup>8</sup> Economic Policy Institute, 2016

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Data retrieved from U.S. Census, (2000); DCDEE, (2017); and NC FAST, (November 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Waitlist data retrieved from DCDEE, September 2018.

### About Think Babies™ NC:

Think Babies™ NC seeks to advance policies that support the healthy development of North Carolina's babies and toddlers. It is aligned with the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading initiative and the NC Early Childhood Action Plan. Think Babies™ NC is led by the NC Early Education Coalition with support from the NC Early Childhood Foundation and a Leadership Team of state and local organizations focused on advancing public awareness and policy solutions for infants, toddlers, and their families.