



# Population Health Trust September Newsletter

## *Community Advisory Board to the Skagit County Board of Health*


**September 25, 2023**

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Happy Fall! As we enter a season of transition filled with cool temperatures, colorful leaves, and giant pumpkins, we are taking some time at the Trust to check in on our COVID Recovery Plan.

The need for quality child care was identified as a priority area by the Trust in the plan. Children with access to quality child care have opportunities to develop socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Already limited in Skagit County, child care access was further strained by pandemic-era closures. These closures resulted in a 22% drop in availability from pre-COVID levels. Skagit County currently has 2,390 licensed child care spaces, but an estimated 7,223 children under the age of five.

The shortage of quality child care impacts not only childhood development, but also the County's economic development. Not having access to reliable child care can lead to missed work, lost wages and in some cases, employees exiting the workforce altogether. A shortage of affordable, accessible childcare has kept an estimated 15,000 people out of the workforce in the North Sound Region costing employers an estimated \$338.2M annually.

<div>CHILDCARE (CC)</div> 	GOALS	
	<p><b>1</b> Each family in Skagit County can access high quality, affordable, and equitable childcare when and where they need it.</p> <p><b>2</b> All professionals who work with children and their families are highly skilled, compassionate, and reflect the demographic characteristics and needs of the community.</p>	<p>To achieve these goals, the Trust partnered with the Opportunity Council's Center for Retention &amp; Expansion of Child Care (C-RECC), Childcare Aware NW, and the Center for Inclusive Entrepreneurship (CIE). Funding from the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) has been utilized to increase child care capacity through the recruitment of prospective providers, especially those who are BIPOC and/or multilingual.</p>

To date, seven individuals are in the pipeline for funding through the initiative, six of whom are multilingual, and one looking to expand a child care center with a specific focus on serving the Mixteco population with extended hours of operation and culturally matched care.

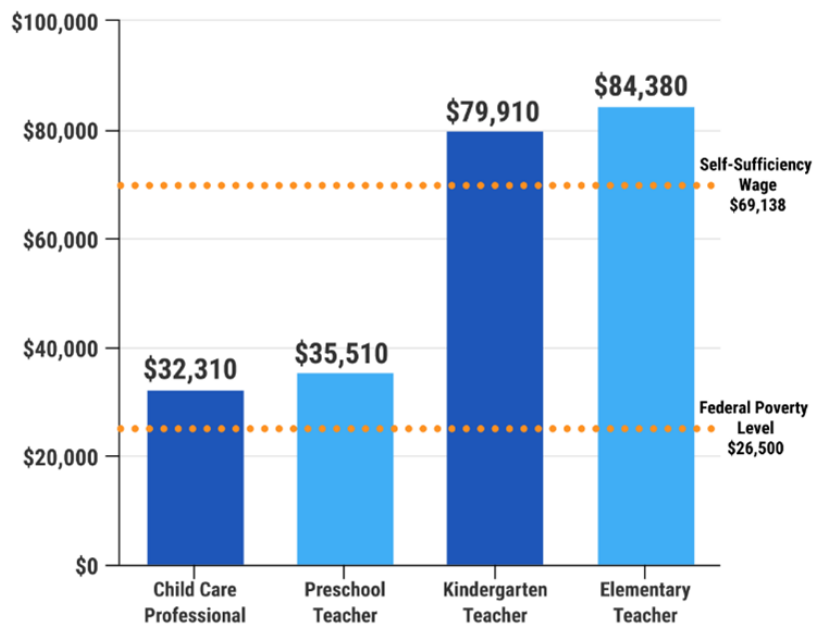
STRATEGIES			
<b>CC1</b> Create opportunities for Spanish and indigenous-speaking residents to open childcare businesses.	<b>CC2</b> Improve retention of Skagit County childcare providers through supports such as mental health consultation and supporting the Help Me Grow Action Team to address the competing needs for better pay for childcare professionals and lower childcare costs.	<b>CC3</b> Advocate for employer-based on-site childcare, including extended hours of care, and investigate alternative modes for the service and business sectors.	<b>CC4</b> Provide support to recruit, retain and train childcare providers based on successful models such as the Skagit Valley College/ Skagit Island Head Start staff development program.

The initiative is also working toward hiring a mental health professional to support child care providers and the families they serve who are impacted by the burgeoning behavioral health needs of children. Finally, the project is working with the business community to share resources and information about how to support their workforce with child care needs. Eventually, the PHT and C-RECC would love to see a pilot of employer-based child care.

The issue of access to quality childcare for all families is complex and multi-layered. Though the above actions are not the single solution to the issue, they provide a model for actions that can be taken locally to create additional childcare capacity for families with young children.

## CHILD CARE & K-12 WAGES

Skagit County, 2021



Sources: WA Employee Security Department Labor Market Reports; WA Self-Sufficiency Standard; HHS Poverty Guidelines

Additional actions at the state and federal level are needed to significantly improve local access, particularly in relation to improving compensation and providing benefits for early educators to attract and retain workforce. The provider turnover rate in Washington was 43% in 2021. This turnover rate compromises quality care as children develop in the context of relationships. This could include measures such as increasing state subsidies (In Washington state, subsidies cover only about a third of the cost of a high-quality program) and paying licensed child care programs based on enrollment rather than attendance.

Look for more updates on the Trust's work on childcare in future newsletters.

**Resources:**

- [The Mounting Cost of Child Care](#). 2019 Report - Washington State Child Care Collaborative Task Force
  - [Child Care in Skagit County](#). 2023 Report - Childcare Aware Washington
  - [Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Childcare](#). U.S. Chamber of Commerce
  - [Washington State Child Care Access Strategy](#). 2021 Report - Washington State Child Care Collaborative Task Force
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Thank you for your partnership in keeping Skagit County healthy!



The Population Health Trust was founded in 2015 and is the Community Advisory Board to the Skagit County Board of Health. For more information, check out our [website](#).

**Population Health Trust**

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