

Head start programs alleviate supply gap of center-based childcare in NJ

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The availability of Head Start and Early Head Start in New Jersey, federal programs designed to serve low-income families' childcare needs, reduces the likelihood that a community will experience a severe childcare supply gap, a Rutgers-led study found.

A community with a severe childcare supply gap has more than five children for each available spot in a daycare or childcare center. The study, published in *Children and Youth Services Review*, found that the presence of Head Start and Early Head Start reduces the likelihood of a severe gap by 14 percent—but that needs remain in lower-income areas such as Atlantic, Burlington and Camden counties.

The review of 430 New Jersey [school districts](#) found that 43 had severe gaps and 47 had minor supply gaps with three to five children per childcare spot. Most of the districts with gaps were in less urbanized and populous areas in southern and northwestern New Jersey. The researchers examined whether and to what extent the availability of Head Start programs helped diminish a supply gap of available childcare centers in the school districts.

"Childcare in New Jersey can be expensive and can run \$1,600 a month for the care of an infant or \$1,200 a month for a toddler," said lead researcher Jeounghee Kim, an associate professor in Rutgers University-New Brunswick's School of Social Work. "Head Start and Early Head Start provide a crucial role for [low-income families](#) particularly in areas with low-population density. State and [local governments](#) should look at

establishing more of these programs where needs persist."

Quality daycare and pre-school programs are critical to early childhood development. In 2017, approximately 65% of families with children under age 6 participated in the labor force across the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. For those families, the availability of childcare service is critical for their employment and financial well-being, the researchers explained.

In New Jersey, 225 Head Start programs across the state served about 15,943 children under age 6 in 2017, representing nearly 5% of the approximately 350,000 slots in licensed centers in the year. Head Start and Early Head Start programs promote school readiness of low-income children from birth to age 5 with educational, health, nutritional, social and other services. Head Start programs focus on preschool-age children, and Early Head Start programs are geared towards infants and toddlers.

More information: Jeounghee Kim et al, Head Start availability and supply gap of childcare slots: A New Jersey study, *Children and Youth Services Review* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2019.104394](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2019.104394)

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