

Much like the housing crisis that is not being felt by those who already have housing, the childcare crisis does not impact those without younger children. The reality is the childcare crisis will affect us all as it impacts the economy and our ability to attract talent or meet the employment needs of our employers. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) considers childcare affordable when it costs a family no more than 7% of their household income. We are well above that guideline, and all indicators project things to get even worse. So, what does that mean to those of us that do not have children?

Understand the scope of the problem. Many of us are not impacted by the childcare “crisis,” so we do not understand how bad it really is. According to Zippia, the career experts, “51% of Americans live in communities classified as childcare deserts. Americans with children spend at least 10% of their household income on childcare. And 58% of working parents rely on childcare centers.” Additionally, the average wage of a childcare provider is just \$13.50 an hour; wages that are going up given the shortage of available employees driven by the lack of childcare! In Washoe County, according to the Children’s Cabinet, we can only meet 49.3% of our childcare needs. So most working families have a childcare problem, which impacts both employers and consumers directly.

How does this impact employers? When the cost of childcare for two children averages over \$2,700 a month, according to Zippia (\$640 per week), are you going to be able to afford an employee with children when you pay just \$15.00 an hour? No, because that pay rate does not even cover the cost of their childcare at \$15.58 per hour. Even at \$20 an hour, the wages are not attractive to most available employees with kids. Yes, many working families do the spousal juggle or have family members that help with childcare needs. However, when unemployment rates are below 3%, you cannot afford to ignore the 58% of working families that depend on childcare centers. As an employer, this will require you to change how you do business—wages matter. If you have trouble hiring or keeping employees, wages are the first place to look. Flexibility is also essential, and when possible, allowing employees to work from home can help. If you are a larger employer, onsite childcare is something you should consider. In short, if you are a business owner, childcare is now **your** problem.

What about the consumers? **We all** fall into the consumer camp. If you are going to **do anything** or **buy anything**, you will be paying more as the shortage and cost of employees are increasing. Additionally, with the lack of childcare centers, most parents cannot find the care they need. Even the employers paying a decent wage are finding it nearly impossible to hire and retain staff. For example: have you walked into a half-empty restaurant lately, only to find that you have a 30-minute wait? Available staff, impacted by childcare availability, is the problem.

So, what can we do about this growing crisis? First, acknowledge that this is a crisis, even if you do not own a business or have young children needing childcare. Awareness can help to develop innovative solutions. Employees should engage with their employers to address the problem. Additionally, we should all provide support to agencies and non-profits working to address this crisis. This includes supporting the construction of desperately needed childcare facilities that may be in your neighborhood. Consider helping some young families in need through church groups or other community organizations. The childcare burden, coupled with our rising housing prices, could force our young families to move out of the area. We need to keep them here and employed in our region. They are the workers and residents who will service and support our regional economy in the years ahead.