



# Childcare Survey Report

## Childcare Providers

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SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



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## Introduction

The childcare crisis in South Dakota has reached critical levels, with many families struggling to find affordable, high-quality care for their children. This report aims to understand the current landscape of childcare in the state, focusing on availability, cost, quality, and impact on families and the economy. According to South Dakota Kids Count, approximately 74% of children under the age of six live in households where all available parents are working, creating a significant demand for reliable childcare services. However, many rural areas in South Dakota face severe childcare shortages, exacerbating the issue for many families. This survey report draws on data from childcare providers across the state to provide insights into how these issues affect South Dakota's families, their economic stability, and the broader community. By exploring these dimensions, the report seeks to identify opportunities to better the current childcare crisis facing South Dakotans.

## Survey Respondents

This survey was distributed statewide in South Dakota to both current childcare providers and those who may utilize childcare or indicate they anticipate using childcare in the next three years. The survey was viewed 2,138 times and received 532 responses.

Some responses were from childcare providers. Seventy-five respondents identified themselves as providers, 59 of those responses answered the minimum number of questions on the survey to be included in the reports. See questions needing

completion indicated in the survey instrument in the appendix of this report.

Four of the 59 completed responses indicated they were childcare providers, had children in the home who need childcare, and they would be willing to complete the second portion of the survey aimed at those needing childcare.

## Key Findings

Based on responses from 59 childcare providers who collectively care for 4,725 children, the sizes of programs vary widely. The smallest serves 5 children, while the largest serves 1,500. The majority of providers (42.3%) care for 10-19 children. Waitlists are common, with 48 providers reporting a total of up to 1,127 children waitlisted.

Providers are somewhat evenly split between those who are state-registered and those who are not. Among the unregistered, barriers include complex paperwork and regulatory challenges. Proposed solutions for improving registration appeal include more financial support and simplified processes.

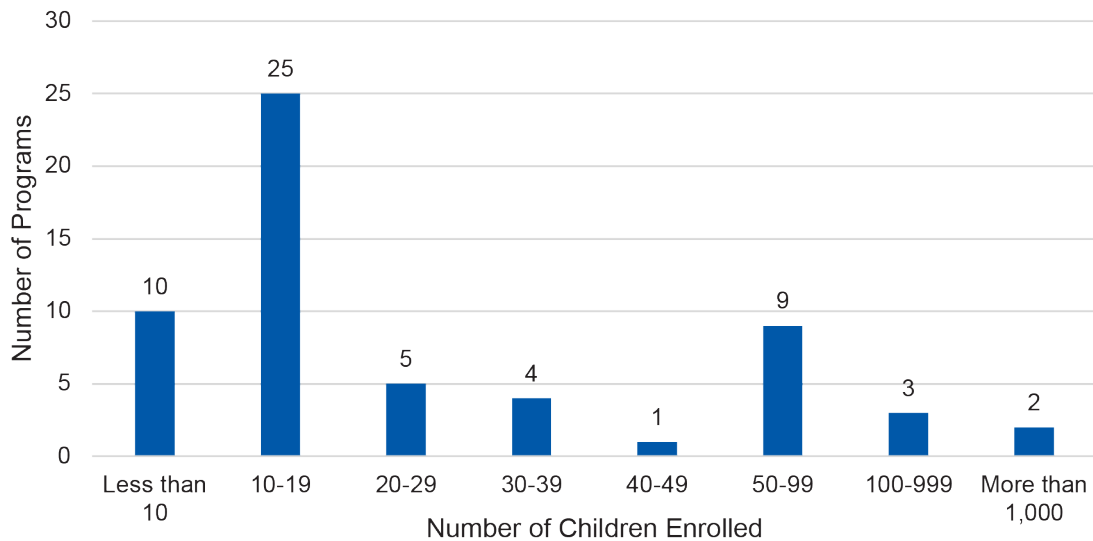
Cost, availability, and trust are major perceived barriers for families seeking childcare, with high costs and limited availability being the most cited issues. Providers also face significant financial strain, with calls for increased state support, better compensation, and improved resources.

## Results

The following information is from a survey (instrument included in appendix at end). Which included a maximum of 14 questions. None of the questions were force-answers, each participant could skip questions they did not wish to answer.

### How many children (including your own) are in your care program? N=59

Of the childcare providers who responded, their sizes varied considerably. For the purpose of this report, “size” refers to the number of children enrolled with the program. The smallest program served 5 children, while the largest served 1500. The most common childcare size was 10-19 with 42.3% of responses.



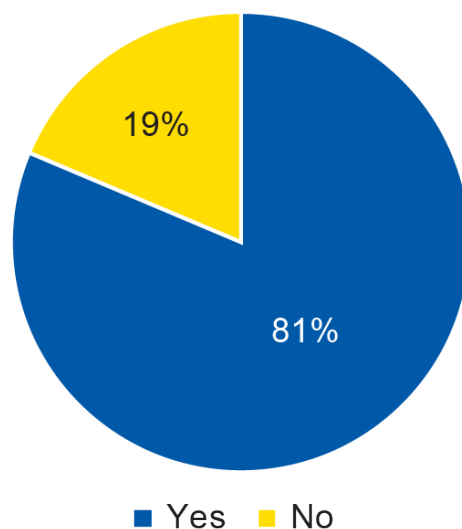
**Figure 1:** Number of children cared for at center

### How long is your waitlist? N=59

Only 11 providers indicated they did not have a waitlist, 48 providers said they did have a waitlist.

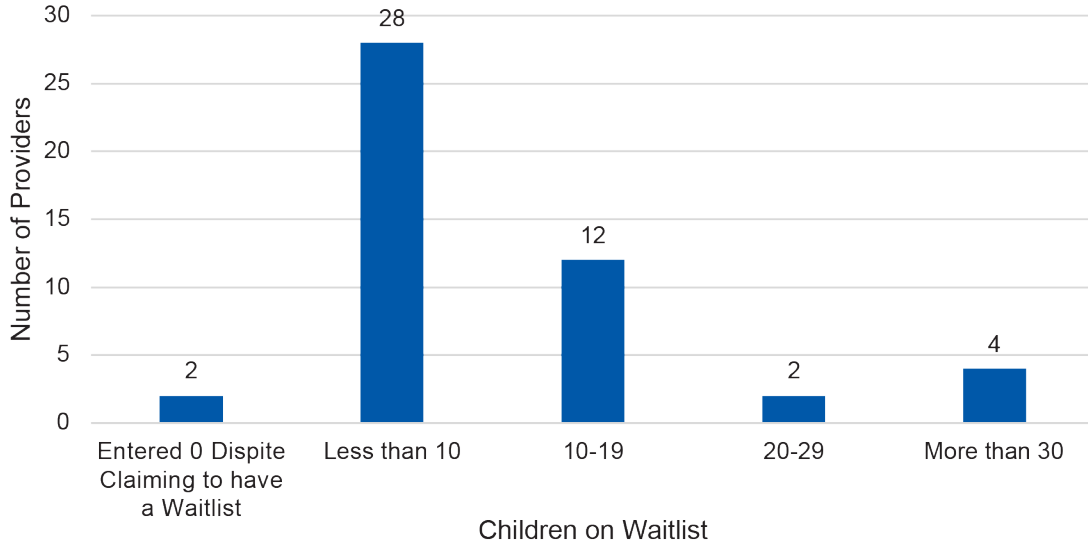
Based on the responses from these providers, the total number of waitlisted children could be as high as 1127.

\*It is important to note, one child may be on multiple waitlists so this number may be larger than the actual number of children needing childcare.



**Figure 2:** Within your childcare program, is there a current waitlist?

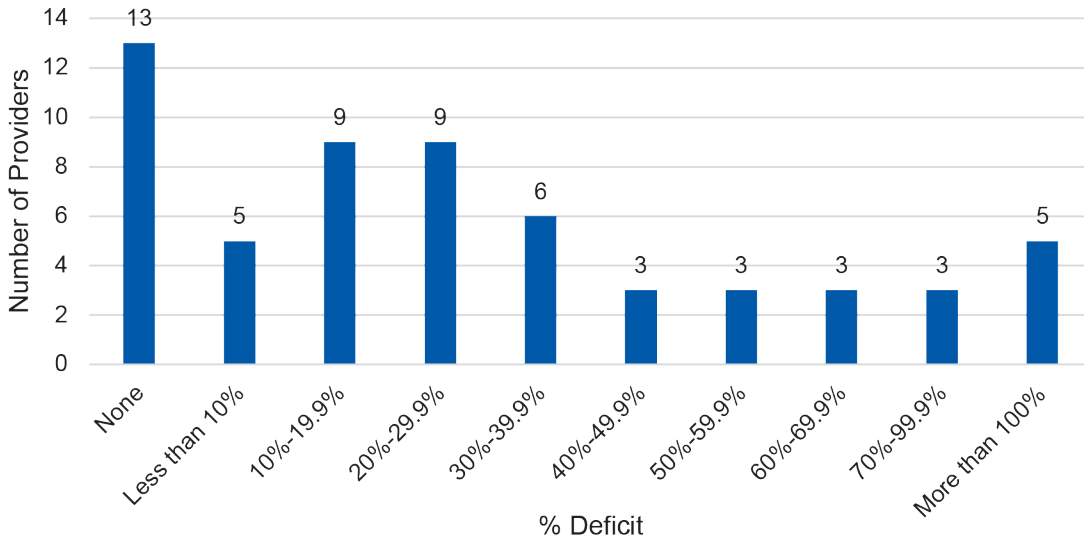
Of those who indicated they did have a waitlist, the length of their waitlists varied.



**Figure 3:** Number of Children on Waitlist

It may be more telling to look at the size of the childcare provider in relation to their waitlist. The figure below shows the availability deficit as a percentage for each provider. For example, if a center cared for five children and had one child on a waitlist their deficit percentage would be 20%. If they cared for 10 and had 10 on their waitlist their deficit percentage would be 100%

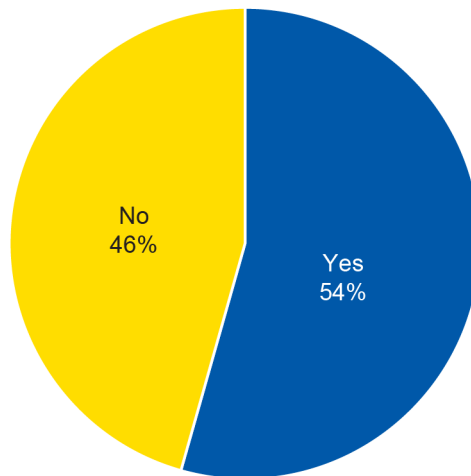
\*It is important to note, there is a possibility one child is currently enrolled with one daycare but is on the waitlist for another.



**Figure 4:** Percent of Deficit of Available Childcare

**Are you a state-registered family child-care provider? N=59**

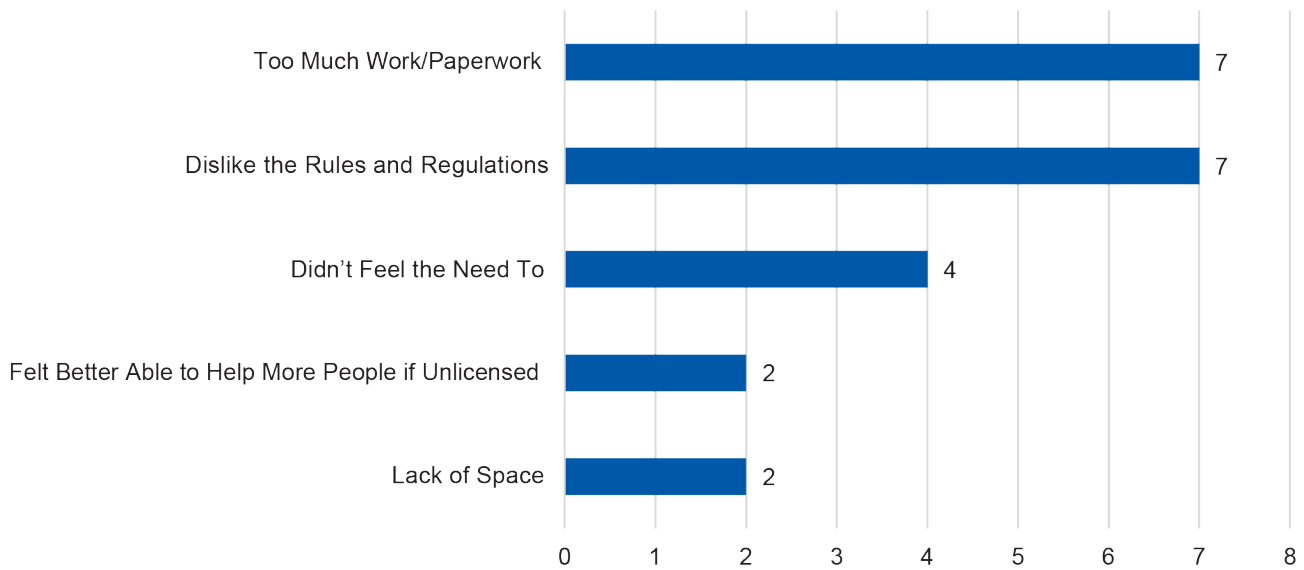
This provider group was split nearly exactly in half when asked if they were state sponsored.



**Figure 5:** Is Your Center State-Registered

**What are your barriers or reasons to not being registered with the Department of Social Services? N=19**

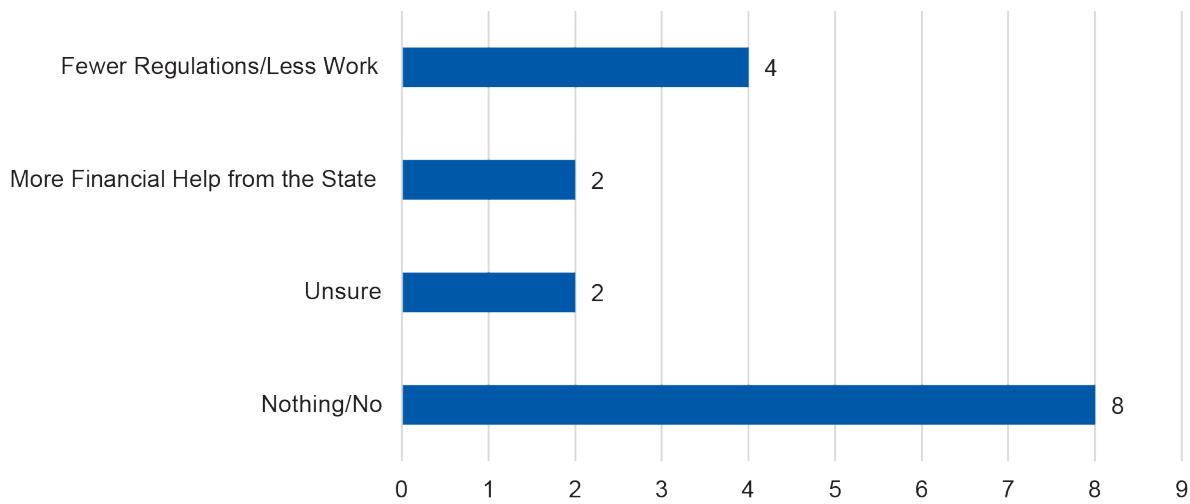
Those who indicated they were not a state-registered family child-care provider were then asked to elaborate in an open-ended text option, 17 out of the 26 who selected no elaborated. This was not a forced question and could be left blank. The chart below organizes themes from the responses. One response may have themes in multiple categories, the chart below will not total 19. With a respondent group this small, sharing a direct quote could identify a specific center which we wis to avoid.



**Figure 6:** Reasoning for not Being Registered

**Do you have solutions in mind for the barriers you previously mentioned? OR What would make being registered with the Department of Social Services more appealing to you? N=17**

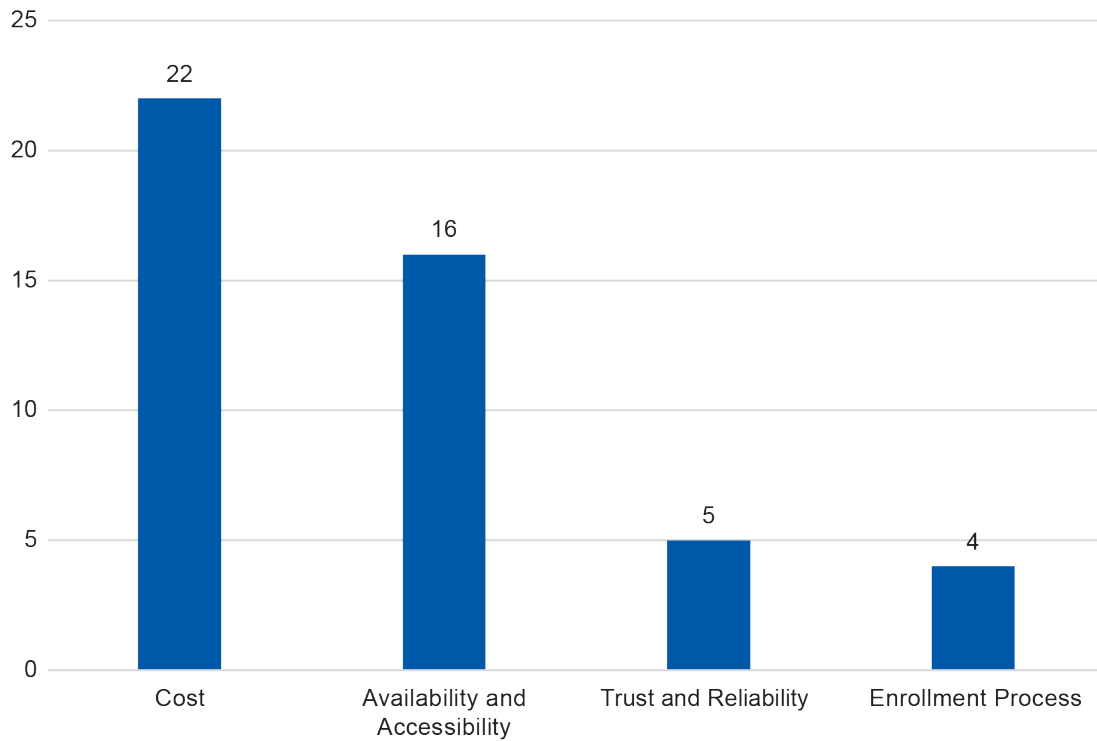
This question was also asked to the unregistered portion of respondents. Seventeen responses were recorded with the following themes being observed:



**Figure 7:** Suggested Solutions

**What barriers do you believe parents have in finding safe and affordable childcare? N=43**

This question was asked to all respondents and was optional, 43 participants responded to this open-ended question. The following themes were observed:



**Figure 8:** Assumed Barriers

Cost (22 occurrences)

- High Costs
- Income Limits for Assistance

Availability and Accessibility (16 occurrences)

- Centers are Full
- Limited Options for Infants
- Provider Constraints

Trust and Reliability (5 occurrences)

- Trust Issues
- Quality Assurance

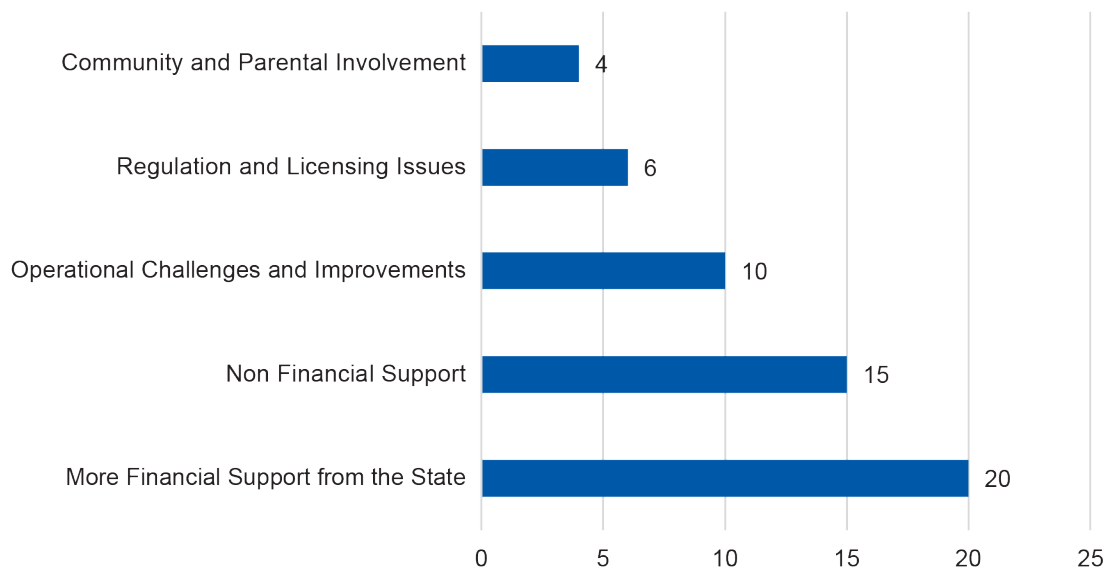
Administrative and Regulatory Issues (4 occurrences)

- Complex Processes to Enroll

### How can your community or state better support you as a childcare provider? N=45

This question was asked to all respondents and was optional, 45 participants responded to this open-ended question. State support was the most common response in both financial and non-financial capacities.

The following themes were observed:



**Figure 9:** Desired Support

More Financial Support from the State (20 occurrences)

- Low Wages/Compensation
- Tuition and Financial Strain on Parents
- Grants and Financial Support
- Benefits and Insurance
- Cost of Food and Supplies

Need for Support (15 occurrences)

- Systemic Support
- Education and Training
- Communication and Resources

Operational Challenges and Improvements (10 occurrences)

- Regulations Based on Age of Children
- Provide Daycare Facilities

Regulation and Licensing Issues (6 occurrences)

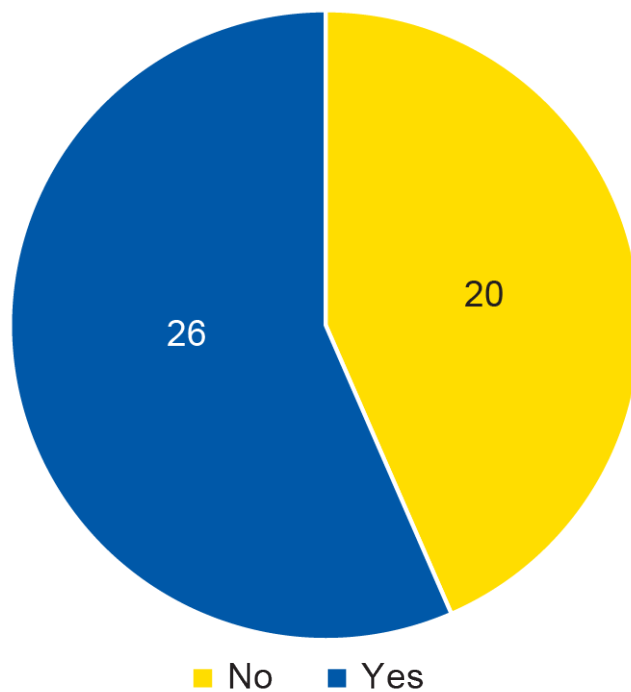
- Need for More Licensing and Regulation
- Need for Less Licensing and Regulation
- Provider Recognition

Community and Parental Involvement (4 occurrences)

- Community Support
- Parental Involvement

**Do you currently accept payments from childcare assistance state or federal funding? N=46**

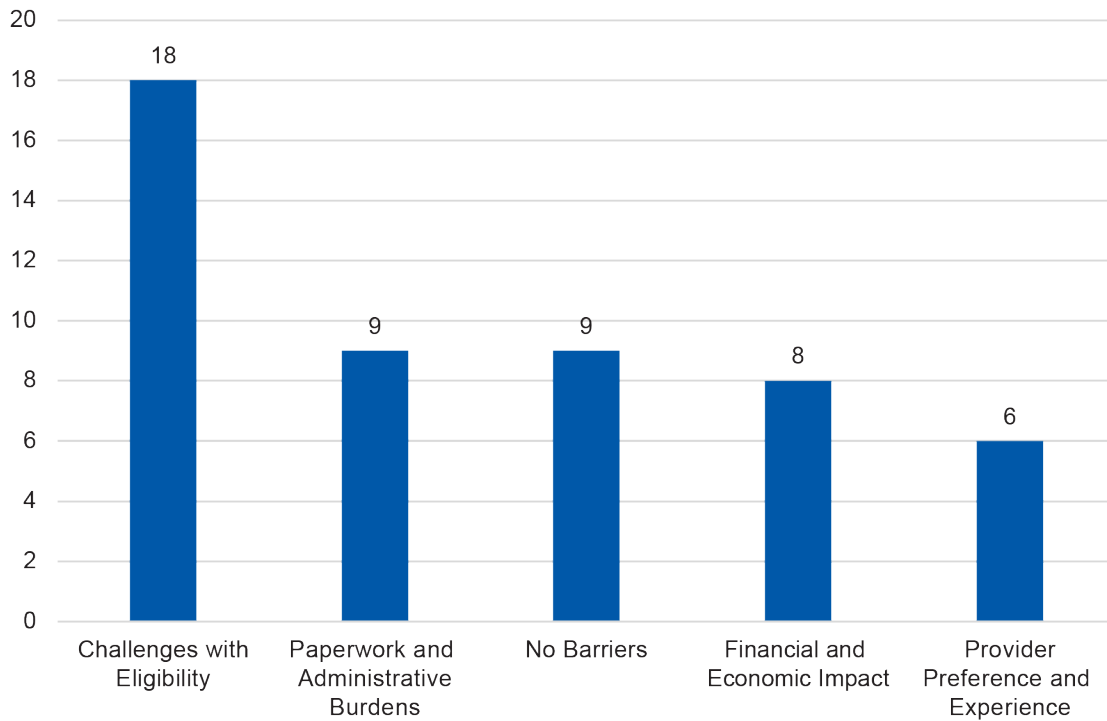
This question was beyond the required questions section and received 46 responses.



**Figure 10:** Acceptance of Childcare Assistance Payments

**Please share any barriers or reasons you or families you work with are not accepting/using payments from childcare assistance state or federal funding? N=38**

This question received a variety of different response types which were sorted by theme.



**Figure 11:** Barriers of State Assistance

Challenges with Eligibility (18 occurrences)

- Eligibility and Qualification Issues
- Child Support Issues

Paperwork and Administrative Burdens (9 occurrences)

No Identified Barriers (9)

Financial and Economic Impact (8 occurrences)

- Providers Not Receiving Enough from State
- Families Not Being Able to Pay Co-Pays

Provider Preferences and Experiences (6 occurrences)

- Would Accept Assistance if Needed
- Negative Previous Experiences

**Is there anything else you would like to share with us in relation to childcare? N=45**

Discontent with Pay and Financial Struggles (14 occurrences)

- Low Wages/Compensation
- Tuition and Financial Strain on Parents
- Lack of Benefits
- Business Financial Struggles

Burnout and Provider Shortages (8 occurrences)

Appreciation for the Profession (6 occurrences)

- Enjoyment and Reward
- Recognition of Importance

Regulation and Licensing Issues (7 occurrences)

- Licensing and Regulation
- Training and Education

Calls for Systemic Change and Support (8 occurrences)

- Need for Systemic Support
- Education and Training Opportunities

Disillusionment and Frustration (5 occurrences)

- Frustration with System
- Disillusionment with the Profession

Specific Community Needs (3 occurrences)

- Local Issues

General Feedback and Neutral Responses (6 occurrences)

## Appendix A – Survey Instrument

The information below represents the survey participants took to collect the data in this report. Respondents took the survey online, so this is not identical to what they saw. Participants were not forced to answer any questions, however, if they skipped certain questions their response was not counted in the reports.



\*This voluntary survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Answers will be held strictly confidential and used only for this study. The results will only be reported in aggregate form and cannot be identified individually. One business owner or household member aged 18 years or older should complete the survey.

What is your zip code? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a childcare provider?

- Yes
- No

How many children (including your own) are in your care program? \_\_\_\_\_

Within your childcare program, is there a current waitlist?

- Yes
- No

How long is your waitlist? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a state-registered family childcare provider?

- Yes
- No

What are your barriers or reasons to not being registered with the Department of Social Services?

Do you have solutions in mind for the barriers you previously mentioned? OR What would make being registered with the Department of Social Services more appealing to you?

What barriers do you believe parents have in finding safe and affordable child care?

How can your community or state better support you as a child care provider?

Do you currently accept payments from childcare assistance state or federal funding?

- Yes
- No

Please share any barriers or reasons you or families you work with are not accepting payments from childcare assistance state or federal funding.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us in relation to childcare?

Thank you for completing the childcare provider portion of this survey! We also have questions for those with children in the home who need childcare, would you like to complete that portion of the survey as well?

- Yes
- No



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