

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kansas Child Care Providers Experience Additional Strain During Pandemic

Hutchinson, Kan. Thursday, October 14, 2021—A timely survey of child care providers across Kansas reveals that during the pandemic providers have experienced increased financial and emotional stress, while relying on less effective COVID-19 mitigation tactics.

To understand how child care providers have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, Child Care Aware of Kansas and the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund (Health Fund) partnered to survey providers from across the state. The survey response represented 28.9% of Kansas child care providers and 97% of counties, with a cross-section of day care homes, group day care homes and day care centers.

The survey found 98.6% of providers have been taking precautions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The most frequent precautions taken included extra cleaning, handwashing and temperature taking. Proven public health measures to mitigate COVID-19 were less prevalent. Nearly half of providers were vaccinating staff. Much less than half were practicing social distancing or masking staff or children. While 61% of providers were requiring staff to be tested after exposure to the virus, only 4% were requiring regular testing as a precaution.

More than 40% of respondents said mandates or requirements would help them implement COVID-19 precautions.

“Stop recommending and start mandating if you want our parents to comply. Recommendations do not work,” shared one child care provider who responded to the survey.

Most programs reported that this time has been extremely stressful and has even caused many to consider closing their centers or home-based programs and seeking other forms of income.

“It has been difficult to continue operating due to wage inflation and the inability to charge what it actually costs to provide a high quality program. We have been able to navigate the changes and we have adapted as needed,” a child care provider shared.

“Prior to the pandemic, Kansas was already suffering from a shortage of child care providers. In 2020, only 3% of counties met desired capacity,” said Kelly Davydov, executive director of Child Care Aware of Kansas. “Child care is essential to our economy and to early childhood development. We need to be adding providers, not seeing them close their homes or centers.”

The most common impacts of the pandemic for child care providers were staffing shortages, strained relationships with families and communities, financial difficulties, and stress and burnout.

“Sustaining quality child care, particularly in rural communities, was a challenge before the pandemic. The pandemic is pushing staff, centers’ viability, and the system to the brink,” said David Jordan, president and CEO of the Health Fund. “It’s clear the crisis is making it tougher to recruit staff, operate centers, and for parents to find quality care. We need to ensure centers have the resources to implement proven public health practices such as masking and vaccinations, as well as have community support.”



Many providers shared that they have experienced emotional stress and burnout from making difficult decisions and implementing additional precautions for the safety of kids, families, and staff.

“The extra stress that providers are experiencing needs to be reduced for their sake and for the children under their care,” said Davydov. “I think their stress naturally impacts young children.”

Providers were asked what they still needed to recover from the pandemic. The most common responses were financial support, clear information, community support, and higher pay for child care workers.

To ensure high-quality child care remains available across Kansas, policymakers and funders can provide financial support tied to specific and proven public health mandates, such as masking, testing or vaccination, in conjunction with educational materials and discussion guides to help maintain positive relationships between providers and families.

“Our children’s health and educational attainment and our state’s economy and future competitiveness depend on Kansas having a strong early childhood system,” said Jordan. “It’s critical we shore up the system in the short term by providing financial relief tied to implementing public health best practices. We also need to make critical investments in the child care sector for the future.”

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About the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund:

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund sparks conversation and action to improve the health and wholeness of Kansans—especially those in rural and under-served communities. Through funding programs and ideas, providing hands-on expertise, and convening influencers, we advance innovative solutions to improve Kansans’ health for generations to come. We steward a \$70 million endowment, which has provided more than \$75 million in grants and program support since our inception in 1986.

About Child Care Aware of Kansas:

Child Care Aware of Kansas designs child care solutions that meet communities, child care providers, and families where they’re at. As a network of partner Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, we provide customized referral services to families, develop innovative training and technical assistance for child care providers, and advocate for positive change that impacts the lives of children and families.

Contact

To learn more about this research, please contact:

David Jordan
President and CEO of United Methodist Health Ministry Fund
(620) 662-8585 | david@healthfund.org

Kelly Davydov
Executive Director of Child Care Aware of Kansas
(785) 823-3343 | kellyd@ks.childcareaware.org