

Brown County Child Care Survey

Data Brief | July 2026

About This Survey

The 2026 Brown County Child Care Survey was developed by Achieve Brown County, Brown County United Way, and Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA).

Conducted from April 28 through July 16, 2026, the survey gathered insights from Brown County employees to better understand how child care impacts families, workplaces, and our community's economy.

Contact Us



Achieve Brown County

achievebrowncounty.org

info@achievebrowncounty.org

920.593.1050



Brown County United Way

browncountyunitedway.org

shruti@browncountyunitedway.org

920.432.3393



WECA Center for Research & Policy

wisconsinearlychildhood.org

info@wisconsinearlychildhood.org

608.240.9880

Brown County Child Care Survey

Data Brief | July 2026

Survey Overview

Achieve Brown County, Brown County United Way, and Wisconsin Early Childhood Association surveyed Brown County employees between April 28, 2026 and July 16, 2026, to better understand how child care access affects families, employers, and the local workforce. The 22-question survey was distributed broadly across Brown County employers and community partners (see Methodology for full distribution detail). **A total of 183 people completed the survey**, including 157 respondents with children living in their household and 26 respondents without children living at home.

Who Responded

Respondents represented a range of household types, though the sample skewed toward full-time workers and higher-income households. Among those children, 52% were for children ages 0–5, 37% were for children ages 6 and older, and 3% reflected a pregnancy or plan to have a child in the next two years. On average, respondents had two children living in the household and reported household income above \$80,000 (75%).



Child Care Landscape in Brown County

Brown County has 135 regulated child care providers: 90 center-based programs, 36 family childcare providers operating out of their homes, and 9 programs run through a public school or licensed camp. Together, these programs offer about 7,900 regulated childcare seats (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, 2026). The county is home to just over 19,000 children ages 5 and under and roughly 25,000 school-age children. 75% of Brown County children live in households where every available adult is in the workforce. This means an estimated 33,164 children need some form of care outside the home. Among children ages 5 and under specifically, 72% live in working-adult households, meaning about 13,700 young children need care (Team3si, 2023). **With 7,900 regulated seats, the county has capacity for barely more than half (58%) of its youngest children who actually need care.** This gap affects more than family budgets: when parents cannot find or afford care, they may miss work, reduce hours, turn down opportunities, or leave the workforce altogether.

Key Findings

135 regulated child care providers	7,900 regulated child care seats	13,700 Children under age 6 need care outside the home
10-30% of household income spent on care	64% considered staying home instead of enrolling in child care	78% household employment impacted by care challenges

84% say cost is a barrier.

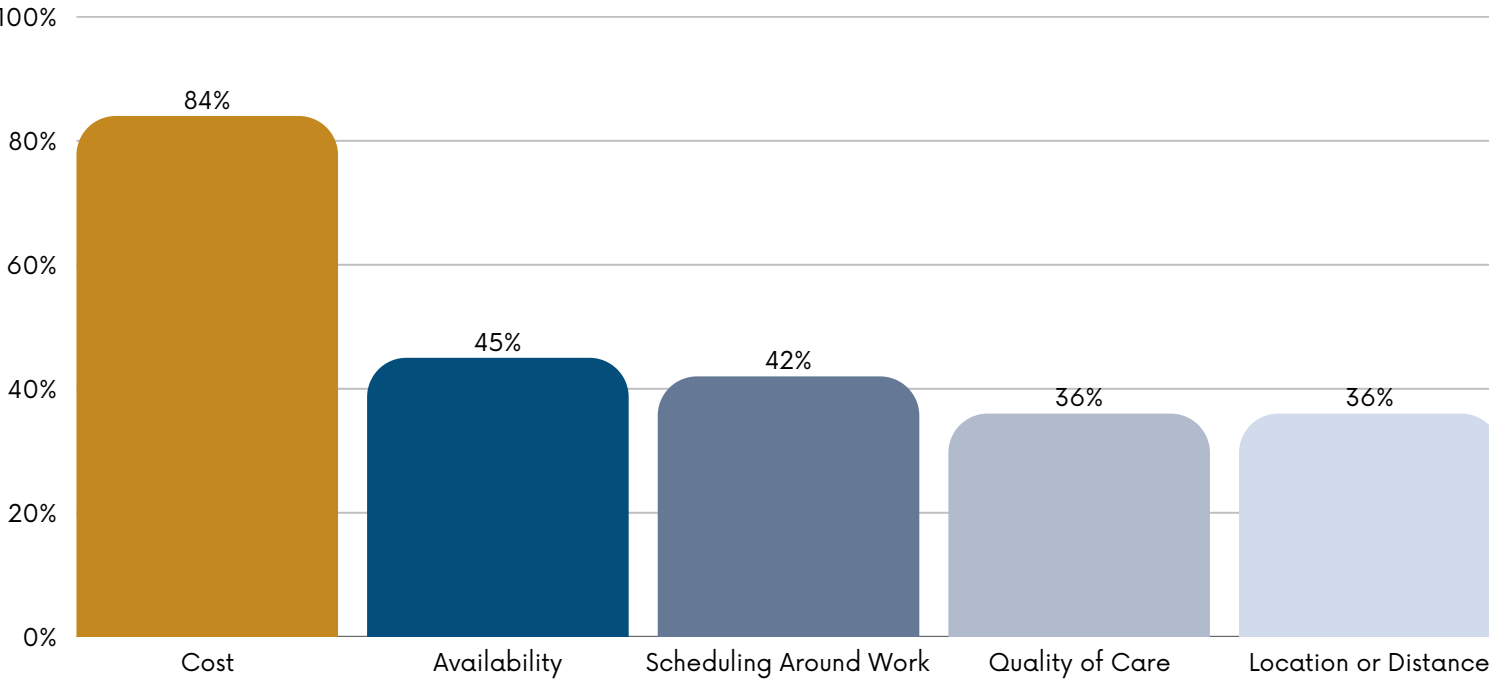
80% agreed employers will face workforce/labor shortages without affordable child care.

The Biggest Child Care Challenges

The survey shows that child care challenges are common across households with children of different ages. Among respondents with children, **roughly 1 in 4 families who need care don't have care that meets their needs.**

For families with children under age 6, the cost burden was especially high: most reported spending between **10% and 30% of household income on child care, well above the federal affordability benchmark of 7% (Haskins, 2026).**

Child Care Challenges Brown County Families Face



What Families Said About Child Care



Sometimes it makes more financial sense for a family member to leave the workforce rather than pay for child care... more people would return to work if they didn't need to weigh the cost of childcare against what they'd be earning."

"We decided that we could not have our second child until our first was getting out of daycare because we could not afford to have two children in daycare at one time."

"I have chosen not to have children at this time largely due to my concerns about access to and affordability of child care."

"Made the decision to quit my job of 9+ years to stay home due to cost of child care."

"Our infant room at our center is upwards of \$1,000 a week per child."

Child Care Impact on Workforce Participation

Employment impacts were widespread. Among respondents with child care needs, **78% reported that access to child care affected their or their partner's employment in the past 12 months**. Employment impacts were widespread. The table below breaks this down by household type: households with at least one child under age 6 (n=100), and households whose children are all age 6 or older (n=26).

Employment Effect	Children Under Age 6 (n=100)	Children Age 6 and Older (n=26)
Took unplanned sick leave	67	10
Took unplanned vacation/PTO due to closures	45	6
Reduced or changed work hours	39	8
Changed job roles for flexibility	20	4
Changed work location for flexibility	11	1
Difficulty managing or hiring a team	9	2
Lost wages due to closures	8	1
Employment not affected	20	8

Note: Households with at least one child under 6 are counted in the "Under Age 6" column even if they also have older children; the "Age 6 and Older" column includes only households where every child is 6 or older.

One of the most serious consequences of child care challenges is the possibility that parents leave the workforce. Across parents of children of all ages, **64% of respondents said they or someone in their immediate family had considered staying home rather than enrolling children in a child care program**. This finding suggests that child care barriers are not only a family issue, but also a workforce issue for Brown County employers. That connection is reflected in employee concerns as well: When asked, 'What is your biggest workplace challenge?' (n=183), 43 respondents identified turnover and retention — more than any other option — followed by growth and development opportunities, 34 respondents and recruiting and hiring (28 respondents).

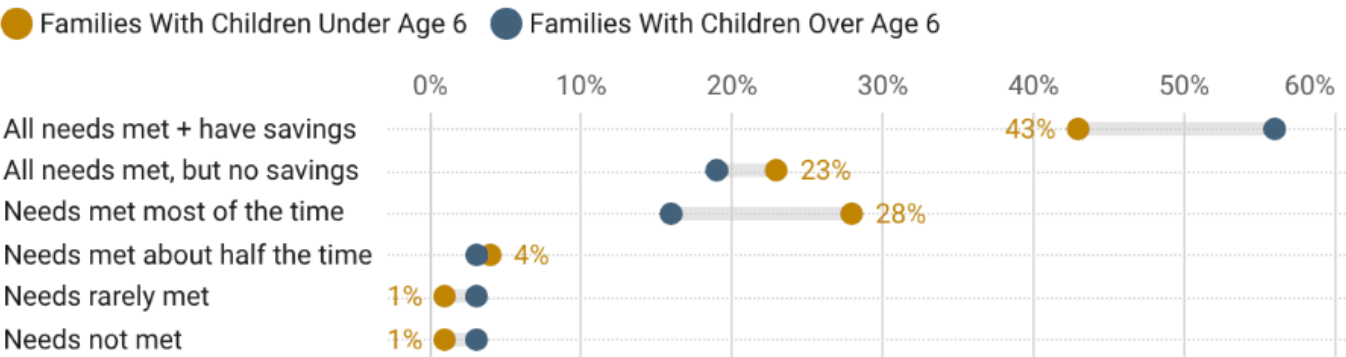
Wisconsin's labor force has stopped growing: baby boomers are retiring faster than young workers can replace them (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, n.d.). The result is a structural labor shortage, and child care and caregiving responsibilities are among the factors keeping potential workers on the sidelines (Boyce & Deller, 2025; Corona et al., 2024). Expanding child care access is one of the few ways to grow the local labor supply, alongside retaining older workers and attracting new residents.

Child Care Impacts Economy

When parents reduce hours or leave work because child care is unavailable or unaffordable, the cost can extend far beyond a single paycheck. So common, there is a term for the **financial impact that weighs on working mothers called the “motherhood penalty” in which mothers earn 63 cents to every dollar fathers make** (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2024). Over a lifetime, this impacts retirement and overall savings significantly. Among survey respondents with a child under age 6 (n=103), **35 respondents (30%) shared that they don't always have their financial needs met**, and another **24 respondents (23%) said while they do make ends meet, they have no savings for the future or the unexpected**.

This has a ripple effect across the county: lost earnings mean less local spending and less tax revenue. All told, the Child Care Trust **estimates an economic impact of \$334 M in Brown County due to lack of affordable child care** (2025). This finding suggests that child care barriers are not only a family issue, but also a workforce issue for Brown County employers. That connection is reflected in employee concerns as well: when asked, 'What is your biggest workplace challenge?' (n=183), **43 respondents identified turnover and retention** — more than any other option — followed by growth and development opportunities, **34 respondents and recruiting and hiring 28 respondents**.

Does your household struggle to meet your financial needs?



28%

of families with children under age 6 shared that they don’t always have their financial needs met

23%

said while they do make ends meet, they have no savings for the future or the unexpected

-\$334 M

Child Care Trust estimates an economic impact of \$334M in Brown County due to lack of affordable childcare (2025)

Looking Across the Data

Parents Know What They Need

“Having a childcare that is both affordable, dependable, and safe. Childcare workers are underpaid and because of this many centers struggle to attract and retain safe, caring professionals.”

“Universal childcare, eliminating the high cost of tuition.”

“More people would return to work if they didn't need to weigh the cost of childcare against what they'd be earning.”

“It is very important to us that our children are getting age appropriate care/education.”

“Affordable, quality summer care.”

“our most important factor is making sure we feel comfortable with where our children are located.”

This data shows that child care is a major workforce issue for local families and employers. High costs, limited availability, and scheduling challenges are causing parents to miss work, reduce hours, reconsider employment, and delay family decisions. These pressures are especially significant for households with young children, but they are not limited to one age group or income level.

Addressing child care access and affordability should be considered part of Brown County's broader workforce strategy. Expanding reliable, affordable care would help parents remain in the workforce, support employer recruitment and retention, and strengthen the county's long-term economic stability. Indeed, 80.3% of respondents with children in the household (126 of 157) and 76.9% of respondents without children (20 of 26) agreed that employers will face workforce or labor shortages without access to affordable child care. So, almost **80% overall (146 of 183) think that access to affordable child care is critical to preventing workforce shortages.**

Moving Forward

Child care in Brown County is an element of workforce infrastructure. With a regulated supply that meets only a fraction of families' need, a tight labor market, and employers experiencing a labor shortage, every parent kept in the workforce matters. Achieve Brown County, Brown County United Way, and the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association will use these survey results to guide community investment, inform employer engagement, and advocate for solutions that expand affordable, high-quality care for Brown County families.

Methodology

The Brown County Child Care Survey was conducted using i-CResults, an online survey and outcomes measurement platform. The survey consisted of 22 questions covering household composition, childcare needs and barriers, employment impact, household finances, employer/industry context, geography, and optional demographic self-disclosure. Two questions were open-ended free response; the remaining questions were single-select or multi-select multiple choice.

The survey collected 313 total responses, of which 183 were completed (58.5%); the remaining 130 were abandoned at 0% completion and excluded from analysis. No duplicate submissions were identified. In addition to the income skew noted above, respondents were concentrated in nonprofit, education, health, and government employment (72% combined), so results skew toward those sectors. The survey was distributed via employer partners, community organizations, social media posts, and other outreach channels.

Response Summary

Metric	Count / Rate
Total survey response	313
Completed (Submitted) responses	183 (58.5% of starts)
Abandoned at 0% complete	130 (41.5% of starts)
Respondents with children in household	157 (85.8% of completed responses)
Respondents without children in household	26 (14.2% of completed responses)

The survey collected employer name (free text) and an optional free-text field for respondents to share personal characteristics (examples: ethnicity, religion, veteran status, ability, tribe). Individual survey responses, including employer name and any characteristics shared, are not published or shared publicly.

Resources

Boyce, M., & Deller, S. (2025). WIndicators: Labor shortages, productivity, and economic growth in Wisconsin. University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension.

<https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/articles/windicators-labor-shortages-productivity-and-economic-growth-in-wisconsin/>

Child Care Trust (2025). Child care deserts by ZIP code. Child Care Gap. <https://childcaregap.org>

Corona, C., Zumbrunnen, C., & Conroy, T. (2024). WIndicators Volume 6, Number 2: The role of childcare in the labor market: A long-run perspective. University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension.

<https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/articles/windicators-volume-6-number-2-the-role-of-childcare-in-the-labor-market-a-long-run-perspective/>

Haskins, G. (2026, July 2). As child care costs skyrocket, states need a new approach to help working families. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/states-of-affordability-child-care/>

Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2024). Motherhood Is Hard—Pay Penalties Make It Harder.

<https://iwpr.org/articles/motherhood-is-hard-pay-penalties-make-it-harder/>

Team3si. (2023). CUSP Public: Child population and demographic data. Third Sector Intelligence, Inc.

<https://team3si.com/public/>

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2026a). Civilian labor force in Brown County, WI [Data series WIBROW9LFN]. FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Retrieved July 24, 2026, from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/WIBROW9LFN>

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2026b, March 18). County employment and wages in Wisconsin — Third quarter 2025.

https://www.bls.gov/regions/midwest/news-release/2026/countyemploymentandwages_wisconsin_20260318.htm

Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. (2025). Brown County workforce profile.

https://www.jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/wits_info/downloads/CP/brown_profile.pdf

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. (2026). Child Care Provider Trends Over Time Dashboard [June 2026 data]. State of Wisconsin.

[https://bi.wisconsin.gov/t/DCF/views/Child careProvider/TrendsOverTime](https://bi.wisconsin.gov/t/DCF/views/Child%20careProvider/TrendsOverTime)

Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. (n.d.). Labor supply projections for Wisconsin 2020–2040.

https://jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/wits_info/downloads/pdf/laborsupplyreport.pdf

Contact us



Achieve Brown County
info@achievebrowncounty.org
920.593.1050



Brown County United Way
shruti@browncountyunitedway.org
920.432.3393



WECA Center for Research & Policy
info@wisconsinearlychildhood.org
608.240.9880

Full Survey Question List

All 22 questions as administered via i-CResults. Multiple choice questions allowed either one answer or multiple answers, as noted; two questions were open text.

#	Question	Type	n Responded
1	How many children live in your household, either all the time or some of the time?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	183
2	What are the age ranges of the children in your household (whether they live there all the time or some of the time)? Choose all that apply.	Multiple Choice (Multiple Answers)	183
3	Do you currently have child care that meets your needs?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	183
4	Which of the following describes the kinds of child care options you have or need now or in the next year? Choose all that apply.	Multiple Choice (Multiple Answers)	128
5	How far is your child care from your home or place of employment (whichever location was most important in making a child care decision)?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	128
6	Which of the following are, or have been, barriers to accessing the child care you need? Choose all that apply.	Multiple Choice (Multiple Answers)	128
7	In the last 12 months, has access to child care affected your employment (or your partner's employment, if applicable) in any of the following ways? Choose all that apply.	Multiple Choice (Multiple Answers)	128
8	Have you or someone in your immediate family considered staying home, rather than entering your child(ren) into a child care program?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	183
9	What is one thing that would make it easier for you (or your coworkers, friends, family members) to manage child care and work?	Text (open response)	146
10	Without access to affordable child care, my employer will face workforce/labor shortages now and in the future.	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	183
11	Please share anything else you would like us to know about your child care needs and decisions you have made regarding selecting a child care provider.	Text (open response)	84
12	What is your yearly household income?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	183
13	What percentage of your household income goes toward child care?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	128
14	Do you work full-time or part-time?	Multiple Choice (Multiple Answers)	183
15	In what industry are you primarily employed?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	183
16	At what company are you employed?	Text (open response)	83
17	What is your biggest workplace challenge?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	183
18	Does your household struggle to meet your financial needs?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	183
19	Which of the following expenses keep you from saving or feeling financially stable?	Multiple Choice (Multiple Answers)	101
20	What is your zip code where you live?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	183
21	What is your zip code where you work?	Multiple Choice (One Answer)	183
22	Please share any characteristics that you are proud of and want to celebrate. Examples: ethnicity, religion, veteran status, ability, tribe, etc.	Text (open response)	37