

# Contra Costa Early Childhood System Map

A visual and strategic tool for understanding  
and strengthening our early childhood system

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# What is the System Map?

A one-stop, interactive synthesis of:

- Program-level data
- Public data for our county and state
- Family and provider perspectives

Early Childhood Systems Map  
Contra Costa County, CA

Introduction & Approach   Community Context   Healthy Beginnings   Strong, Supported Families   Quality Early Childhood Programs   Early Childhood Workforce   Funding, Governance, & Collaboration

This map of Contra Costa County provides a comprehensive picture of the early childhood system, looking at health and wellbeing, family support, early childhood programs, workforce, funding, and cross-system collaboration. Using the systems map, Contra Costa's partners - early childhood agencies, families, and providers - can effectively collaborate; improve policies and systems; facilitate informed decision-making; and plan strategically to improve outcomes for young children and their families.

**FIRST5**  
CONTRA COSTA

JULY 2025

# Why the System Map was Created



To turn data into insights  
and insights into action

- Early childhood ecosystem is cross-sector and complex.
- The map supports decision-makers, funders, and providers in aligning efforts, improving access, and driving equity.

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# Who was involved?



## Start Early Consulting

Led the design and data synthesis for the Contra Costa Early Childhood System Map, bringing expertise in cross-system analysis and visualization.



## First 5 Contra Costa

Commissioned and guided the project, ensuring that the map reflects local priorities, family experiences, and the county's broader vision for an equitable, family-centered early childhood system.



## Advisory Group

Provided critical input throughout the process, validating findings, surfacing real-world perspectives, and ensuring the map's relevance and usability across sectors.

# How the System Map was Created



Aligned with local leaders and providers



Compiled local program and public datasets



Gathered input from families and providers



Compared findings to state benchmarks



Validated with partners



# What's Inside



Community Context



Healthy Beginnings



Strong, Supported Families



Quality Early Childhood Programs



Early Childhood Workforce



Funding & Governance



Program Profiles

Early Childhood Systems Map

## Contra Costa County, CA



Introduction  
& Approach



Community  
Context



Healthy  
Beginnings



Strong,  
Supported  
Families



Quality Early  
Childhood  
Programs



Early  
Childhood  
Workforce



Funding,  
Governance, &  
Collaboration



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JULY 2025

# Let's strengthen the early childhood system together.

[bit.ly/early-childhood-system-map](https://bit.ly/early-childhood-system-map)

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# Parent Employment And Family Income

Financial security and economic mobility depend on parent employment and the ability to earn a living wage. Examining living wage, minimum wage, and median income for single parent households and other households with children provides additional context on the challenges families facing. All parents in the household working indicates a need for child care, though parent unemployment may be due to a lack of affordable child care.

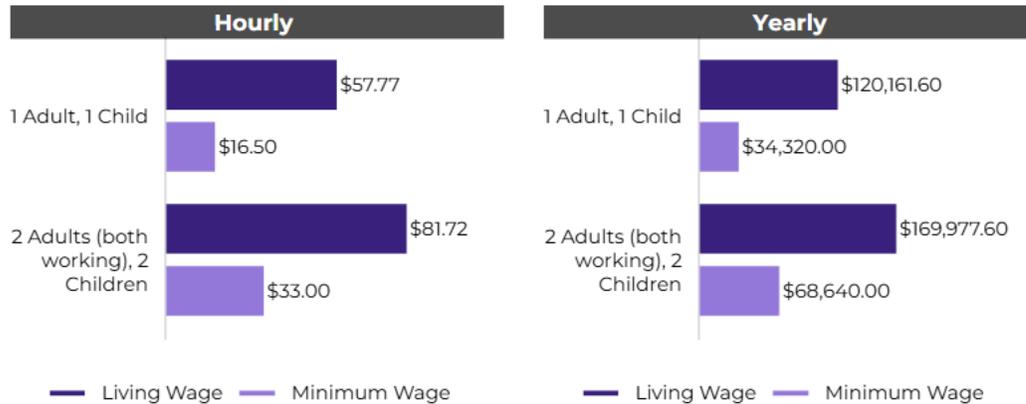
## Parent Employment (2023)<sup>1</sup>



Many working families still make too little to meet minimum standards of living. Therefore, it is important to consider a living wage. This is what a full-time worker must earn to cover their family's basic needs where they live but still remain self-sufficient. The living wage considers the costs of food, child care, health care, housing, transportation, civic engagement, internet and mobile, and other necessities such as clothes, personal care, and household supplies.

71% of children have all available parents in household working.

## Living Wage vs. Minimum Wage (2022)<sup>2</sup>



## Median Family Income (2023)<sup>3</sup>

Families	Median Income
All Households with Children under 18	\$154,056
Single Male Householder, with Children under 18	\$93,224
Single Female Householder, with Children under 18	\$55,601

**16%** of children in the county live in single-parent families<sup>4</sup>

[See references](#) →



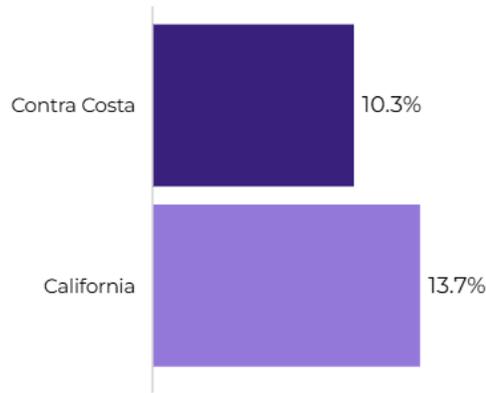
# Food Security And Assistance

Children need adequate nutrition to ensure their physical and cognitive development. Furthermore, parents and other family leaders need to feel confident that they are able to put food on the family table so that they do not feel stress that impacts their ability to bond with and support their child's well-being.

## California Households With Children Reporting Not Enough Food in Last 7 Days (Sept 2024)<sup>8</sup>



## Food Insecurity Under 18 (2023)<sup>9</sup>



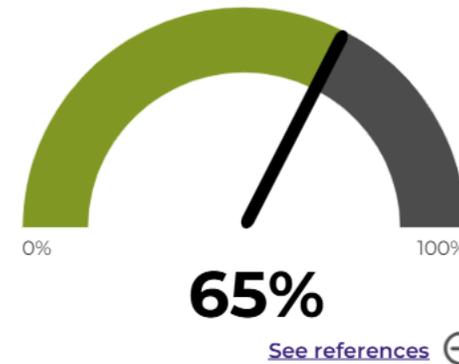
## Daily Food Gap (2025)<sup>10</sup>

	Contra Costa	California
Estimated Daily Food Cost	\$12.24	\$11.44
Daily CalFresh Benefit	\$6.47	\$6.29
Daily Food Gap	\$5.77	\$5.15

CalFresh (federally known as SNAP) is California's implementation of a federal assistance program that supports low-income individuals and families to afford nutritious food. Eligibility is based on factors such as income, household size, and expenses. In Contra Costa, CalFresh estimates that only 65% of the families eligible are served, indicating there is still work to be done.

**While Contra Costa experiences less food insecurity than California as a whole, the county's high cost of living negatively impacts the availability of affordable food.** 9.5% of the county is receiving CalFresh; however, the daily food gap is much larger in the county than the state, meaning assistance alone may not be enough. As evidence, the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano serves about 65,000 households a month<sup>12</sup>. The current federal environment also threatens social safety nets, which could increase food insecurity in the county.

## Contra Costa CDSS CalFresh Program Reach Index (2021)<sup>11</sup>





# Child Care Affordability

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services advises that child care should cost no more than 7% of a household's income. Costs vary and are more expensive for younger children and in centers vs. family child care homes. Some families rely on child care subsidy programs to afford care; however, there is still a significant gap, both for eligible families who are unserved and for income ineligible families who might have to pay 15-30% or more of their income for care. When child care is unaffordable (and paid family leave is unavailable or limited), families may resort to unsafe or low quality options for care, or they may forego employment, decreasing their financial security and economic mobility.

## Child Care Costs (Jun 2025)<sup>12</sup>



Children in Care	Average Cost: Family Child Care Home (Annually)	Average Cost: Child Care Center (Annually)
Infant	\$18,084	\$24,240
Preschooler	\$16,992	\$18,564
Infant and Preschooler	\$35,076	\$42,804

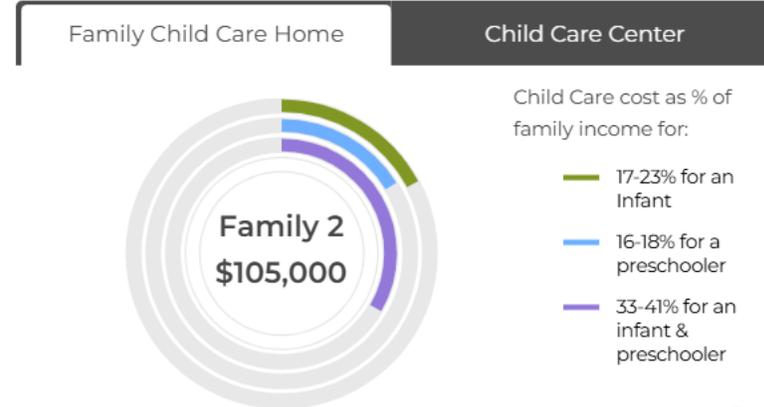
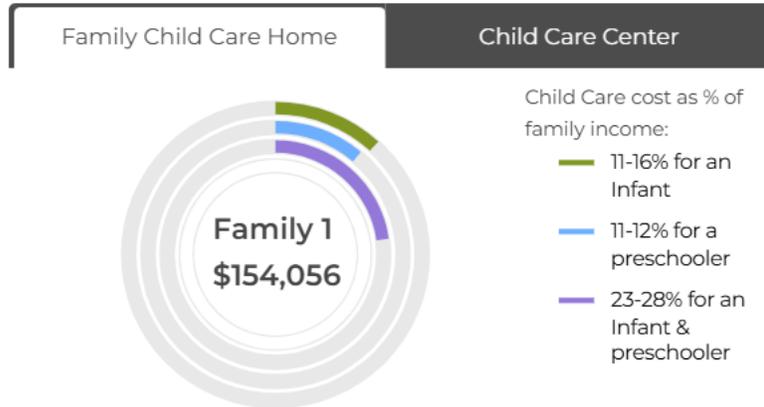
## Child Care Costs as Portion of Income (Jun 2025)<sup>13, 14</sup>

### Family 1

Family of 4 with a household income of **\$154,056**, the median for the county.

### Family 2

Family of 4 with a household income of **\$105,000**, just over income eligibility for child care assistance.



[See references](#) →



# Key Insights — Strengths and Opportunities

Each community has strengths and opportunities to improve their systems and services to support families. Family experiences and provider perspectives are central to the analysis of the data regarding equitable access, experiences of quality, and outcomes regarding family economic security and mental health.

## Strengths Opportunities



**Libraries are a huge source of support, connection, and resource referral** named by nearly all focus group and interview participants.



**First 5 Contra Costa and First 5 Centers were widely praised for their consistent presence and practical supports**—from parenting classes and playgroups to diapers, referrals to other community resources, and emotional encouragement.



**Families shared that access to food support was relatively strong in Contra Costa**, with many citing CalFresh, WIC, food pantries, and food distribution through churches and community organizations as helpful and easy to use.



**Parents are proactive and resourceful** in seeking out community activities and supports for their children, even when formal systems were limited.



I would say I'm most proud of just being able to connect people to those resources...There's just not a lot of information on what is available and how to access them, and so I'm proud of being able to connect people.

**- Head Start Teacher**

I feel like this is not a food desert. If people are looking for help, there are food [resources] out there. No one ever needs to be hungry in Contra Costa.

**-Contra Costa Mom**



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## Strengths

## Opportunities



**Other families shared that they were unable to access programs like WIC or CalFresh due to income cutoffs, even though they were not financially secure or going through a period of unemployment.** This made supports feel out of reach for families who were just above the eligibility line.



**Families in East County and unincorporated areas reported limited access to basic infrastructure,** including parks and child-friendly spaces, making it hard for children to play or participate in community life.



**Parents have to reduce hours, leave the workforce, or work while simultaneously caring for their children due to the high cost of child care.**



**The high cost of living - especially housing - was a major stressor for all families.** Families described being on housing waitlists for years or unsure how to even begin navigating available housing supports.



**The size of the county and lack of transportation options made it difficult for some families to access services and supports.** Parents described long drives or lack of local programs in their area.



**It can be difficult to learn about or access available family support services.** Families felt unsure about where to go to find trusted information and often learned about programs through word of mouth.

“

The county of Contra Costa is so big. Like, there is a diaper bank, but it's in Concord, so if you're in El Sobrante or you're in Richmond, if your mobility is limited, your care for your kids is limited, that's not really accessible to me...Transportation is really limited here versus if you live in Alameda County or San Francisco County, where it's really efficient to get around.

”

-Mom in El Sobrante