

IN THE KNOW: CARING WORKFORCE

The caring workforce is critical to fostering robust communities and a strong economy. Comprised of teachers, child care workers, and direct care workers (those who support older adults and those with disabilities), care workers provide essential services that ensure the health and well-being of our loved ones.

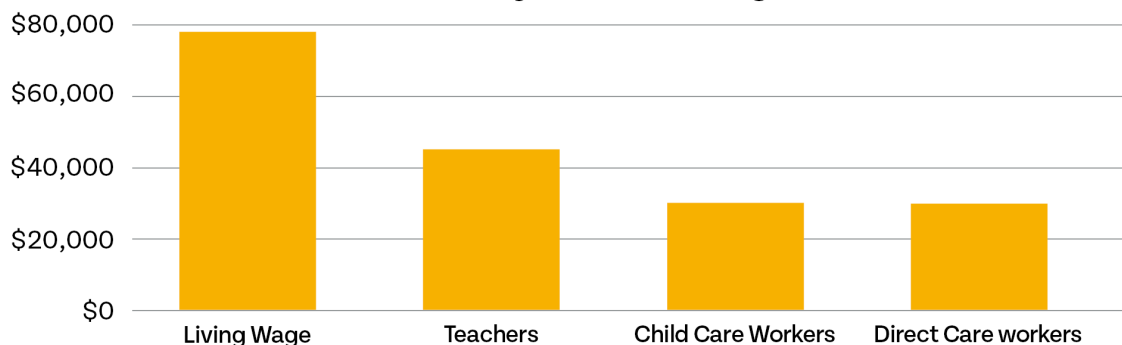
Despite its importance, this workforce is in a state of crisis, due in-part to sustained under-investment. The impacts of this crisis are felt not only by individual workers, but also by the thousands of Coloradans who depend upon the care these individuals provide.

In addition to sharing the commonality of providing hands-on-care, **the different professions within the caring workforce are connected by several overarching similarities:**



Inadequate wages – Colorado’s caring workforce is compensated at very low rates. The chart below shows how median wages for caring professions compare with what’s needed to support a household comprised of a single adult with one child.

Median Yearly Care Worker Wages

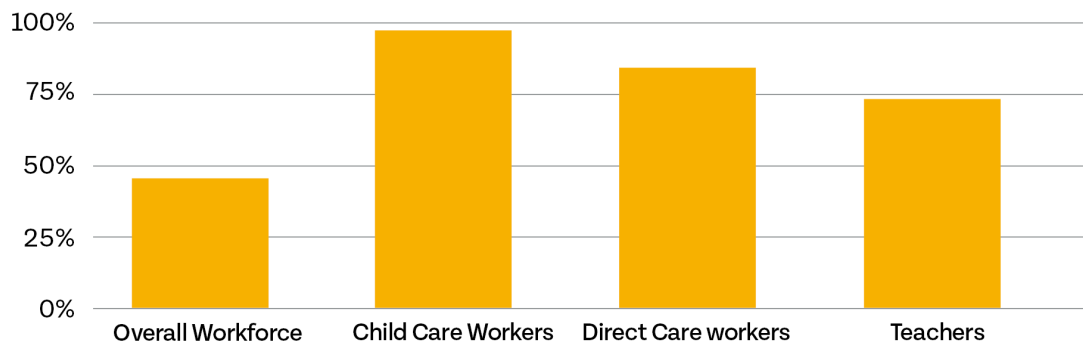


Sources: Living wages, MIT’s Living wage calculator; teachers, Chalkbeat; child and direct care workers, US Bureau of Labor Statistics



Female dominated – Women have long occupied the caring economy. As showcased below, this remains true today. The overrepresentation of women in caring professions contribute to the field’s low wages and continued struggle for public investment and support.

Women as a % of Colorado’s Caring Workforce



Sources: Overall workforce, State Demographer Office; early child care workforce, CPR; direct care workers, Bell Policy Center; teachers, Colorado Sun



Workforce shortages – Stemming from a host of factors including low wages, poor benefits, and challenging workplace conditions, our caring economy is tremendously understaffed. Workforce shortages have led to efforts to entice retirees back into the teaching profession, raised concerns about the implementation of Colorado’s new universal preschool program, and created untenable wait times for in-home direct care services.



Reliance on public support – Finally, each of these professions are dependent upon public funding. Schools—including teacher salaries—are primarily paid for with a combination of state and local taxes. Direct care services are largely funded through Medicaid, a joint state/federal program. And child care for many families is subsidized with a mix of state, federal, and local dollars. In practice, this means the well-being of our caring workforce is intricately connected to public investments and our state’s fiscal health.

Care workers are pivotal to the health and prosperity of our communities. Their work underlies a strong economy and the well-being of countless families across Colorado. Yet, this workforce is struggling. As a state, however, we can enact public policies that reverse this tide and recognize the immense value and contribution of these workers.

Key Context

- The vast majority of Coloradans want to remain in their homes and communities as they age. However, in order to do so, most individuals will need some type of assistance. Direct care workers can provide this support by helping with everyday tasks such as bathing, dressing, and meal preparation.
- The need for direct care workers has intensified with the aging of Colorado’s population. In order to simply keep pace with our demographic changes, by 2030, we will need to grow our direct care workforce by 40 percent.
- Our lack of child care workers plays a significant role in the statewide challenge to find affordable child care. Providers can’t expand services if they aren’t able to adequately staff their facilities. Currently, there are only enough licensed spots for approximately 80 percent of children under six.
- Women’s workforce participation dropped significantly during the COVID pandemic, due in part to a reduction in child care options. This showcases what we already knew: the availability of meaningful, accessible child care impacts women’s workforce participation and economic security.
- A survey of Colorado Education Association members finds that over two-thirds of educators considered leaving the profession in 2021. Feelings of being undervalued and underpaid fueled their considerations.