



2026 HIGHLIGHTS

Economic Security

One in four children are economically disadvantaged.

About 24% of Colorado kids live below 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL). This is the eligibility for the National School Lunch Program, the threshold used by the Colorado Department of Education to identify students as economically disadvantaged.

Single-parent households are almost four times as likely to experience financial hardship as married households.

About 60% of single-parent households with children do not make enough money to afford all of their basic needs, compared with 16% of married households with children.

Medicaid and the Child Health Plan *Plus* (CHP+) serve more than 600,000 kids, many of whom are also participating in other federal programs.

Federal programs help a significant number of children and their families afford food, child care, health care, and other everyday needs. Medicaid and CHP+ are the largest programs, serving 616,257 children.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey; United For ALICE; Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing

Child Welfare

Very few referrals lead to substantiated findings of abuse or neglect.

Among the roughly 118,000 reports of suspected abuse or neglect, 26% lead to an investigation and about 2% lead to a substantiated finding.

Almost half of children in foster care are living with a close family member or friend.

About 46% of children in foster care are in kinship care, living with a close relative or family friend to maintain greater stability and connection to their community.

Foster youth graduate at significantly lower rates than their peers.

Less than half of foster youth (45%) graduated high school on time compared to 86% of all students. Graduation rates among foster youth are improving but remain the lowest of any group tracked by the state.

Source: Colorado Department of Human Services

Health

One in three 2-year-olds in Colorado are not fully vaccinated.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends seven vaccines for children by the time they are 18 months. About 34% of kids born in 2021 still had not received all recommended vaccinations by 24 months.

Medicaid and Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+) served 10% fewer children in the last year, and the uninsured rate doubled among low-income children.

In Colorado Fiscal Year 2024-25, Medicaid and CHP+ served a combined total of 616,257 children – about 70,000 fewer kids than the year prior. At the same time, the share of children living below 150% FPL without health insurance doubled from between 4% and 5% to 10%.

About 70% of kids cannot easily access pediatric primary care.

Seven in ten Colorado kids live in neighborhoods that do not have enough pediatric providers. Access is the worst in rural communities.

Sources: Children's Hospital Colorado; Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing; Public Reference Bureau; Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Early Childhood

Colorado does not have enough licensed care to serve all infants and toddlers.

There are enough licensed child care seats to serve just 13% of infants and 29% of toddlers. While not all families are looking for licensed centers or homes, most do not even have the option.

When seats are available, many families cannot afford them.

At least half of Colorado families would need to spend 33% or more of their income to send two kids to licensed child care. Families experiencing poverty do not have enough money to cover the cost of care.

More than 9,000 families are on a waitlist or in an enrollment freeze for child care subsidies.

The Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) helps low-income working families afford child care. But due to funding constraints, thousands of families who cannot afford child care are waiting for help.

Sources: Colorado Department of Early Childhood; University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute

K-12 Education

Six in ten third graders do not read or write on grade level.

About 58% of third graders do not meet academic expectations in English language arts. Rates remain similarly high through eighth grade.

There are significant disparities in academic achievement by race, ethnicity, and income.

Black, Hispanic and Latino students and students from low-income households are significantly less likely to meet academic expectations in English and math. For example, 74% of economically disadvantaged eighth graders do not meet expectations in English language arts compared to 45% of students from higher-income households.

Nearly 30% of students are chronically absent.

Almost 245,000 K-12 students (28%) are chronically absent, defined as missing 10% or more of the school year.

Source: Colorado Department of Education