

+ Investing in Arizona's Babies:

Investing in Arizona's Babies: The Case for High-Quality Early Childhood Education (Prenatal to Age 3)

Early childhood education is key to lifelong success. Yet many Latino infants and toddlers in Arizona lack access to high-quality, affordable services. The first three years of life are a critical window for learning. The brain grows from about 25% of its adult volume at birth to nearly 85% by age 3, making access to equitable, high-quality prenatal to age 3 (PN-3) services essential for all Latino children.

Why the PN-3 Years Matter

- A [baby's brain reaches about 80%-85% of its adult volume](#) by age 3 and 90% by age 5.
- [More than one million neural connections form](#) every second in early childhood.
- Research shows [early caregiving quality is associated with positive school readiness](#) and long-term educational outcomes.

Arizona's Child Care Landscape: Progress and Strengths

- Arizona has approximately [4,600 licensed child care providers](#) serving infants from birth through school age.
- [Arizona Head Start programs serve about 17,000 children](#) annually across the state.
- [First Things First Arizona](#) funds early childhood services that have reached more than 300,000 children since 2007.

Who Arizona's Babies Are: The Demographic Realities

- Arizona is home to about [325,000 children ages 0 to 3](#).
- Almost [half of children between birth and age 5 in Arizona are Latino](#).
- About [half of all Latino children are U.S.-born children of at least one immigrant parent](#).
- In Arizona, [44% of children ages 0 to 5 live in low-income households](#).
- About [40% of children in Arizona ages 0 to 5 are dual language learners](#).

Persistent Gaps and Inequities for Families with Infants and Toddlers in Arizona

1. Access and Availability

- Over [75,000 children in Arizona do not have access to child care](#) — about a 16.5% supply gap.
- Over [60% of Arizona residents live in child care deserts, meaning](#) for every 50 children under the age of 5 in a certain geographical area, there is less than one licensed child care provider.
- Only [1 in 7 eligible children receive child care subsidies nationally](#), including Arizona.

2. Affordability

- [Average cost of infant center-based care in Arizona is between \\$13,000 and \\$16,000 per year.](#)
- [Infant care costs equal about 14% of median married-couple income and over 40% of single-parent income.](#)
- Federal benchmark for [child care affordability is no more than 7% of family income.](#)

3. Workforce Instability

- Median hourly [wage for Arizona early educators is about \\$13 per hour.](#)
- [Early educators' poverty rates are 5.7 times higher](#) than those of elementary and middle school teachers.
- Nationally, [81% of providers cite low wages](#) as the main reason staff leave the field.

4. Dual Language Learners and Equity Gaps

- About [40% of children in Arizona ages 0 to 5 are dual language learners.](#)
- Children from low-income households [show measurable language gaps by age 2.](#)
- Latino parents overwhelmingly [express strong preferences for bilingual early learning.](#)



5. Latino Children in Arizona: Opportunity and Persistent Gaps

- [Nearly half of all children ages 0-5 in Arizona are Latino](#), making Latino children the largest racial/ethnic group among young children in the state.
- Arizona's Latino population is notably young: [About 20% of Latinos are children ages 0 to 10](#), compared to a much smaller share among the overall state population.
- [Arizona has one of the largest Latino populations](#), nationally ranking among the top states by Latino population proportion.

6. Economic and Workforce Returns

- Every \$1 invested in high-quality early childhood programs [yields up to \\$13 in long-term returns](#).
- Child care shortages could [cost the U.S. economy \\$329 billion](#) over the next decade.
- [Access to child care is strongly linked to workforce participation](#) and maternal employment.