



SHORT SUBJECTS

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Military Families and Child Care Needs in California

Approximately 106,000* military children (children with at least one parent employed as an active-duty military servicemember) reside in California. Of these, roughly 90,000 are aged 12 years or less and require child care (see Table 1). The Department of Defense (DOD) aims to provide child care for 80 percent of these children in on-installation facilities, and relies on community-based facilities for the other 20 percent of care.¹

The DOD admits that not all military families eligible for subsidized child care receive it, and that not all bases meet the goal of providing 80 percent of necessary child care.¹ These gaps mean some military families must procure higher-cost off-installation child care than other members of the service. The DOD provides some subsidies for child care to help parents who must seek off-installation child care.

This brief explores the need for child care for military families in California, the licensing requirement gap between the DOD and California, and options military families currently have for procuring child care.

CHILD CARE NEEDS IN CALIFORNIA

Children aged 12 years and under need child care when parents are not at home. This child care may be provided by a licensed facility (either on- or off-military installations), by privately licensed individuals or by private, unlicensed individuals and family or friends. Using American Community Survey data, CRB estimates there to be approximately 90,000 military children who may need child care. While the DOD aims to provide 80 percent of all child care needs, in a report to the GAO, they list only 25,000 child care slots for on-installation child care in

California for 2010. This meets less than 28 percent of the estimated need. The remaining child care needs are met by community facilities.

CRB Table 1. Estimated Counts of Military Children, by Age

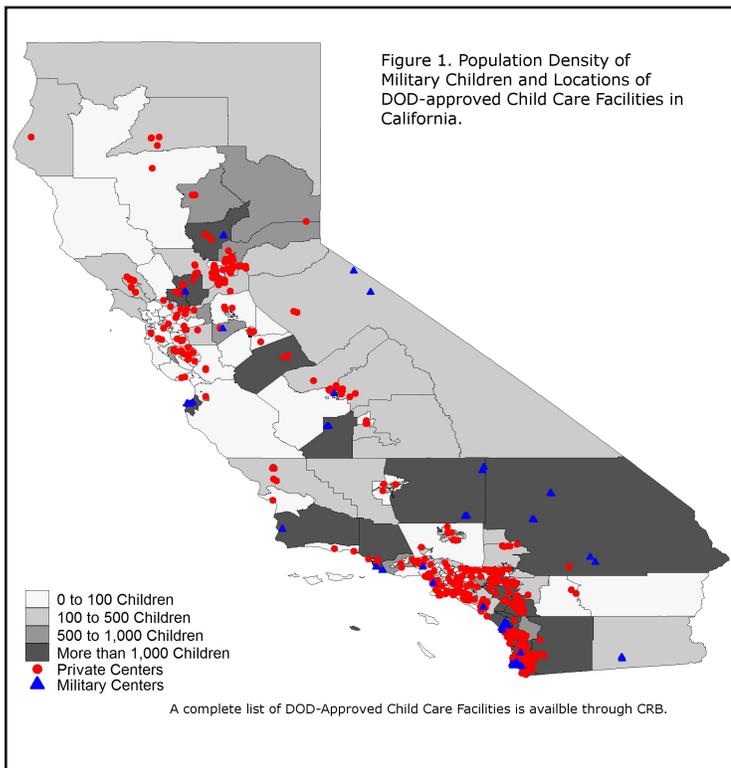
Estimated Counts of Military Children in CA, by Age			
	Estimated Count	Standard Error	90% Margin of Error
Total	105,736	2,215	+/-3,644
Age			
0-3	39,192	1,350	+/-2,220
4-12	50,624	1,534	+/-2,523
13-18	15,920	861	+/-1,415

The DOD licenses off-installation facilities to provide subsidized child care. However, the licensing requirements for DOD off-installation facilities are more stringent than California licensing standards. In a survey of child care facilities in California in 2008, the National Association of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA) found that of 38,132 facilities, only 298 (<1%) were certified to meet DOD requirements.²

CRB mapped the location of both on- and off-installation DOD-approved child care facilities and then overlaid that on a map with a geographic plot of military children densities, as shown in Figure 1. The figure reveals that some areas of California rely heavily on off-installation care (e.g., Long Beach, Los Angeles, San Diego) while off-installation care is not available in other areas (e.g., the 29 Palms area).

The lack of DOD-approved child care facilities means that some military families must seek non-DOD approved child care. When a family opts for non-DOD

* CRB used American Community Survey data to estimate the number of military children in California. To arrive at the estimate we mapped the number of children with at least one parent active in the armed services (as coded by employment code) living in California each year for 2009-2011. Using a 90 percent confidence interval, we have a standard error rate of +/- 3,644 on the total number of children.



approved child care, they lose the subsidy provided for child care. This can mean a loss of \$225 or more per child per month for a family.

COST OF CHILD CARE

The subsidy for off-installation child care was developed to help families procure child care that was equivalent in quality to on-installation child care in their communities. Subsidies differ by pay grade and by branch of service. Both the Air Force and the Navy provide a maximum of \$225 per child per month, the Marine Corps provides \$250 per child per month and the Army varies its caps based on provider rates.¹

The range of what families spend on child care varies greatly by branch and location. Across all branches, the average cost of off-installation care per month per family is \$556. However, this ranges from a low of \$501 for the Army to a high of \$787 for the Air Force. This cost is in addition to the subsidy the family receives for child care.¹

For families who seek non-DOD approved child care, rates can vary considerably. Some military families use other military families, family members or friends to provide child care at rates lower than licensed facilities and forego the DOD subsidy for child care. Other military families cannot find DOD-approved child care and seek California-licensed child care at similar or

higher costs than DOD-facilities and do not receive the subsidy for child care. In areas where there is high-need, high-cost child care (e.g., Alameda, Long Beach, San Diego), military families may pay significantly more than the average cost reported above for child care.

LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

One barrier military families face in obtaining child care is finding a DOD-licensed facility. Because the DOD requires a more stringent level of requirements for licensing than does California, few facilities seek out DOD licensing.

California has the lowest ranking of the 50 states in an evaluation by the NACCRRRA when it comes to child care center licensing requirements. In their evaluation of 15 benchmarks for oversight and regulation, California only fully met one requirement, substantially met five and failed to meet the remaining ten.² The NACCRRRA also argues that by increasing licensing and oversight requirements in California to ones closer to that of the DOD all children would benefit. NACCRRRA argues that the increased oversight and regulation would improve child care for all children and improve the health and safety of child care centers across California.²

WORKS CITED

1. Government Accountability Office. (2012). *Military Child Care: DOD Is Taking Actions to Address Awareness and Availability Barriers*. GAO 12-21. GAO: Washington, DC. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/590/588188.pdf>.
2. Smith, Linda K. and Mousumi Sarkar. (2008). *Making Quality Child Care Possible: Lessons Learned from NACCRRRA's Military Partnerships*. National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies: Arlington, VA. http://www.naccrra.org/sites/default/files/publications/naccrra_publications/2012/makingqualitychildcarepossible-lessonslearned.pdf.

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