WHAT IS A CHILD CARE DESERT?

There are a variety of ways to define child care deserts, but the general concept is that the supply of child care is less than the demand. This map operationalizes child care deserts as a *ratio of the aggregate licensed capacity of licensed homes, centers and preschools to the population of children under five*. The population under 5 was chosen as a population prior to K-12 school, and school age facilities are NOT included in this ratio because they typically do not serve children under 5. This ratio is calculated for each census defined county subdivision, which are the primary census defined divisions of counties, and which are used as a proxy for communities in this map.

DESERt RATIO MAP CATEGORIES

- **Total Desert (0%)** – This category includes all communities with children under 5 which don’t have ANY licensed centers, preschools or homes. In this sense, they are a total desert.
- **Below National Rate (0.1% - 31.0%)** – Includes ratios above 0%, but below the national rate of children in an “organized care facility” OR a “nonrelative home provider” according to the Census or 31.1%.
- **Above National Rate, Less than Half (31.1% - 49.9%)** – Includes ratios at or above the national rate of children in an “organized care facility” OR a “nonrelative home provider”, but below half.
- **More than Half, Less than Two-Thirds (50.0% - 66.5%)** - This category uses two common fractions as book-ends: half and two-thirds.
- **More than Two-Thirds (66.6%+)** – This category provides an upper-limit above two-thirds.
- **No Population Under 5 (N/A)** – This category includes communities without children under 5.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- These data are based on point-in-time pulls, and thus the data change over time.
- The communities in which people live are not always the communities where care is provided.
- Licensed capacity is a point-in-time maximum number of children legally allowed within a licensed facility. The number of children who attend a particular facility may be greater (think different children on different days/times of day) or lower than the capacity.
- A “good” ratio, or “enough” child care, is not defined here.
- A ratio greater than 100% indicates that the aggregate licensed capacity in a community is greater than the under 5 population that lives in that community. It does not necessarily mean that more children attend care in the community than live there (though that could be the case).