



## Child care costs rising, report says

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**UPPER THUMB** — Though it may not shock working parents, others may be surprised to hear findings from a report issued Monday show child care costs continue to rise despite the economic downturn, and day care expenses for many families exceed food costs and other household expenses.

According to the report, “Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2010 Update,” which was released by the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), parents who choose child care in a center or a family child care home must pay a significant part of their income for this care. The report also found low- and middle-income parents have limited access to affordable, quality care.

The report states the average cost parents paid for full-time care for a 4-year-old child in a center ranged from more than \$4,050 in Mississippi to more than \$13,150 a year in Massachusetts.

“The average center-based child care fees for an infant exceeded the average annual amount that families spent on food in every region of the United States,” according to a release NACCRRA issued Monday. “Monthly child care fees for two children at any age exceeded the median monthly rent cost, and were nearly as high, or even higher than, the average monthly mortgage payment in every state.”

In Michigan, where the 2007 median household income was \$47,931, the average monthly cost for full-time child care in 2009 was \$543, which is 43.7 percent of a full-time minimum wage income, according to the Michigan League for Human Services (MLHS).

In Huron County, where the 2007 median income was \$38,687, the average monthly cost for full-time child care in 2009 was \$511, which is 41.1 percent of a full-time minimum wage income, according to MLHS.

According to NACCRRA Executive Director Linda Smith, the cost of quality child care is out of reach for too many families.

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“It is unimaginable that the cost of infant care in a child care center is more than the cost of college in 40 states. It’s time to increase our public investment in improving the quality of child care for all families,” Smith said in a statement Monday.

Today, more than 11 million children under age 5 are in some type of child care arrangement every week, according to Monday’s report. On average, children of working mothers spend 36 hours a week in child care. Studies repeatedly have shown that high-quality child care — care that provides a loving, safe, stable and age-appropriate stimulating environment — helps children enter school ready to learn.

Unfortunately, the high cost of child care limits parents’ options when it comes to choosing child care, the NACCRRRA reports.

“As a result of increasing child care costs and the current economy, some parents have been forced to remove their children from organized child care programs or licensed settings and place them in more informal settings,” Smith said. “This potentially means that the provider has not had a background check or training in health and safety practices or early childhood development, let alone training to provide age-appropriate activities. I am concerned that as a nation with school readiness as a national goal, there will be long-term implications for the next generation with regard to school success and future success.”

**Rebecca Gettel, Huron County Great Start Collaborative director, said the collaborative has heard from parents who get a babysitter or relative to watch their children instead of a day care center because of the cost.**

“It’s definitely a concern,” she said.

**Gettel explained quality child care has been one of the focuses of the collaborative because it’s a fact most brain development occurs during a child’s first five years of life, and it’s important children have quality care that promotes development prior to children entering kindergarden.**

**“One of our big emphasis has been working with child care programs to improve quality in child care settings, but it doesn’t just stop with day care settings and preschool programs,” she said, noting the collaborative also has been working with babysitters and relatives.**