

NEW HAMPSHIRE'S EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

The U.S. early childhood workforce has experienced unprecedented challenges in recent years and New Hampshire is no exception. This brief summarizes the challenges and shines a spotlight on innovative strategies—made possible through funding from the state's Preschool Development Grant (PDG).

WORKFORCE SHORTAGES IN THE UNITED STATES

The U.S. is still confronting major workforce shortages. Among those who lost their job during the pandemic, [only about one third are actively searching](#) for employment now. About half of unemployed workers say they are not looking for work due to health concerns or needing to care for children or other family members. This shortage is expected to continue. While the Congressional Budget Office predicts labor force productivity will increase in future decades, they anticipate it will [increase at a slower rate](#) than what has been observed in recent decades.

The U.S. early childhood workforce is no exception.

The [early childhood workforce shrunk by 8%](#) between February 2020 (pre-pandemic) and November 2022. Many workers leave the early childhood field to find higher paying jobs. On average, U.S. early childhood workers received only about [\\$13.22 per hour](#) in 2021.

NH'S PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT (PDG)

PDG funds tuition assistance programs for early childhood workers. The goal of the [Early Childhood Tuition Assistance Program](#) at UNH's College of Professional Studies is to boost the early childhood and out-of-school time workforce as well as district paraprofessionals. In 2023, UNH's College of Professional Studies awarded more than 430 grants. The demand for grants has been high, with many applications waitlisted. Students receiving these grants report that they finish their education much more quickly with tuition support.

PDG funding also provides professional development to the early childhood workforce. The University of New Hampshire (UNH) Early Learning Coaching Team offers early childhood workers [practice-based coaching on how to effectively implement play-based curricula](#). The UNH team also shares related resources and conducts associated research to support this initiative.

WORKFORCE SHORTAGES IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire also faces early childhood workforce shortages. The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment estimates that there are [5,540 early childhood workers](#) in New Hampshire to serve the state's 76,875 children age 0-5. Data indicate that there are [not enough workers or child care slots to match family demand](#). Employment in child care remains low in part because the workforce [earns substantially less](#) than the statewide average (\$24,490 vs. \$59,270 on average annually, respectively).

The state's 2023 Early Childhood Strategic Plan prioritizes the workforce. It underscores that workforce shortages are a root cause of why families do not have adequate access to early childhood opportunities and services. [The strategic plan calls for increasing the early childhood workforce](#) by promoting 1) early childhood careers and paths, and 2) the availability of workforce incentives and tax credits.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Early childhood workers are more likely to be female and to live in poverty. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that almost [95% of early childhood workers are female](#). Many of these women are [faced with difficult decisions if they have children of their own](#), such as whether to spend their limited income on child care, find lower-quality but cheaper care options, or leave the workforce to care for their children. To effectively build a strong pipeline of early childhood workers, state efforts must consider ways to address these challenges.

The state's PDG funding is set to expire in 2024. Without the promise of sustainable longer-term funding, organizations cannot establish programs and initiatives to grow a pipeline of qualified early childhood workers.

