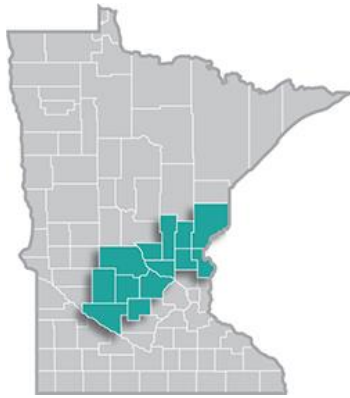


Central Minnesota – Child Care Overview



Population

The Central Minnesota planning region, which is comprised of 13 counties, has a population that surged past 765,000 people in 2025, making it the second largest among the state's six planning regions, behind the Twin Cities metro area. This accounts for 13.1% of Minnesota's total population. From 2020 to 2025, Central Minnesota's population grew by over 39,360 people, reflecting a growth rate of 5.4%, which surpassed the state's overall growth rate of 2.2%.

Central Minnesota has a diverse age demographic, with a total population of 765,298 people. The youngest age group, those under 5 years old, comprises 46,661 individuals, accounting for 6.1% of the region's population. In comparison, Minnesota's statewide percentage of children under 5 years old is slightly lower at 5.8% (Figure 1). Additionally, the number of children under 5 in Central Minnesota has grown by 15.9% since 2000, compared to a growth rate of 2.8% for this age group in Minnesota as a whole (Figure 2). This segment is significant as it highlights the region's future potential workforce and underscores the importance of early childhood services and education.

Figure 1. Percentage of the Population by Age Group, 2025

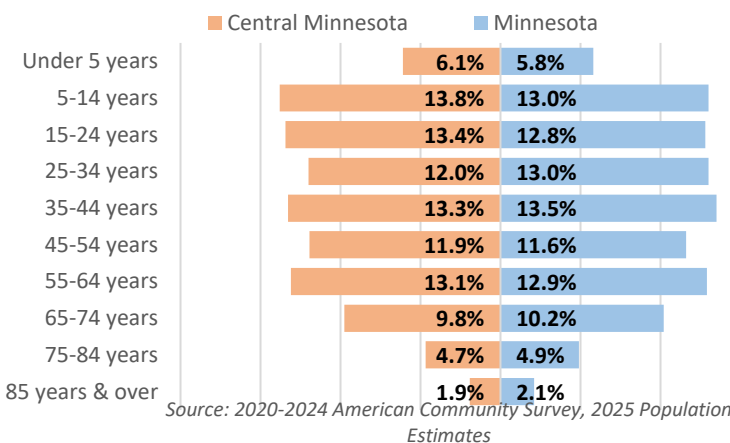
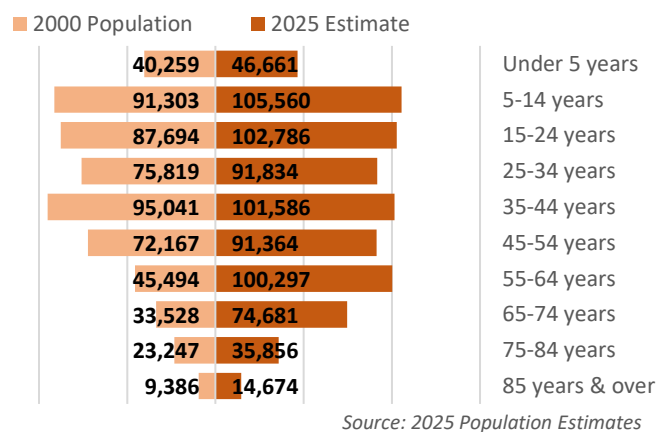


Figure 2. Population Pyramid, 2000-2025



Population Projections

Newly released data from the [Minnesota State Demographic Center](#) projects that the population in Central Minnesota will increase by around 92,100 people from 2025 to 2045, a projected 12.2% increase. That is greater than the statewide projected growth rate of 5.5%.

More notably, the number of children under 5 years old are projected to increase by about 5,200 people, an 11.2% increase. In comparison, children under 5 in Minnesota are expected to increase by just 2.7% (Table 1).

Table 1. Population Projections, 2025-2045

Central Minnesota	2025 Projection	2045 Projection	2025-2045 Change	
			Numeric	Percent
Under 5 years	46,033	51,202	+5,169	+11.2%
5-14 years	100,757	108,837	+8,080	+8.0%
15-24 years	103,648	106,184	+2,536	+2.4%
25-34 years	91,042	102,002	+10,960	+12.0%
35-44 years	99,588	117,247	+17,659	+17.7%
45-54 years	89,990	108,732	+18,742	+20.8%
55-64 years	93,685	97,551	+3,866	+4.1%
65-74 years	78,291	75,552	-2,739	-3.5%
75-84 years	40,236	57,834	+17,598	+43.7%
85 years & over	14,605	24,833	+10,228	+70.0%
Total	757,875	849,974	+92,099	+12.2%

Source: [Minnesota State Demographic Center](#)

Of the 13 counties in Central Minnesota, nine counties—Wright, Isanti, Sherburne, Mille Lacs, Chisago, Benton, Kandiyohi, Kanabec, and Meeker—are expected to see an increase in the population of children under the age of 5 from 2025 to 2045. Wright County stands out with the highest increase, adding 3,417 children, a 33.6% rise, while Isanti, Sherburne, and Mille Lacs all growing between 13% and 22%. Meeker, Kanabec, Kandiyohi, Benton, and Chisago counties are projected to have modest gains, ranging from 3.0% to 9.3%, respectively.

Conversely, four counties are projected to experience a decrease in the number of children under 5. Pine is expected to see the fastest decline at -13.8%, followed by Stearns County at -6.3%, Renville County at -5.8%, and McLeod County at -0.6% (Table 2).

Table 2. Population Projections for People Under the Age of 5, 2025-2045

Counties	2025	2045	2025-2045 Change	
			Numeric	Percent
Wright	10,157	13,574	+3,417	+33.6%
Isanti	2,552	3,116	+564	+22.1%
Sherburne	6,663	7,811	+1,148	+17.2%
Mille Lacs	1,574	1,785	+211	+13.4%
Chisago	3,263	3,566	+303	+9.3%
Benton	2,581	2,746	+165	+6.4%
Kandiyohi	2,804	2,976	+172	+6.1%
Kanabec	886	914	+28	+3.2%
Meeker	1,342	1,382	+40	+3.0%
McLeod	2,021	2,008	-13	-0.6%
Renville	842	793	-49	-5.8%
Stearns	10,041	9,404	-637	-6.3%
Pine	1,307	1,127	-180	-13.8%
Central region	46,033	51,202	+5,169	+11.2%

Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center

Family Arrangements & Employment

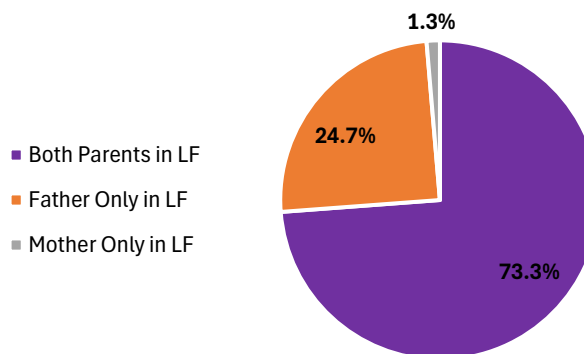
In Central Minnesota, there are approximately 54,000 children under the age of 6, accounting for about 31.1% of the population under 18. Among these young children, 75.5% (40,929) live with two parents. Of those living with two parents, 73.3% have both parents in the labor force. Additionally, 24.7% have only the father in the labor force, 1.3% have only the mother in the labor force, and the remaining 0.7% have neither parent in the labor force (Figure 3).

The remainder, a bit under a quarter (24.5% or 13,288) of children under 6 live with a single parent, which is slightly below the statewide rate of 25.6%. Of these children, 65.2% live with their mother, while 34.8% live with their father. Among children living with their father, 94.8% of these fathers are in the labor force, whereas 79.1% of mothers in single-parent households are in the labor force.

In Minnesota, 68.7% of children living with a single parent reside with their mother, while 31.3% live with their father. Statewide, about 93.2% of the single fathers are in the labor force and 80.5% of mothers are in the labor force.

It is evident that a significant portion of parents with young children are actively participating in the labor force. This highlights the crucial need for accessible and affordable child care services. Reliable child care enables parents to maintain their employment and contribute to the economy, ensuring they can support their families. Parents without adequate child care options, particularly those with young children, may struggle to remain in the workforce, leading to financial instability and potential skill loss. Therefore, investing in child care is not only beneficial for families but also vital for sustaining a strong and stable labor force in Central Minnesota.

Figure 3. Children Under 6 Living with Both Parents Labor Force Participation, 2024



Source: 2020-2024 American Community

Cost & Availability of Child Care

The cost of child care is a significant and widely discussed topic. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that [child care should not exceed 7% of a family's annual income](#). Regional average child care rates from [Child Care Aware of Minnesota](#) and median household income data from the [American Community Survey](#) offer a closer look at affordability in Central Minnesota.

Table 3. Average Annual Child Care Costs in Central Minnesota, 2023

6E	Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Child Care Centers	\$11,804	\$10,816	\$10,036
Family Child Care	\$7,748	\$7,436	\$7,124
7E	Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Child Care Centers	\$14,872	\$13,364	\$12,272
Family Child Care	\$8,736	\$8,424	\$8,112
7W	Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Child Care Centers	\$17,524	\$15,600	\$13,780
Family Child Care	\$9,360	\$8,944	\$8,476
Source: Child Care Aware Minnesota and American Community Survey, 2020-2024			

Table 4. Child Care Costs as a Percentage of Median Household Income , Central Minnesota, 2023

6E	Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Child Care Centers	15.4%	14.1%	13.1%
Family Child Care	10.1%	9.7%	9.3%
7E	Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Child Care Centers	17.6%	15.8%	14.5%
Family Child Care	10.4%	10.0%	9.6%
7W	Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Child Care Centers	18.9%	16.9%	14.9%
Family Child Care	10.1%	9.7%	9.2%
Source: Child Care Aware Minnesota and American Community Survey, 2020-2024			

Child care costs in Central Minnesota exceed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services affordability benchmark regardless of provider type, age group, or region. For families using child care centers, annual costs range from \$10,036 for preschool in Region 6E to \$17,524 for infants in Region 7W, representing 13.1% to 18.9% of median household income. Family child care offers a more affordable alternative, with costs ranging from \$7,124 to \$9,360 annually, or 9.2% to 10.4% of median household income, though it still exceeds the 7% benchmark across all age groups and regions. Infant care carries the highest cost burden regardless of provider type, and costs decrease as children age into toddler and preschool settings.

Industry Trends in Employment & Firms

According to data from the [U.S. Census Bureau's Nonemployer Statistics](#), there were 1,596 self-employed child daycare providers in Central Minnesota. Part of a longer-term downward trend, the region experienced an even more rapid decline of 464 self-employed daycare providers from 2019 to 2023. The largest percentage decreases occurred in Pine (-51.4%), Mille Lacs (-28.8%), and Sherburne (-25.7%). All counties in Central Minnesota experienced losses in self-employed daycare providers (Table 5).

In addition to in-home self-employed day care providers, data from [DEED's Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages](#) provides insight into employment trends in Child Day Care Services in Central Minnesota. In 2025, there were 131 Child Day Care Services establishments providing 1,867 jobs. The average annual wage in this sector was \$28,860, approximately \$30,500 less than the average annual wage across all industries (Table 6).

The number of jobs in the Child Day Care Services sector in Central Minnesota has generally increased from 2005 to 2025. The data shows a gradual rise from 1,338 jobs in 2005 to a peak of 1,867 jobs in 2025. Notably, there was a significant increase from 2015 to 2017, likely reflecting economic growth and increased demand for child care services. However, the sector experienced a decline in 2020 to 1,346 jobs, likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to economic disruptions and closures of child care facilities. The sector rebounded in the subsequent years, reaching 1,867 jobs in 2025, indicating a recovery and possibly an increased demand for child care services as the economy stabilized (Table 6 & Figure 4).

Table 5. Nonemployer Child Daycare Providers in Central Minnesota, 2019-2023

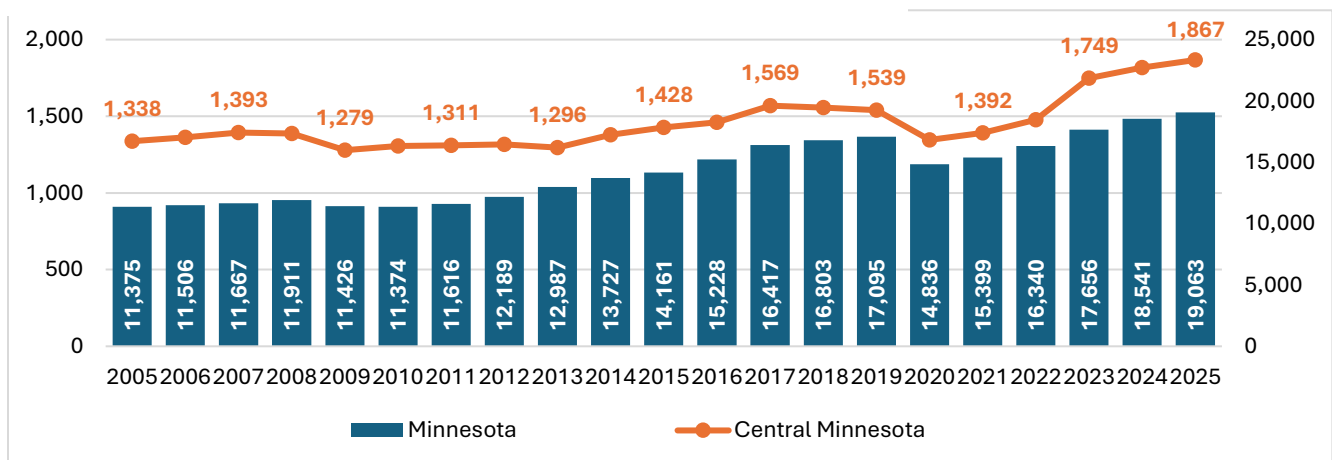
County	2023	2019	2019-2023 Numeric Change	2019-2023 Percent Change
Benton	143	172	-29	-16.9%
Chisago	88	117	-29	-24.8%
Isanti	48	64	-16	-25.0%
Kanabec	30	33	-3	-9.1%
Kandiyohi	107	117	-10	-8.5%
McLeod	90	105	-15	-14.3%
Meeker	51	56	-5	-8.9%
Mille Lacs	42	59	-17	-28.8%
Pine	35	72	-37	-51.4%
Renville	30	38	-8	-21.1%
Sherburne	211	284	-73	-25.7%
Stearns	402	529	-127	-24.0%
Wright	319	414	-95	-22.9%
Central region	1,596	2,060	-464	-22.5%

Table 6. Child Day Care Services Employment in Central Minnesota, 2025

NAICS Code	Industry	Number of Jobs	Number of Firms	Average Annual Wages	2005-2025 Change Numeric Percent	
0	Total, All Industries	283,510	20,270	\$59,332	+31,993	+12.7%
6244	Child Day Care Services	1,867	131	\$28,860	+529	+39.5%

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages

Figure 4. Child Day Care Services Employment Trends, 2005-2025



Occupational Employment & Wages Statistics

DEED's [Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics \(OEWS\)](#) program provides detailed employment and wage data for a wide range of occupations in the region. According to the program, there were an estimated 1,240 people working as Child Care Workers in Central Minnesota. In 2026, the median hourly wage for Child Care Workers in the region was \$17.30, which is \$7.27 lower than the median wage across all occupations. Additionally, the statewide median wage for Child Care Workers was \$17.51, which is \$0.21 higher than in Central (Table 7).

Table 7. Central Minnesota Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics, Q1 2026

SOC Code	Occupation Title	Estimated Regional Employment	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Statewide Employment	Statewide Median Wage
0	Total, All Occupations	281,730	\$24.57	2,949,820	\$27.97
399011	Child Care Workers	1,240	\$17.30	11,570	\$17.51
252011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	1,050	\$20.80	10,320	\$21.46
119031	Education & Child care Administrators, Preschool & Daycare	70	\$28.76	1,010	\$30.32
211021	Child, Family, & School Social Workers	560	\$32.21	6,540	\$33.34
352012	Cooks, Institution & Cafeteria	860	\$20.34	7,890	\$21.43
439061	Office Clerks, General	5,670	\$23.02	55,530	\$23.54
111021	General & Operations Managers	6,680	\$44.07	72,860	\$48.56
259045	Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary*	4,880	\$41,227	38,540	\$41,223

Source: Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics, 2026; *Only median annual wages available

In addition to Child Care Workers, child care providers also require the services of workers in several other occupations such as Teaching Assistants, Education & Child Care Administrators (Preschool & Daycare), Cooks (Institution & Cafeteria), Office Clerks, General Operations Managers, and Child, Family & School Social Workers.

With median wages around \$17.30, the wages for Child Care Workers are insufficient to cover the cost of living for both single individuals and families in Central Minnesota. For a single person, the required hourly wage to meet a basic needs cost of living was \$17.95 per hour, about 65 cents higher than the median wage for Child Care Workers. For a typical family (one full-time worker, one part-time worker, and one child), the required wage to meet a basic needs cost of living in the region is \$23.12 per hour, significantly above what Child Care Workers earn.

Child Care Workers in Central Minnesota are among the lowest-paid professionals, earning wages that fall short of meeting the region's basic needs [Cost of Living](#). These workers receive lower pay than many other occupations, such as Hotel, Motel & Resort Desk Clerks (\$17.41), Laundry & Dry-Cleaning Workers (\$18.08), and Animal Caretakers (\$18.04). This wage disparity highlights the financial challenges faced by those in the child care profession. It is difficult for workers to remain in jobs that do not meet the cost of living in the region. As a result, many Child Care Workers may struggle to make ends meet, which can lead to high turnover rates and a shortage of qualified caregivers.

Occupational Demand

Overall, there has been a significant demand for Child Care Workers in Central Minnesota. In 2024, there were 182 job vacancies for Child Care Workers, resulting in a job vacancy rate of 18.8%. This is notably higher than the 5% job vacancy rate across all occupations, highlighting the strong demand for these workers in the area. Examining job vacancy data from 2013 to 2024, almost half of the surveys showed that Child Care Workers consistently had a higher job vacancy rate than the overall industry average, further indicating this demand.

Moreover, data from the most recent [Job Vacancy Survey](#) for Central Minnesota indicates that the median hourly wage offer for Child Care Workers was \$14.79, which is about \$5.02 less than the median wage offer for all occupations. Additionally, 20% of the vacancies were part-time, and 7% were temporary or seasonal. Approximately 1% of these positions required postsecondary education, compared to 27% across all occupations. Lastly, only 2% of the job vacancies required one year of experience, compared to 37% for all occupations (Table 8).

Table 8. Job Vacancies in Central Minnesota, 2024

SOC Code	Occupational Title	Number of Job Vacancies	Job Vacancy Rate	Median Wage Offer	Percent Part-Time	Temporary or Seasonal	Requiring Post-Secondary Education	Requiring 1 Plus Years of Experience
0	Total, All Occupations	13,827	5%	\$19.81	31%	5%	27%	37%
399011	Child Care Workers	182	18.8%	\$14.79	20%	7%	1%	2%

Source: DEED Job Vacancy Survey

Demand can be impacted by turnover within the industry. According to the most recent data from the [U.S. Census Bureau's Quarterly Workforce Indicators](#) data tool, the turnover rate in the Child Care Services industry in Central Minnesota was 13.6% in quarter 1 of 2025, meaning that about 13.6% of the workforce left their jobs in that time period. In comparison, the turnover rate across all industries was 8.3%. High turnover in the child care industry can be driven by factors such as low wages, which make it difficult for workers to stay in these positions long-term and make a family-sustaining wage. For businesses, high turnover is costly as they must invest in recruiting and training new employees. This increased cost can lead to higher child care expenses for families as providers pass on the costs associated with maintaining a stable workforce.

Industry & Occupational Outlook

According to DEED's [2022 to 2032 Employment Outlook data](#), the Central Minnesota Child Day Care Services industry is projected to gain 157 jobs over the next decade, a 10.7% increase. The increase in Child Day Care Services was significantly higher than the overall projected growth rate of 5.2% across the total of all industries in Central Minnesota.

Central Minnesota is projected to see an increase in Child Care Worker jobs from 2022 to 2032. During this period, an increase of 30 jobs, or 1.8%, is expected (Table 9). Additionally, there will still be numerous job openings due to labor market exits (when individuals leave the labor force) and occupational transfers (when individuals move to different jobs). In total, there are projected to be 2,796 Child Care Worker job openings from 2022 to 2032. This also suggests that other jobs will become more prominent in the industry, rather than just direct service Child Care Workers.

Table 9. Employment Projections in Central Minnesota, 2022-2032

SOC Code	Occupation	Estimated Employment 2022	Projected Employment 2032	Percent Change	Total Change	Labor Force Exit Openings	Occupational Transfer Openings	Total Hires
0	Total, All Occupations	315,929	332,231	+5.2%	16,302	160,516	198,606	375,424
399011	Child Care Workers	1,657	1,687	+1.8%	30	1,207	1,559	2,796

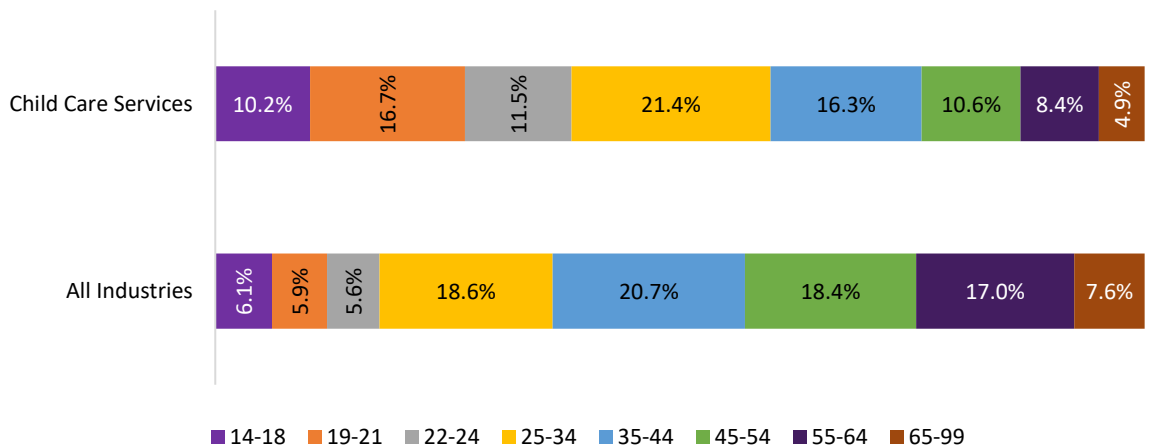
Source: Employment Outlook

Workforce Characteristics

In Central Minnesota, the Child Care Services sector exhibits a notable gender imbalance, with women constituting 91.8% of its workforce as of 2024. This contrasts sharply with the overall workforce composition where women comprise 50% of jobholders across all industries. Additionally, the workforce in the Child Care Services industry is slightly more racially diverse compared to all industries. In 2024, 89.2% of workers in this industry were white, whereas 91.5% of workers across all industries were white. Black or African American jobholders comprised the second largest racial group in the industry, making up 6.5% of the workforce. Additionally, 2.3% of workers identified as Two or More Races, and 1.1% identified as Asian.

Data from [Quarterly Workforce Indicators](#) for 2024 highlights the age distribution of workers in the Child Care Services industry compared to all industries. The Child Care Services industry in Central Minnesota tends to employ a younger workforce compared to the total of all industries. Notably, younger age groups (14-24 years) have a significantly higher representation in Child Care Services, with a combined percentage that is double that of all industries. On the other hand, middle-aged and older workers (25-54 years) are more prominently represented in all industries, suggesting that Child Care Services may attract or be more suited to younger workers. This trend shows a higher concentration of younger employees in Child Care Services compared the total of all industries (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Central Minnesota Child Care Services Industry Workforce Demographics by Age, 2024



Source: Quarterly Workforce Indicators