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Where Will the Children Go? Child Care Cuts Leave Families with Few Options

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Many parents across the country are unable to work because they can't afford child care for their children, and help with child care costs is likely to become even harder to get. At least 12 states have made cuts to their child care programs, even with the availability of additional federal child care funding through the economic recovery package. As the economic recovery funds are used up, some of these states will make additional cuts, and additional states will start making cuts, leaving many more low-income families without the child care assistance they need.

Arkansas used the economic recovery funding to provide child care assistance to over 12,000 additional children and as a result reduced its waiting list for assistance. However, 5,000 children remain on the waiting list, and that list is expected to double now that the state's economic recovery funds for child care have run out. As a result, some families with very tight budgets will be forced to come up with a way to pay for child care on their own. Some families will have no choice but to use lower-cost child care that may not offer the early learning environment their children need to get a strong start. Some parents will lose their jobs when unreliable child care arrangements fall through or when they cannot find affordable child care at all. This could ultimately lead some parents to turn to welfare in order to support their families, despite their desire to work.

Meanwhile, in Arizona, 13,000 children have been placed on the state's waiting list for child care assistance since February 2009, and the list keeps growing. The Arizona Child Care Association and Early Care and Education Consortium recently released a [video](#) showing what these cuts mean for Arizona families relying on child care and child care providers trying to stay in business. Child care centers and classrooms previously filled with children are now closed and empty because of a lack of funding to help families pay for child care. The average annual cost of center care in Arizona is \$6,626 for a four-year-old and \$8,505 for a one-year-old. Few low-income families can afford these costs without some sort of financial help.

Unfortunately, what is happening in Arizona and Arkansas is not unique. With many states cutting child care and other funding in order to close budget gaps, low-income families and child care programs across the country are struggling. And the number of families without child care assistance and the number of child care programs forced to shut their doors are likely to increase unless additional federal child care funding is provided.