

Advancing Local Solutions

Adams County Childcare Pilot

August 2026



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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Childcare is essential infrastructure that supports Adams County's families, workforce and economy.

Across the county, employers are struggling to recruit and retain workers, providers are facing increasing financial pressures and families continue to encounter significant barriers to finding affordable, reliable care.

These challenges extend far beyond early childhood; they influence workforce participation, business productivity, housing, community development and long-term economic growth.

Recognizing these interconnected challenges, **Adams County partners launched the Childcare Solutions Pilot** to identify practical, implementation ready strategies that strengthen childcare supply while supporting providers, employers and working families.

Key Findings

Throughout the pilot, four themes consistently emerged:



CHILDCARE IS WORKFORCE, ECONOMIC, AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Childcare is critical to recruitment, retention, productivity, and long-term economic competitiveness.



SIGNIFICANT SHORTAGES OF INFANT & TODDLER CARE

Adams County continues to face significant shortages of infant and toddler care.



PROVIDER SUSTAINABILITY IS ESSENTIAL

Financial sustainability, not demand, is the greatest barrier to expanding capacity.



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS DRIVE ACTION

The ingredients for success are in place; the next step is coordinated action.

High-Impact Opportunities

These findings informed four priority opportunities that emerged through stakeholder engagement and working group discussions:



Advance Co- Location & Mixed- Use Childcare



Invest in Family Childcare Home Expansion



Pursue Targeted Regulatory Improvements



Explore a Shared Childcare Solutions Fund

Building Local Solutions

To address growing childcare challenges, Adams County convened a diverse group of local leaders including municipalities, employers, providers, housing organizations, philanthropy and public health partners, to identify practical, implementation ready solutions.

Process at a Glance

GOAL

Advance at **least one childcare strategy to implementation readiness** by 2027 while identifying tools and partnerships that can be replicated across Adams County communities.

PARTNERS

County, municipalities, providers, employers, housing, public health, philanthropy and community organizations

TIMELINE

2025-2027
(18-month pilot)

Who Was Involved

The initiative is guided by a cross-sector working group that includes:

- Adams County
- Local municipalities
- **Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County (ECPAC)**
- **Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC)**
- Childcare providers
- Employers and business leaders
- Housing and community development partners
- Community and public health organizations

What Was Done

Throughout the pilot, partners:

- ✓ Conducted stakeholder interviews
- ✓ Analyzed childcare and workforce data
- ✓ Engaged providers, employers and municipalities
- ✓ Explored financing and policy opportunities
- ✓ Evaluated community assets
- ✓ Identified implementation-ready strategies
- ✓ Built alignment around shared priorities

Our Approach



UNDERSTAND

Community needs and existing conditions



ENGAGE

Stakeholders and gather local perspectives



ANALYZE

Data, assets, and barriers to identify opportunities



PRIORITIZE

Select practical, feasible strategies for impact



IMPLEMENT

Move priority strategies toward implementation

What We Heard

Stakeholder interviews consistently demonstrated that **childcare is no longer viewed solely as an early childhood issue.**

Employers, educators, local government, housing organizations, providers and community partners described childcare as **essential infrastructure that supports workforce participation, economic development and community vitality.**



Childcare Is Essential Workforce Infrastructure

Stakeholders consistently described childcare as a workforce issue **affecting recruitment, retention, productivity and long-term economic competitiveness.**

Employers increasingly recognize that **childcare shortages influence workforce participation and business performance.**



Childcare has come up as one of the highest priorities for businesses."



Providers Need Stability Before They Can Grow



You can't raise wages without additional funding; tuition alone doesn't cover it."

Throughout the pilot, providers described a system where **families struggle to afford care while providers struggle to afford delivering care.**

PROVIDER SNAPSHOT

27% Full Enrollment **38%** Nearly Full **19%** Below Half Capacity **10%** Closed Classrooms *due to low enrollment*

Providers also identified the four greatest financial challenges:

- 1 Lack of enrollment
- 2 Staff salaries and benefits
- 3 Daily operating costs
- 4 Capital improvements and facility repairs

Source: January 2026 ECPAC Survey; 77 providers responded)

Tuition alone cannot cover the actual cost of operating high-quality childcare programs, particularly infant and toddler classrooms. Providers face a difficult balancing act: the true cost of delivering care exceeds what most families can afford to pay, leaving little room to raise tuition while sustaining enrollment.



Access Depends on More Than Available Seats

Stakeholders emphasized that childcare access involves more than simply increasing licensed capacity.

Neighborhood-based Family Childcare Homes and co-located childcare models were repeatedly identified as promising ways to improve access.

- **Location** - near homes, work and essential services
- **Transportation** - reliable and affordable options
- **Hours** - care that aligns with work schedules including non-traditional hours
- **Community** - neighborhood-based options that are culturally and linguistically responsive



Municipal Leadership Matters

Municipalities have powerful tools to create conditions where childcare can thrive.

Municipalities can support childcare by:

- Zoning and land use policies
- Permitting and licensing processes
- Adaptive reuse of public and community buildings
- Planning and coordination across departments
- Implementing SB24-002 and other state policies

Local action can remove barriers, expand supply and support providers.



The Opportunity Is Collaboration

The challenge is not a lack of ideas; it is aligning partners, resources and decision-making around shared priorities.

The strongest finding of this work is that Adams County already possesses many of the ingredients needed to move forward.

By working together across sectors and communities, we can build a childcare system that strengthens families, supports providers and drives a thriving Adams County.

Cities, providers, employers, housing organizations, public health partners and community organizations all expressed interest in expanding childcare.

What the Data Tells Us

Childcare Challenges Have Significant Economic Consequences

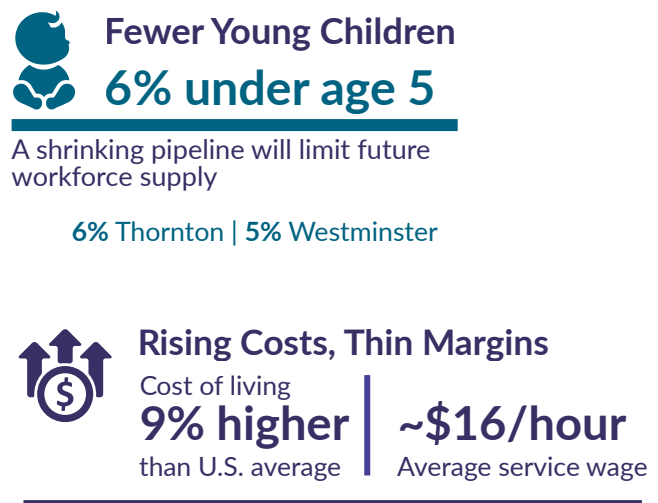
Childcare challenges are estimated to cost Adams County approximately **\$162.8 million annually** through lost workforce participation, reduced business productivity, lower household earnings and increased public costs.



Source: Ready Nation Council for a Strong America "Want to Grow Colorado's Economy? Fix the Childcare Crisis"; EPIC analysis

Workforce Pressures Are Intensifying

Adams County faces multiple workforce challenges simultaneously:



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate, Table S0101 and DP03; 2025 Adams County Economic Profile

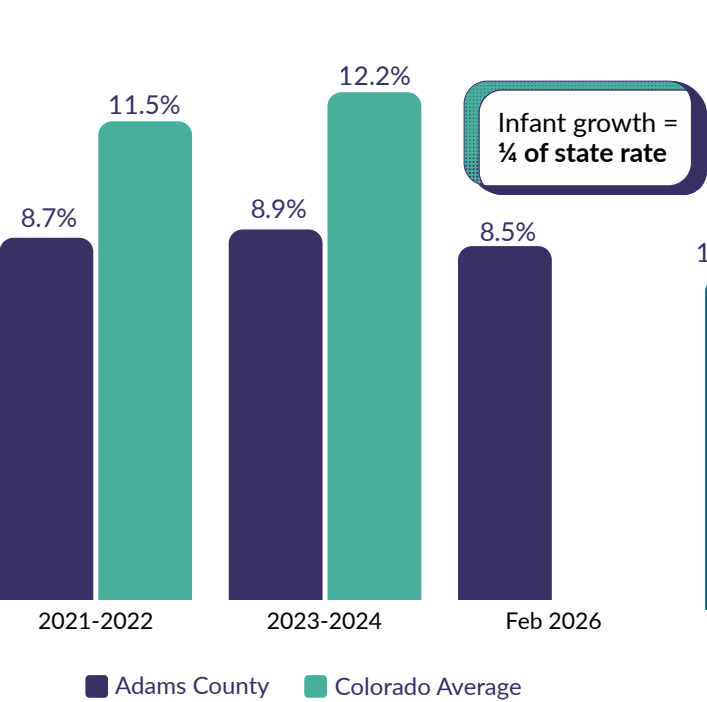
These trends reinforce the importance of expanding childcare as a workforce strategy. As more workers retire, Adams County's ability to attract and retain younger workers and their families will be critical to maintaining a strong workforce and supporting future economic growth.

Childcare Capacity Has Not Kept Pace

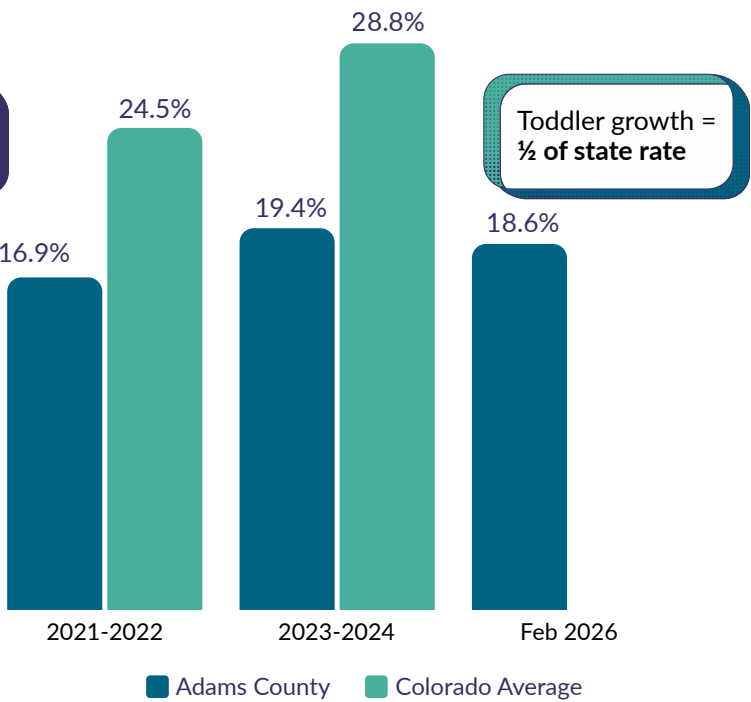
Recent data shows Adams County continues to trail statewide averages in infant and toddler capacity while also experiencing recent losses in available childcare slots.



Infant Capacity (% of Infants with Access to a Slot)



Toddler Capacity (% of Toddlers with Access to a Slot)



Sources: The Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County Preliminary Infant and Toddler Data 2026 Compared to 2024

Four Opportunities for Action

The pilot identified **four practical opportunities** capable of strengthening childcare while building upon Adams County's existing partnerships and assets.

1 

ADVANCE CO-LOCATION AND MIXED-USE CHILDCARE MODELS

Maximize the use of existing public assets and strategic partnerships to integrate childcare into places where families live, work and learn

Potential Actions:

- Co-located childcare with libraries, recreation centers and schools
- Explore public-private partnerships for new developments
- Prioritize projects in areas with high need and limited supply
- Partner with housing developers

Potential Impact:

Increases access, reduces costs and builds sustainable community assets

2 

INVEST IN FAMILY CHILDCARE HOME EXPANSION

Support and expand licensed family childcare homes to quickly increase capacity for infants and toddlers

Potential Actions:

- Provider grants and low-interest loans for home modifications
- Offer start-up support and ongoing coaching
- Strengthen marketing and referral systems

Potential Impact:

Creates more infant and toddler slots quickly and at lower costs; supports small business owners

3 

PURSUE TARGETED REGULATORY IMPROVEMENTS

Remove barriers and streamline processes that slow down or limit childcare growth

Potential Actions:

- Simplify permitting and licensing requirements
- Review zoning and land use policies that limit childcare
- Support implementation of SB24-002 and future policies

Potential Impact:

Reduces time and cost to open and expand childcare programs; increases available capacity

4 

EXPLORE A SHARED CHILDCARE SOLUTIONS FUND

Leverage and align resources to invest in high-priority childcare projects and programs across the county

Potential Actions:

- Pool public, private and philanthropic funding
- Support facility development and program expansion
- Prioritize funding based on community needs and impact

Potential Impact:

Maximizes local investment and ensures resources are directed to the greatest need

What Action Could Look Like

What Could Investment Look Like?

Adams County and local municipalities are taking steps to create a more supportive environment for childcare expansion by aligning policies, planning and development efforts.

- **Adams County: Senate Bill 24-002:** Adams County established a property tax rebate program for eligible childcare providers under Senate Bill 24-002. The program helps reduce operating costs, supports provider sustainability and expands access to affordable childcare for working families.
- **Adams County: Inventory of Land and Facilities:** The County is identifying publicly owned land and facilities that could be repurposed or redeveloped for childcare, creating a pipeline of potential sites for future investment.
- **City of Westminster: Childcare-Friendly Zoning:** Westminster has updated zoning regulations to make it easier for childcare providers to locate and expand, reducing regulatory barriers and supporting future growth.



EXAMPLE IN ACTION: Housing Partnerships

Maiker Housing Partners has broken ground on a new affordable housing development that will include a Head Start program, demonstrating how early childhood services can be integrated into housing developments. Maiker is also exploring opportunities to co-locate additional childcare options, such as an infant and toddler center or a family childcare home, in future housing developments to better meet the needs of working families.

Another example is Delwest, which has partnered to incorporate a family childcare home into a residential development, illustrating how developers can expand childcare access by including home-based care as part of neighborhood planning.

Together, these examples demonstrate multiple ways housing developers can help increase childcare access while creating family-friendly communities.

Local Impact: These efforts demonstrate the commitment of local governments to making childcare a community priority and creating the conditions needed for sustainable expansion.

What's Next?

By the end of 2027:

- **Senate Bill 24-002:** Establish conversations with at least three local governments to evaluate opportunities to implement SB24-002 within their jurisdiction, identifying key opportunities for zoning and overlay ordinances.
- **Inventory of Land and Facilities:** Identify at least three facilities and begin conversations with public and private partners on how best to utilize these properties for residential, workforce and business needs.
- **Childcare-Friendly Zoning:** Using Westminster as a model, identify at least three additional municipalities interested in a zoning change or overlay zone to facilitate childcare facilities and reduce costs, timelines and processes.

The opportunities identified through the Adams County Childcare Pilot are not intended to be implemented in isolation. Rather than funding a single project, **these investments represent a coordinated portfolio of strategies** that build on the four opportunities identified through the pilot. Together, they can expand childcare capacity, strengthen providers and improve outcomes for families, employers, and communities.

If We Invest...

Illustrative Planning Scenario

The following illustrative planning scenario demonstrates one example of how sustained community investment could support implementation of multiple pilot recommendations while generating measurable economic benefits.

Using EPIC's planning assumption of approximately **\$2,000 per childcare seat supported annually**, this **scenario assumes investments are distributed across a portfolio of strategies**, including provider expansion and sustainability, family childcare home growth and facility improvements, to strengthen both existing and new childcare capacity.

Investment Strategy	Community Investment	Childcare Capacity Supported	Childcare Need Addressed	Annual Economic Impact
Portfolio of Strategies: Provider expansion & sustainability, family childcare home growth & support, Family Childcare Home growth, facility improvements and public-private partnerships	\$10 million over five years	1,000 seats supported annually	~5% of the county seat gap each year	~\$8.1 million annual economic benefit
	Average annual investment \$2 million Planning assumption: \$2,000 per supported seat annually	Through a mix of: • Provider expansion & sustainability • Family childcare home growth • Facility support • Co-location and mixed-use collaboratives	Over five years, a sustained investment could meaningfully reduce unmet need while strengthening provider sustainability	• Families: more income and stability • Employers: higher productivity, lower turnover • Taxpayers: reduced public costs and stronger local economy

Data Note: Seat Gap in Adams County is 22,215 as of July 2025 according to the [Annual Licensed Capacity maps from CDEC](#).

 Five-Year Community Impact If Adams County sustains this level of investment over five years, it could:			
\$10 million invested in childcare solutions over five years	= ~5,000* seats supported	= ~\$40.7 million in cumulative economic benefit over five years	Stronger childcare system through sustained, coordinated investment

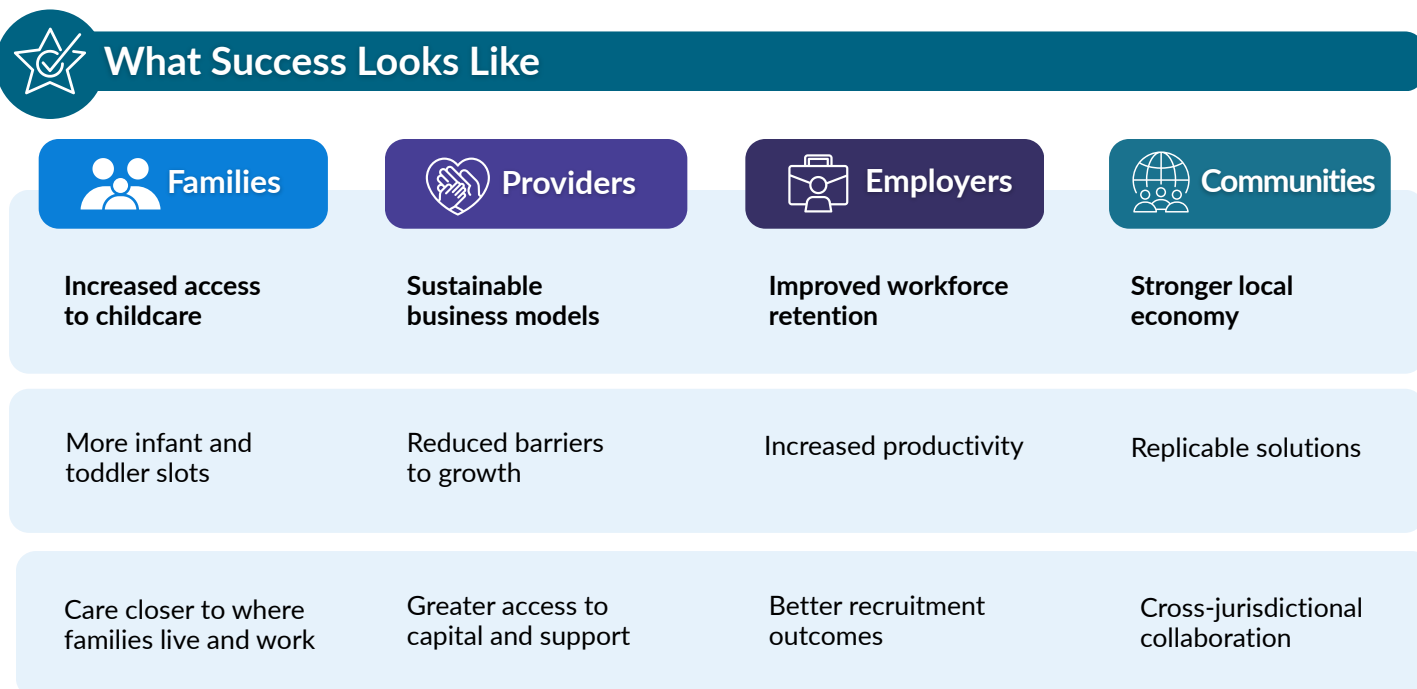
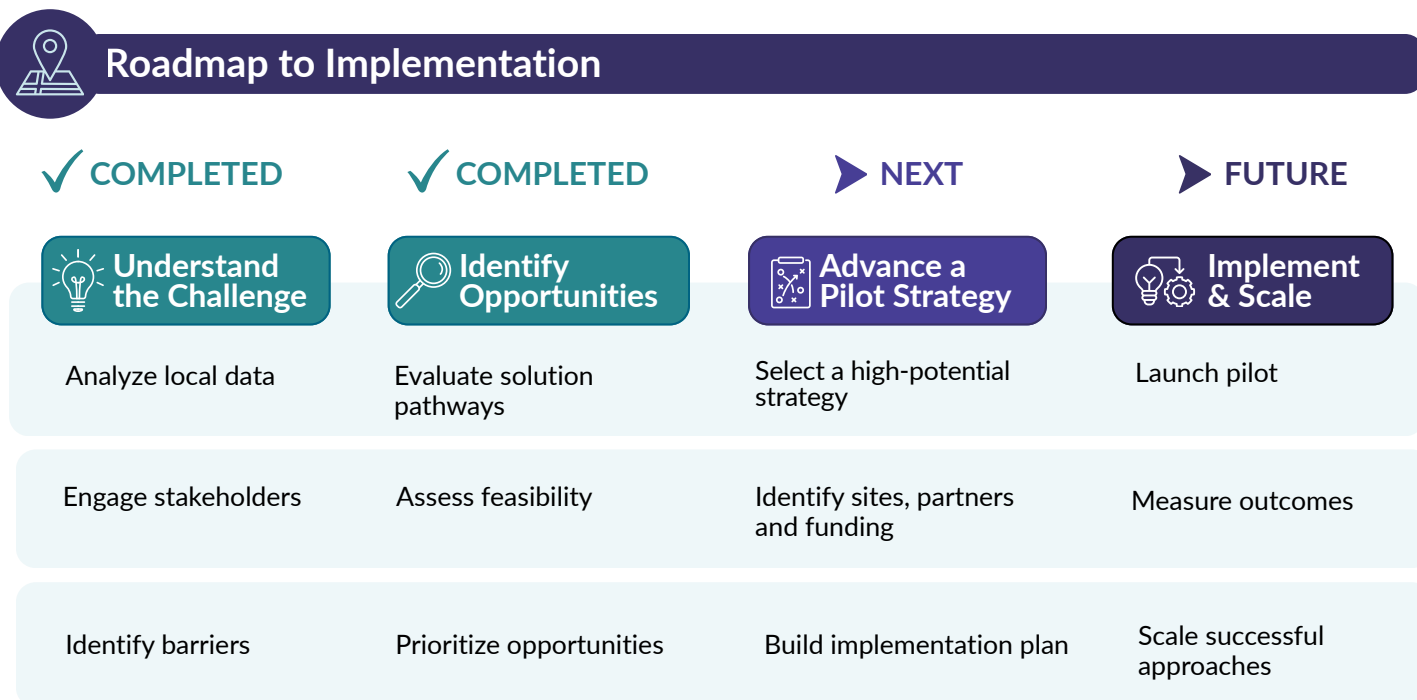
Data Note: Seats supported represent approximately 1,000 childcare seats supported each year over a five-year investment period. This does not represent 5,000 permanent new seats.

No single investment will solve Adams County's childcare challenges. However, sustained, coordinated investments across multiple strategies can meaningfully expand capacity, strengthen providers and improve outcomes for families, employers and communities.

Moving from Planning to Implementation

The pilot established a solid foundation for coordinated action.

The next phase focuses on **advancing implementation-ready projects** while continuing to strengthen partnerships across municipalities, employers, providers and community organizations.



Looking Ahead

The Adams County Childcare Pilot established a solid foundation for coordinated action. Community partners now have shared priorities, stronger relationships and a clear roadmap for moving from planning to implementation.



What's In Place



What Needs to Happen Next



Our Shared Goal

Shared understanding of childcare as workforce infrastructure	Select priority pilots. Identify 1-2 strategies or sites to advance first	By continuing to align policy, investment and partnerships, Adams County can move from planning to implementation and build a stronger childcare system that supports families, providers, employers and the regional economy.
Engaged municipal, provider, employer, and community partners	Align funding and partners. Connect public, philanthropic, employer and provider resources.	
Focus clear opportunity areas for action	Move toward implementation. Define roles, timelines, success measures and owners for next steps.	

Conclusion

The Adams County Childcare Pilot has reached an important midpoint, with partners aligned around the urgency of the challenge and the practical opportunities available to address it. The work completed to date confirms that **childcare is essential workforce and economic infrastructure**, while also highlighting the **need to stabilize providers, expand infant and toddler care, remove regulatory barriers and coordinate investment across communities**.

Collaboration among county and municipal governments, local leaders, economic development partners, employers, providers, and philanthropic organizations will be critical to translating these priorities into action. In the coming months, these **partners can help align policy, land, funding, technical expertise, and community relationships around the initiatives with the greatest potential for near-term impact**.

The next phase will focus on **selecting priority pilots, aligning public, philanthropic, employer and provider resources, and assigning clear roles, timelines and measures of success**. By advancing a coordinated portfolio of strategies, including co-location, Family Childcare Home expansion, regulatory improvements and a shared solutions fund, Adams County can move from planning to implementation and build a stronger, **more sustainable childcare system for families, employers, providers and the regional economy**.