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Impacts of Special Needs on Children and Families

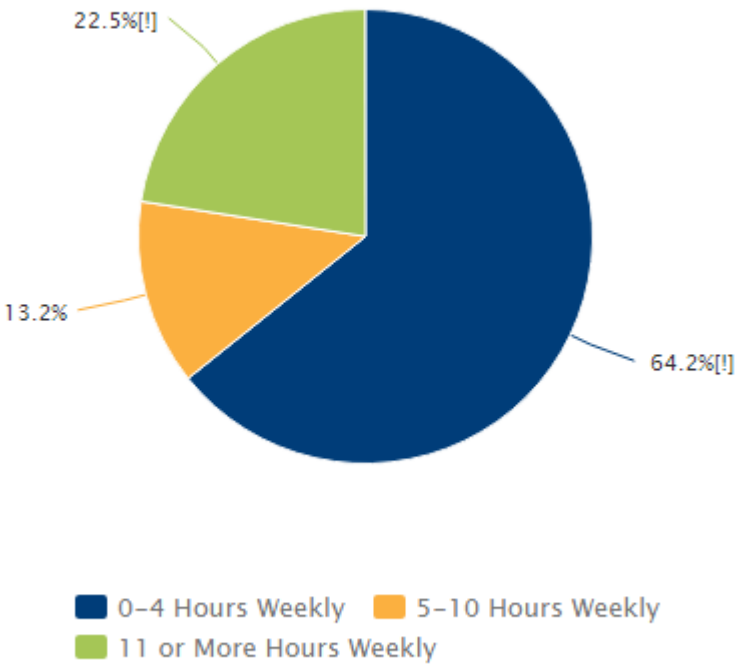
Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN) Ages 0-17 with Conditions that Moderately or Consistently Affected Their Daily Activities in the Previous Year: 2024

United States	Percent
Activities Consistently Affected	15.8%
Activities Moderately Affected	42.8%

California	Percent
Activities Consistently Affected	20.6%
Activities Moderately Affected	40.7%

Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 with special health care needs (CSHCN) whose conditions consistently, moderately, or never affected their daily activities in the previous 12 months, among those with reported health conditions (e.g., in 2024, 40.7% of California CSHCN with reported health conditions had conditions that moderately affected their daily activities in the previous year).
Data Source: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Survey of Children's Health (Nov. 2025).

CSHCN Who Need Health Care at Home, by Number of Hours Their Families Spend Providing Care in an Average Week: 2024
California



What It Is

Children with special health care needs (CSHCN) have or are at increased risk for a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional condition and require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally. On kidsdata.org, indicators related to the impacts of special health care needs on children and families include difficulties faced by CSHCN in and out of school, hospital and emergency room use, and impacts on families' time, employment, finances, and parenting.

Why This Topic Is Important

Nearly 1.5 million California children, and more than 16 million children nationwide, have or are at increased risk for a chronic health condition—physical, developmental, mental, or behavioral—and require care and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally. As advances in technology and medicine continue to improve and extend the lives of children with special health care needs (CSHCN), these numbers are expected to grow. Over the next decade, for instance, it is estimated that the number of children with medically complex conditions will double.

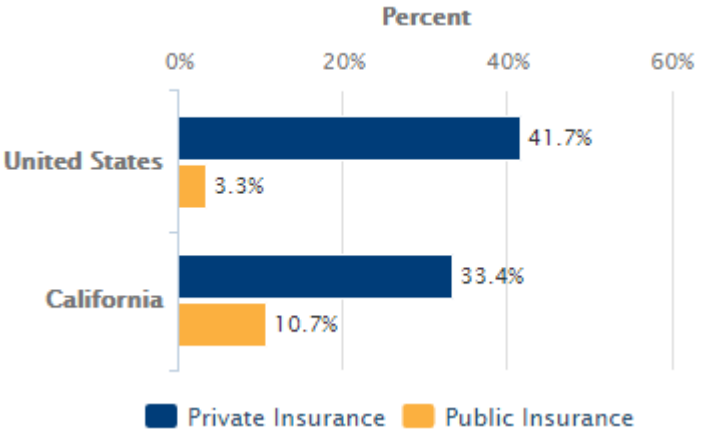
When compared with children who do not have special health care needs, CSHCN are more likely to be limited in their ability to function and participate in daily activities, and to experience social, academic, and other life challenges that can complicate their medical care. As a result, CSHCN often rely on a range of services from multiple sectors, and their parents and family members often have more caregiving responsibilities and experience more stress and difficulties with employment and finances when compared with other families. In order to care for their children, parents of CSHCN may need to cut back their work hours or give up a job which provides access to health insurance and income to pay medical bills. National estimates show that families of CSHCN provide approximately 1.5 billion hours of health care at home each year, with lost wages for these caregivers representing nearly $18 billion. Poverty is more common among these families, as well, and parents of CSHCN generally fare worse than other parents on measures of physical and mental health.

How Children Are Faring

According to 2024 data on California and U.S. children ages 0-17 with special health care needs (CSHCN), around 3 in 5 with reported health conditions had their ability to do daily

Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 with special health care needs (CSHCN) who need health care at home, by number of hours their family spends providing care for them in an average week (e.g., in 2024, among California CSHCN who needed health care at home, 22.5% had families who spent 11 or more hours per week providing them care).
Data Source: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Survey of Children's Health (Nov. 2025).

CSHCN with More than $1,000 in Out-of-Pocket Health Expenses in the Previous Year, by Type of Health Insurance Coverage: 2024



Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 with special health care needs (CSHCN) whose families had and did not have out-of-pocket expenses related to the child's health in the previous 12 months, by type of health insurance coverage and amount paid (e.g., in 2024, 85.8% of California CSHCN with public health insurance only had less than $500 in out-of-pocket health expenses in the previous year).
Data Source: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Survey of Children's Health (Nov. 2025).

CSHCN with Family Members Who, in Order to Maintain Health Insurance, Avoided Changing Jobs in the Previous Year: 2024

Locations	Percent
United States	15.0%
California	14.9%

Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 with special health care needs (CSHCN) whose parents or other family members avoided changing jobs in the previous 12 months because of concerns about maintaining the child's health insurance (e.g., in 2024, 14.9% of California CSHCN had a family member who, in order to maintain health insurance, avoided changing jobs in the previous year).
Data Source: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Survey of Children's Health (Nov. 2025).

activities moderately or consistently affected by those conditions in the previous year. In California, an estimated 12% of CSHCN missed at least 11 school days in the previous year due to illness or injury—three and a half times the rate for their peers without special health care needs. The percentage of CSHCN who had ever repeated a grade in school—statewide (5%) and nationally (9%)—also was more than one and a half times that for their peers.

In 2024, 27% of California CSHCN visited an emergency room (ER) in the previous year, and 7% had at least one overnight hospital stay. In California and nationwide, ER use is more common among CSHCN with public health insurance than those with private coverage. While out-of-pocket health care costs in the previous year were higher than $1,000 for 26% of California CSHCN overall in 2024, more than 85% of CSHCN in California with public insurance exclusively had out-of-pocket expenses of less than $500.

Among California CSHCN who need to receive therapies, medications, or other health care at home, more than 1 in 5 have families who spend at least 11 hours each week providing that care. In 2024, 23% of CSHCN in California had parents or other family members who left a job, took a leave of absence, or cut back their work hours in the previous year because of the child's health, and 15% had someone in their family who avoided changing jobs in the previous year due to concerns about maintaining health insurance coverage.

More than 1 in 5 California CSHCN had parents who usually or always felt aggravation from parenting in the previous month, compared with fewer than 1 in 25 California children without special health care needs, according to 2024 estimates.

View references for this text and additional research on this topic:
https://m.kidsdata.org/topic/15/impacts-of-special-health-care-needs-on-children-and-families/summary