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WHO CARES?

**WHY CANADA NEEDS A PUBLIC
CHILD CARE SYSTEM**

Who Cares? Why Canada needs a public child care system

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper, please email info@oxfam.ca.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



WE ARE CARING FOR CHILDREN AND HELPING THEM TO DEVELOP, WHAT COULD BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT?"

— Tessa Lochhead, co-founder and co-director of Pirurvik Preschool and mother (Iqaluit, Nunavut)

Despite considerable evidence pointing to the benefits of child care for women's economic equality, for economic growth and for children's development, many governments fail to recognize child care as a public good and adequately resource it. Families are left struggling to cover expensive child care fees, millions of women are kept out of the workforce, and half of the world's children go without pre-primary education.¹

Women in Canada do almost twice as much unpaid care work than men² and this has significant financial and economic impacts for women and society at large. Families struggle to find child care and women are forced to make difficult tradeoffs between expensive child care and their careers. Child care is one of the most feminized job sectors in Canada and early childhood educators are some of the most undervalued workers, resulting in low retention rates, low levels of job satisfaction and labour shortages.³

Getting to a public child care system that is affordable, accessible, high-quality and inclusive for all families in Canada is possible. It would be good for gender equality, good for the economy and good for children. Public child care is one of the smartest investments the government can make to ensure Canada is more inclusive, more equal and more prosperous. Child care advocates have long advocated for increased leadership from the federal government and they have a clear road map: the Affordable Child Care for All Plan.⁴ It is time for federal leaders to take up this challenge.

THREE KEY ELEMENTS OF CHILD CARE REFORM

1 AFFORDABILITY: making child care affordable through low-fee, fee-cap policies.

2 ACCESSIBILITY: expanding child care availability through licensed public and non-profit child care.

3 QUALITY: improving quality of child care by investing in the workforce to ensure living wages and good working conditions.

WHY PUBLIC CHILD CARE MAKES SENSE

It's good for gender equality

After a half century of efforts to reduce the gender wage gap, progress has stalled in Canada. Women continue to earn less on each dollar men earn.⁵ This gap significantly increases for more marginalized women, including women of colour (67 cents), immigrant women (71 cents), Indigenous women (65 cents) and women with disabilities (54 cents).⁶ Women's labour force participation remains seven to nine percentage points lower than men's.⁷ Because of unpaid care responsibilities, many more women than men are stuck in part-time, seasonal or temporary jobs, which are generally paid less, offer less job security, provide fewer opportunities for advancement, and lack health benefits. Almost 70 per cent of part-time workers and 60 per cent of minimum-wage earners are women.⁸ As a result, women would have to work 14 years longer to earn the same amount as men over their lifetimes.



\$19.2 BILLION

IF THE 670,000 WOMEN WHO WERE WORKING PART-TIME IN 2016 WERE ABLE TO FIND FULL-TIME WORK THEY WANTED, THEY WOULD HAVE BROUGHT HOME AN ADDITIONAL \$19.2 BILLION IN WAGES.⁹

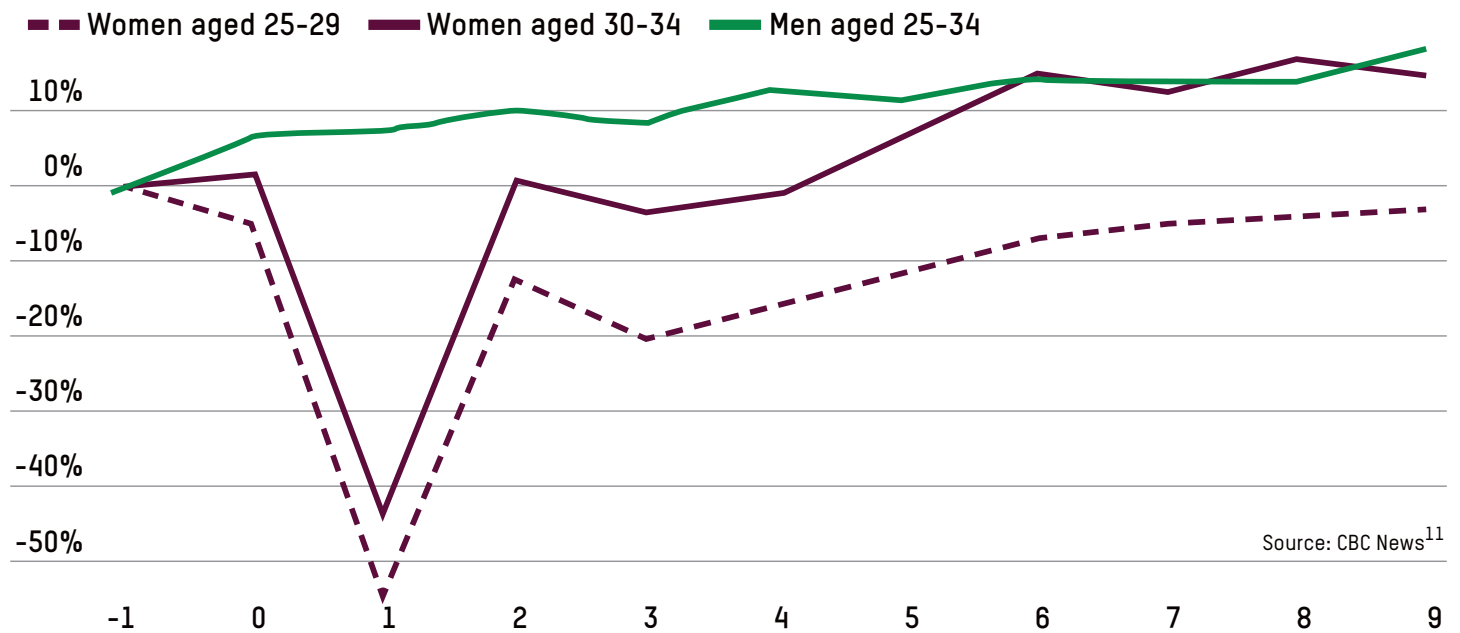
More than 33 per cent of women aged 25 to 34 have a child under the age of six. This often comes at considerable cost. A recent study by RBC found that in the year following the birth of their first child, women aged 25 to 34 saw their earnings fall by almost half compared to women with no children, and continued to experience a significant earnings penalty over the next four years.¹⁰ This loss of earnings is most pronounced and detrimental for women under 30 because their careers are not yet well established.

“AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE FOR ALL WOULD HELP FAMILIES AND CHILDCARE WORKERS. IT WOULD SET REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS ACROSS THE BOARD, SUPPORT CHILDREN, AND ALSO PROVIDE STABILITY IN THE FIELD, HELPING TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN PEOPLE WHO ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT THE WORK AND DIMINISHING THE EXPLOITATION OF CHILDCARE WORKERS.”

— Kathy MacNeill, child care provider of over 20 years and mother (Ottawa, Ontario)

Figure 1: The parent gap in earnings

This chart shows the gap, in percentage terms, between what men and women with children earn compared to those without, at different years after the birth of their first child.



WITHIN OUR FAMILY, WE BARELY FALL OVER THE LINE OF QUALIFYING FOR A SUBSIDY AND THE COST OF LIVING IS HIGH. SO PART-TIME CHILD CARE IS ALL WE CAN AFFORD AND WE WORK PART-TIME TO TRY TO MAKE IT WORK.”

Women need affordable child care to be able to pursue decent work opportunities. It is key to strengthening women’s economic security and equality. This was underscored by the findings of a recent survey conducted by Statistics Canada.¹² Of those surveyed, the majority of whom were women, 36 per cent reported that they had difficulty finding child care for their children. When asked how that impacted their families, 40 per cent reported that they had to change work schedules, 33 per cent reported having to work fewer hours than desired, and over 25 per cent reported that they had to postpone their return to work.

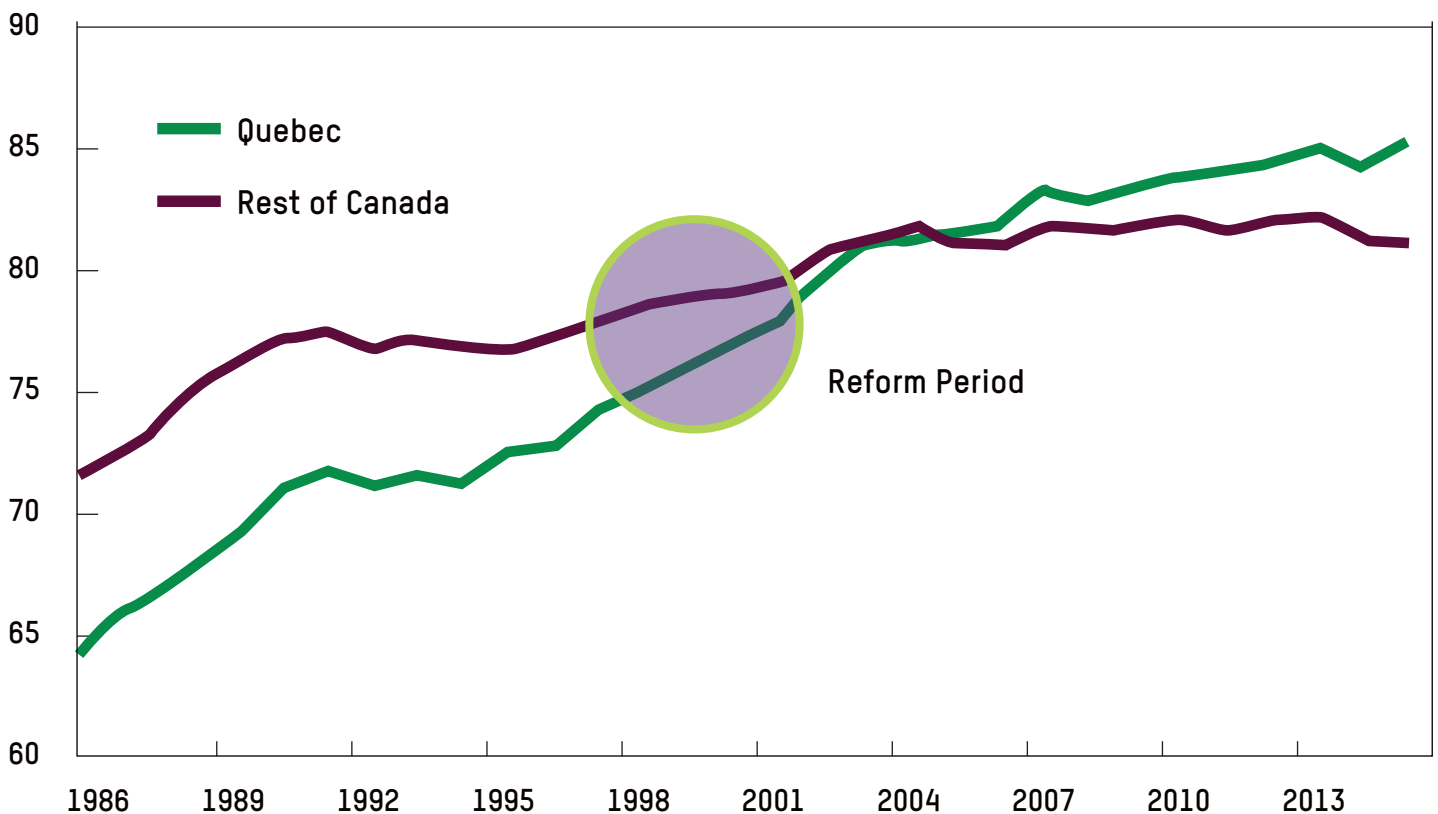
— Adrienne Vicente, parent, daughter of a live-in caregiver and Filipino caregiver community advocate (Ottawa, Ontario)

It's good for the economy

Closing the gender labour force gap and wage gap has tremendous potential for growing Canada's economy. According to a study by the McKinsey Global Institute, closing the gender gap could add \$150 billion in incremental GDP by 2026 or a 0.6 per cent increase in annual GDP, which amounts to a 6 per cent increase over the business-as-usual GDP growth forecast.¹³ In its last economic review of Canada, the OECD found that the gender employment gap within Canada increases with personal child care costs, and it highlighted Quebec's experience as evidence of the positive impact of low-fee child care on women's labour force participation. Since the implementation of the major child care program reform in Quebec starting in 1997, women's labour force participation has increased faster than in the rest of Canada and contributed to Quebec's economic growth.

Evidence shows that public child care is fiscally affordable because increases in parental employment bring in more tax revenues and result in reduced public spending on social assistance and other benefits. It also increases growth and productivity, thereby multiplying the revenue effects. In 2017 the IMF conducted a study examining the benefits of increased women's labour force participation in growing Canada's economy.¹⁶ Their calculations were premised on a 40 per cent reduction of child care costs, with the federal government paying providers the difference, which would cost the government an estimated \$8 billion. They found that this investment could, for example, bring 150,000 stay-at-home mothers with high education levels into the workforce, which in turn would raise GDP by 2 percentage points or \$8 billion, enough to compensate the program or pay for other programs that advance gender equality.

Figure 2: Women's Labour Force Participation Rates in Quebec and the Rest of Canada, Ages 25-54



Source: IMF¹⁴

SUPPLY-SIDE VS DEMAND-SIDE FUNDING

“ONLY THE REGULAR FUNDING THAT STATE INVESTMENT BRINGS IS ABLE TO GUARANTEE ACCESS AND QUALITY ON A FAIRLY EQUITABLE BASIS FOR ALL GROUPS.”

—OECD¹⁶

Supply-side funding—funding that goes directly to programs to cover all or some of their operating costs—emphasizes that early learning and child care is a public good and ensures public accountability for high-quality programs. Demand-side funding—tax benefits, cash or vouchers paid out to families—presumes that purchasing power guarantees parent choice and reinforces the idea that early learning and child care is a commodity in the marketplace. Several studies have shown that supply-side approaches result in more uniform quality and superior coverage.¹⁷ Demand-side approaches generally tend to be more expensive, less accessible, of lower quality and more inequitable.

It's good for kids

International studies, program evaluations and quality measurements have repeatedly shown that participation in early childhood education and care programs has positive effects on children's cognitive and language development and their happiness, and has long-term impacts on their education, employment and earnings.¹⁸ But the quality of care is critical, as the effects of poor child care on children's development and learning can be long-lasting.

Quality depends on a variety of factors: the curriculum used, the child-to-staff ratio, the size of the group, the resources available to educators, and the way in which children from different backgrounds are integrated into the group. But the most significant factor determining quality is staff, including the level of training and experience of early childhood educators,



CANADA HAS SOME OF THE HIGHEST CHILD CARE COSTS AMONG ITS INTERNATIONAL PEERS, AND CHILD CARE FEES CONTINUE TO RISE FASTER THAN INFLATION IN MOST REGIONS.

the quality of leadership and mentorship provided by management and senior staff, and the rate of turnover. Yet, child care workers are some of the lowest paid and least valued workers and the sector suffers from a severe retention and recruitment crisis. Canada needs a workforce strategy to address the poor working conditions of child care workers to ensure their rights are respected and care quality is improved.

“NOT EVERYONE CAN AFFORD THE UPFRONT COST OF A TAX-SUBSIDIZED SUPPORT PROGRAM. AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE CHILD CARE WOULD HELP EVERYONE NO MATTER THEIR FINANCIAL BACKGROUND.”

— Deborah Schratte, working mom (Vancouver, British Columbia)

THE CASE FOR THE UNIVERSAL APPROACH

Canada's child care system should be universal. This does not mean a compulsory one-size-fits-all model nor does it mean that child care should necessarily be free. It also does not mean only one type of child care service should be offered (i.e. government-run, institutionalized programs). Rather, universality implies making access available to all children whose parents wish to participate, without discrimination based on income or other criteria. A universal approach calls for a publicly funded and managed system that provides a wide range of accessible and comprehensive services delivered by public and non-profit providers in a way that is adapted to families' needs.¹⁹

UNICEF makes the following arguments in favour of designing early childhood services as universal programs rather than targeting them to particular groups of children:

- Universal early childhood services tend to bring together children from different backgrounds rather than reinforcing concentrations of disadvantage, which is a means of preventing social exclusion.
- Universal services usually command broader and more sustainable public support and engender greater public concern for quality.
- Programs targeted only on the basis of income or geography may fail to reach the smaller proportion—but often larger absolute number—of vulnerable children who fall outside the target.
- Disadvantaged children by ensuring additional funds to child care centres that serve low-income children or children with special educational needs.²⁰

It's good for families

Canada has some of the highest child care costs among its international peers, leaving families struggling to make ends meet. Infant care in the most expensive regions of Canada comes at a median monthly fee of over \$1700, and between \$1200 and \$1300 for toddlers and preschoolers.²¹ Child care fees continue to rise faster than inflation in most regions. Even in rural areas, fees are not significantly lower than in nearby cities.



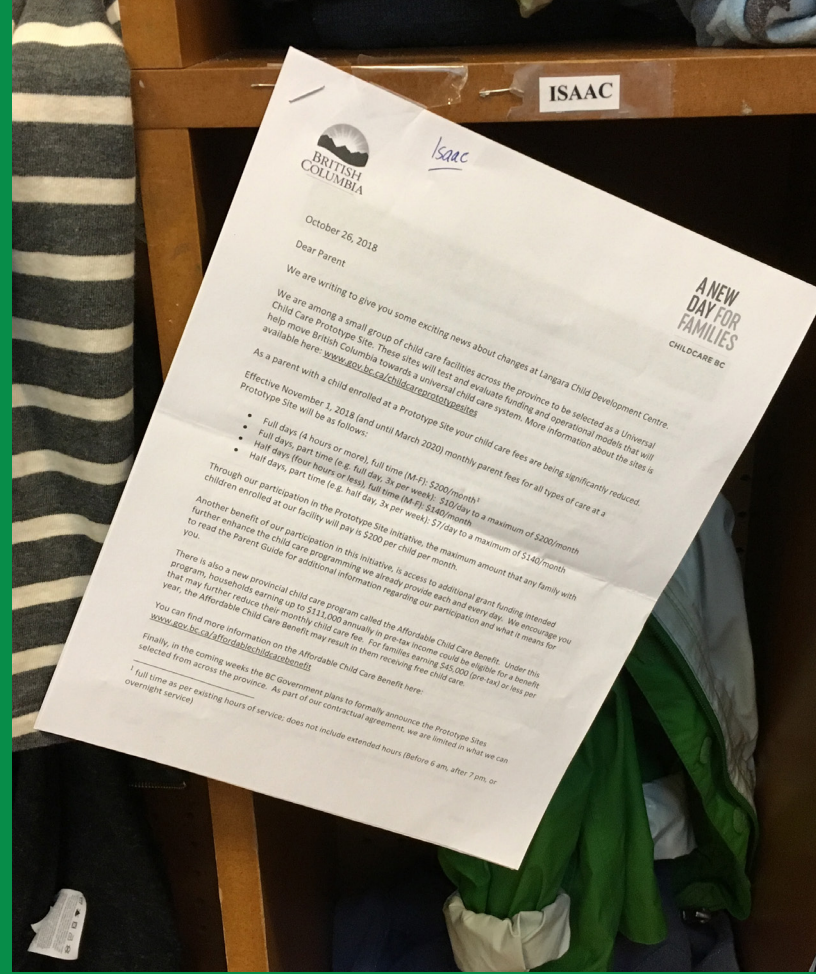
THE AVERAGE ONTARIO FAMILY SPENDS NEARLY A QUARTER OF THEIR INCOME ON CHILD CARE.

Child care is considered affordable if it costs less than 10 per cent of the family income or less than 30 per cent of the income that the main caregiving parent, generally the mother, would make if employed.²² But the average Ontario family spends nearly a quarter of their family income on child care, or just over two-thirds of the main caregiving parent's potential income. There is a clear need for publicly funded child care to reduce these financial pressures on families, particularly low-income families who are working hard to escape poverty.

The availability of licensed spaces is another key issue for families in Canada. An estimated 776,000 children (44 per cent of all children younger than school age) in Canada live in 'child care deserts'—communities where at least three children compete for each licensed spot.²³ Where child care is offered in a purely market-driven way, child care deserts tend to increase. This is why a publicly funded, planned and managed child care system is so important. Families should have access to child care where they live, no matter where they live.

776,000 CHILDREN

AN ESTIMATED 776,000 CHILDREN IN CANADA LIVE IN 'CHILD CARE DESERTS'— COMMUNITIES WHERE AT LEAST THREE CHILDREN COMPETE FOR EACH LICENSED CHILD CARE SPOT.



FIRST-HAND THOUGHTS:

DEBORAH SCHRATTER, working mom
(Vancouver, British Columbia)

// EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS ARE AN EXTENSION OF OUR FAMILY AND OUR COMMUNITY. THEY ARE PART OF AN ESSENTIAL SUPPORT NETWORK.

Early childhood educators contribute greatly to the growth of our children: watching over their cognitive development, nurturing their growing curiosity and providing day-to-day-general support. They also provide parents (especially new parents) with added emotional support and professional advice. It is a difficult choice a parent has to make to leave their child with someone else, but knowing that my children are left with highly trained individuals who care for my child's well-being brings me great comfort.

When I first heard we were accepted to be part of the \$10-a-day child care pilot program, I genuinely felt like I won a lottery. What the support of affordable child care brings to a family is incredible. Here in Vancouver, I'm part of a double-income household, but we still have to budget carefully. Like many others, there is no possibility for me to be a full-time mother, or we would run the risk of not being able to afford our home. Access to this program means I can provide more for my children—the money saved goes towards future tuition savings, extracurricular activities, better food. And it provides ease of mind that we have a bit more flexibility in our budget during these crucial first four years.

When Canada invested in the technology sector we saw this industry and related professions blossom into something greater for the country. If we injected more money into child care you'd see more talent attracted to the field. Parents want to nurture their children in the best way possible. In the same way, I hope that our government sees the potential in our children, and can help to develop the childcare industry further and to see that as an investment in caring for the most important resources we have: our community, including parents, support workers and children alike."

Photo R: Letter given to all parents to announce they were part of a pilot project featuring \$10-a-day care.

WHY PUBLIC CHILD CARE IS GOOD FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Child care is one of the most feminized job sectors in Canada: 97 per cent of child caregivers are women.²⁴ These jobs are undervalued, resulting in low retention rates, low levels of job satisfaction and labour shortages. Child care provision is the responsibility of provincial and territorial governments, and child care policies and regulations vary. Little data is currently available to assess and compare working conditions of child care workers across the country, which further underscores how marginalized these workers are.

97%

CHILD CARE IS ONE OF THE MOST FEMINIZED JOB SECTORS IN CANADA: 97 PER CENT OF CHILD CAREGIVERS ARE WOMEN.

1/4

A QUARTER OF CHILD CARE WORKERS IN CENTRES OR HOME CHILD CARE SETTINGS NEED A SECOND JOB TO MAKE ENDS MEET.

40%

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS EARN 40 PER CENT LESS ON AVERAGE THAN WOMEN WITH SIMILAR LEVELS OF EDUCATION WORKING FULL-TIME IN OTHER SECTORS.

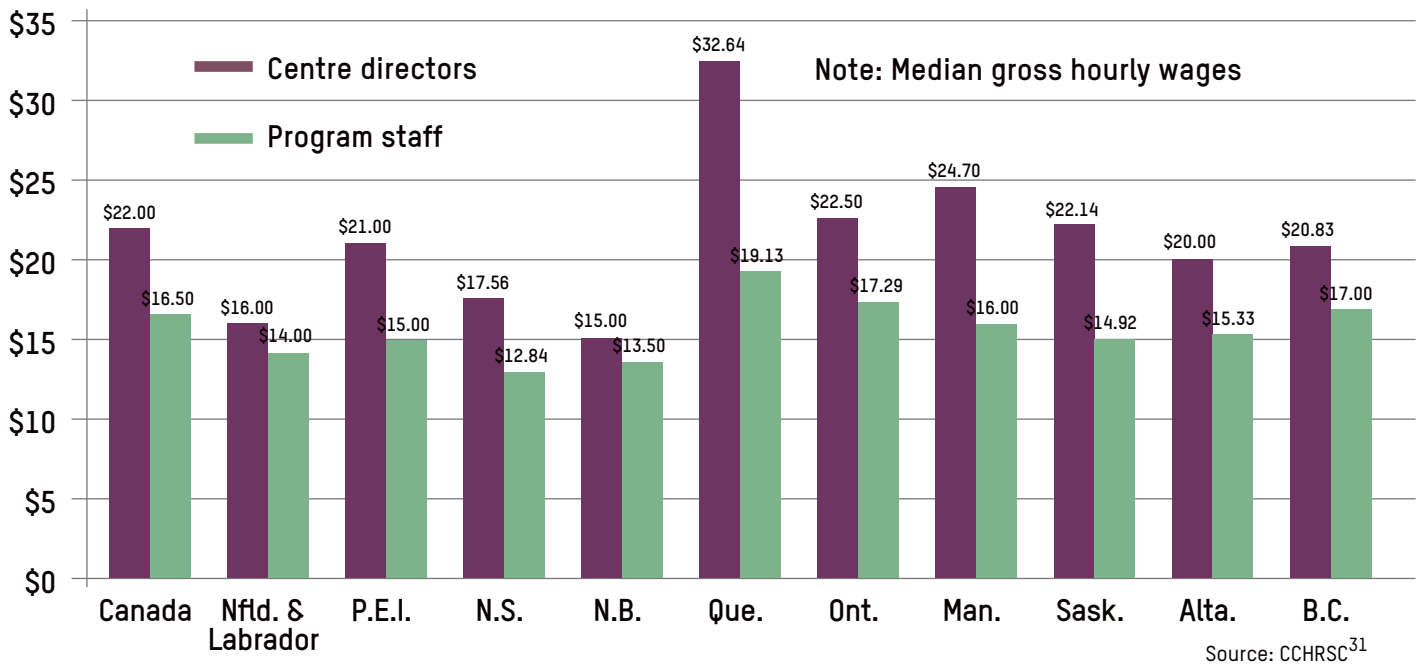
There are two types of child caregivers: regulated child care providers, who work in licensed centres and regulated home child care centres, and unregulated caregivers. This second category includes unregulated home child caregivers working in a child's home, such as nannies, au pairs and domestic workers, as well as unregulated child caregivers working in their own homes. Both regulated and unregulated child caregivers earn low wages and often have no benefits, poor working conditions and limited job protection.

Regulated child care workers

Close to 90 per cent of centre-based child care workers in Canada have completed some form of post-secondary education directly related to early childhood education and care, most commonly a two-year college diploma.²⁵ Yet, they earn some of the lowest wages in Canada—nearly 40 per cent lower on average than women with similar levels of education working full-time in other sectors.²⁶

Wages are approximately 25 per cent higher in non-profit than in for-profit child care centres.²⁷ In 2011, the most recent year for which data are available, the median hourly wage for child care program staff was \$16.50, which was generally below a living wage, and many earned much less.²⁸ This was especially true for staff working part-time or in before-and-after-school programs as they receive fewer benefits and lower pay and have poorer working conditions (i.e. precarious contracts, split shifts) than full-time staff.²⁹ It is no wonder that a quarter of child care workers in centres or home child care settings need a second job to make ends meet, and that licensed child care centres struggle with finding and retaining qualified staff.³⁰

Figure 3: Child care centre staff wages across Canada



A FEDERAL CHILD CARE SYSTEM SHOULD PROVIDE A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS SO THAT THEY CAN CONTINUE LEARNING AND INCREASE THEIR TRAINING. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION COURSES ARE EXPENSIVE AND MOST DAYCARE WORKERS ARE BEING PAID MINIMUM WAGE. IT'S HARD TO FIND THE MONEY TO CONTINUE YOUR EDUCATION IN THIS FIELD SO THAT YOU CAN PROVIDE THE BEST FOR THE CHILDREN IN YOUR CARE."

— Suzanne, in-home child care provider (Calgary, Alberta)

PEOPLE LOOK AT CHILD CARE PROVIDERS DIFFERENTLY, AS IF WE HAVE LOWER STATURE. WE'RE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PILE WHICH IS RATHER DISTURBING BECAUSE WE ARE THE INDIVIDUALS TAKING CARE OF THE LIGHT AND JOYS IN A PARENT'S LIFE."

— Sarah, mother and home child care provider (rural Nova Scotia)

FIRST-HAND THOUGHTS:

KATHY MACNEILL, child care provider of over 20 years and mother (Ottawa, Ontario)

// THE PREVAILING ATTITUDE IN SOCIETY IS THAT ANYONE CAN DO THIS JOB, BUT THAT IS NOT SO.

I have a three-year diploma in child and youth counseling and I undertake ongoing education to keep up with the field. Taking care of children is what I want to do. It is a special skill to have kids trust and bond with me quickly. I help keep little people healthy, happy and thriving, which requires a wide variety of skills.

Working in a female-dominated sector, we see that our skills are not as valued or paid as much as those in a male-dominated career, even if we have the same level of education. I have my diploma but still start off at minimum wage. However, that same diploma level for, say, a career like welding, could have you start off at \$20 per hour and eventually earn \$60,000-plus a year.

Working in child care is hard and stressful. Job instability is frequent (maybe you'll have a job this summer, maybe you won't). Physical safety in some centres can be an issue (not all spaces in a daycare are safe), and parents can take over your work environment, which can leave you feeling intimidated, uncomfortable and disempowered to do your job.



This is an actual career and I've never considered doing anything else. It's been a vocation. At the end of the day the people I really strive to please and the ones who really matter are the little ones I spend the day with.

If affordable child care for all were enacted at the federal level it would validate this important field of work. Parents would be able to choose child care based on the needs of their child and not on their pocketbooks."

A 2007 STUDY ESTIMATED A CANADA-WIDE SHORTAGE OF 4,800 CHILD CARE WORKERS FOR POSITIONS IN CENTRE-BASED CHILD CARE SETTINGS.

Besides low wages, most child care staff do not have access to health care benefits, paid sick leave, personal days or vacation time beyond the legislated minimum. This is especially true for those working part-time and for workers in for-profit centres.³² Generally, wages do not increase with years of experience and centre-based child care workers have little opportunity for career

advancement. Several provinces require professional development, but it is relatively costly, and there is little incentive for child care workers to pursue these opportunities as they do not result in higher wages or career advancement.³³ Poor working conditions ultimately result in high rates of worker burnout and demoralization, which exacerbate the sector's retention crisis.³⁴

A 2007 study estimated a Canada-wide shortage of 4,800 child care workers for positions in centre-based child care settings.³⁵ Demand has only grown since then and the shortage has most likely increased, leading employers to hire less-qualified staff to fill staffing gaps.³⁶ Non-qualified workers often face worse conditions, such as long hours and split shifts, and tend to receive even lower wages and fewer benefits.³⁷

As in other sectors, unionization gives workers the power to negotiate better conditions. Unionized child care centres tend to have higher wages and include other benefits such as life or disability insurance, paid sick or personal leave days, top-up maternity benefits and pension plan or RRSP contributions.



FIRST-HAND THOUGHTS:

ADRIENNE VICENTE, parent, daughter of a live-in caregiver, and Filipino caregiver community advocate (Ottawa, Ontario)

“ MY PARENTS CAME TO CANADA IN THE LATE 1970S FROM THE PHILIPPINES. THEY WANTED TO WORK REALLY HARD TO GIVE US A BETTER LIFE, WHATEVER IT TOOK. MY MOM BECAME A LIVE-IN CAREGIVER. WORKING IN THAT ENVIRONMENT, YOU AREN'T ABLE TO CHALLENGE YOUR EMPLOYER AROUND WORKING CONDITIONS.

For some caregivers, they've already come from harsh conditions, which has become a normalized experience to them. Passports are sometimes confiscated, or there is abuse, but you are too scared to go to the police for fear of being sent back, or because you don't know your rights.

Live-in caregivers are often isolated, with maybe one day off a week, so it's hard to learn about the options and resources they could have from settlement agencies or the kind of work these agencies do.

Live-in caregivers have to display a large number of skills (education, language and experience) but only recently have we been reassured they are able to make at least a minimum wage. However, their wages don't match their job requirements and certainly don't compensate for the high amount of emotional labour that goes into this type of work.

Live-in caregivers are away from their families, experiencing social integration as newcomers, and are taking care of a stranger's family beyond just cleaning homes and making sure the children eat. These workers care for the children, fully, while the parents are away. The children grow up with their caregivers. They confide in them and share experiences that they don't share with their parents. However, when you talk wages, they don't match the responsibilities, especially when you consider that caregivers are often supporting their own family back home.”

Unregulated child caregivers

Around 30 per cent of child caregivers in Canada work in private households.³⁸ This includes nannies, au pairs and domestic workers who work on a part-time or full-time basis and live either in their employer's home or elsewhere. As they fall outside regulatory frameworks, unregulated child caregivers straddle the line between informal and formal work, and there is very little research and data available on these workers and their working conditions.³⁹

A significant portion of unregulated child caregivers in Canada are migrant workers. Canada is one of the few countries that offers provisions under immigration laws for migrants planning to take up care work, and over 5,500 migrant child care workers come to Canada each year.⁴⁰ Caregivers are selected by employers and receive a work permit that is exclusively attached to that employer, which makes leaving the employer difficult. Employers of migrant child caregivers often do not comply with labour regulations or clauses in their employment contracts regarding hours of work, wages and time off. However, migrant caregivers often will not challenge their employers because they fear losing their job and not being able to get another job without employer references. They may also fear that job loss will jeopardize their chance of becoming a permanent resident of Canada.⁴¹ Migrant worker advocates welcomed the Canadian government's recent decision to provide open work permits for caregivers and to re-establish a path to permanent residency.

There are well-documented reports of abuse and exploitation of live-in caregivers by employers and recruiters in Canada.⁴² A study by the Canadian Department of Justice found that many live-in caregivers endured forced labour and slavery-type practices.⁴³ The case of "Eva," documented by Parkdale Community Legal Services in Toronto, provides a strong example: Eva worked approximately 150 hours per week, but was only paid for 44 hours by her employer. Even though Eva knew her rights were being violated, she felt she had no choice but to continue working for the employer because she was in Canada under a restrictive work permit that forbade her from working for anyone else.⁴⁴

In addition to being physically and mentally exhausted, caregivers confined to their employer's household can feel isolated from the rest of society. For those who live in the employer's household, there is often no clear boundary between being on duty and off duty. Even for live-out caregivers, the long hours and isolation on the job can produce similar effects. While there is no live-in requirement for migrant child caregivers in Canada, many employers prefer live-in caregivers over which they can exert more control.

A comparative analysis of public policy toward in-home child care in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom found that "the lack of regulation for in-home child care is the most striking in Canada."⁴⁵ Unregulated child care in Canada remains firmly in the informal and private domain, excluded from early childhood education and care regulations. This leaves workers vulnerable, with almost no legal recourse in the face of abuse. Advocates for domestic workers have long advocated for Canada to adopt the International Labour Organization Convention 189 which sets out the fundamental rights of domestic workers, including terms and conditions of employment, to protect them from abuse.⁴⁶

A ROADMAP TO AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE FOR ALL

“ I THINK EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ABOUT CHILD CARE WILL BE IMPORTANT TO HELP INDIVIDUALS WITHOUT KIDS, OR PEOPLE MAYBE OF AN OLDER GENERATION WITH ADULT CHILDREN, TO GET ON BOARD. CURRENTLY, EVERYONE HAS TO ALLOCATE THEIR TAXES FOR SCHOOLS, BUT EDUCATION IS MANDATORY; CHILD CARE ISN'T VALUED THAT WAY YET.”

— Suzanne, in-home child care provider (Calgary, Alberta)

Investing in child care is not only the right thing to do to advance gender equality, it is one of the smartest investments the government can make to ensure Canada is more inclusive, more equal and more prosperous. The evidence is clear: unless Canada ensures equal access to affordable child care, progress towards closing the economic gender gap will stall and Canada's economic growth will be stifled. Canada can afford to invest in a public child care system, and we all stand to benefit.

Canada's approach to child care

The OECD, ILO, IMF⁴⁷ and World Bank have described Canada's lack of accessible and affordable child care services as “one of the highest hurdles for women to participate in the labour force” and have criticized Canada's low investment in early learning and child care.⁴⁸ Compared to its OECD peers, Canada comes in lowest in public spending on early childhood education and care spending, at merely 0.3 per cent of the GDP, which is well below the international benchmark amount of 1 per cent of GDP.⁴⁹

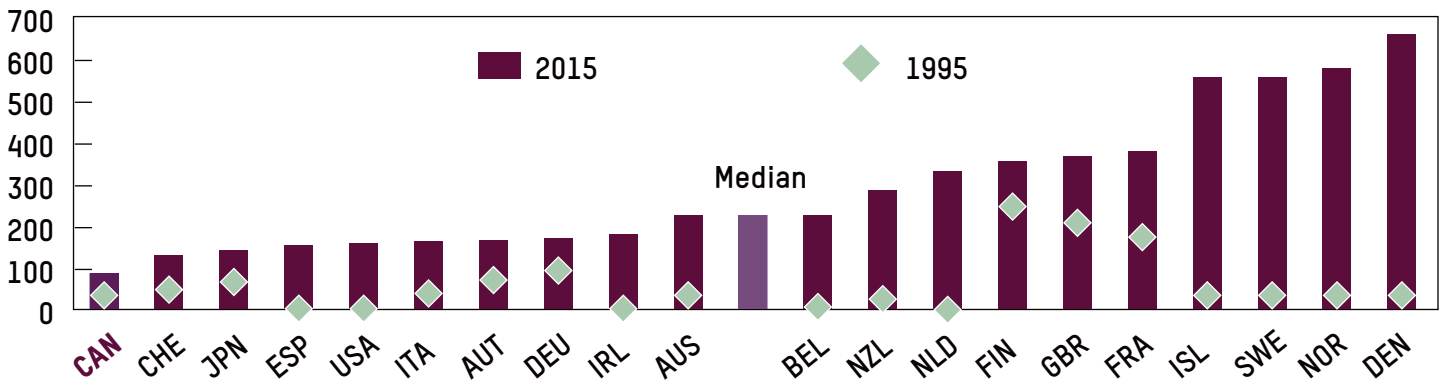
Over the years the Canadian federal government has taken a demand-side funding approach to early childhood education and care and has left it to the provinces and territories to decide how they spend social transfer payments.⁵⁰

In 2006, the Conservative government introduced the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB), a taxable monthly cash benefit of \$100 per child paid to every family for children under six (subsequently expanded to \$160 per child for children under six and an additional \$60 per child for children aged six to 17). The UCCB did little to improve child care access and women's labour force participation.⁵¹

In 2016, the Liberal government replaced the UCCB with the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), a tax-free monthly payment made to eligible families to help them with the cost of raising children. The benefit provides families with incomes of less than \$30,000 a maximum benefit of \$6,400 per child under the age of six and \$5,400 per child through the age of 17. In 2017, the government budgeted \$7.5 billion over 11 years for early learning and child care and launched the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework, which sets broad parameters for provinces and territories on how to spend the child care transfers, but lacks clear targets, timelines, robust oversight and reporting requirements for provinces and territories. While the Canada Child Benefit has had positive impacts in reducing child poverty, it has not added incentives for women to work or reduced the financial pressure of child care costs on families.⁵² In fact, the IMF found that it serves as a disincentive for women to work. In 2018, a third of women aged 25 to 34 were working part-time in order to care for children, despite wanting full-time work.⁵³

Figure 4: OECD Economies Public Spending on Early Childhood Education and Care

(Per head, at constant prices (2005) and constant PPPs (2005), in US dollars)



Quebec stands out as the first and only province in Canada to introduce a substantially publicly funded child care program. The low-fee universal child care program, first introduced in 1997, aimed to make child care more accessible and affordable, to improve childhood development, and allow women to join the workforce, thus increasing the provincial government's tax base. Since the program was established, Quebec has seen the rate of women age 24 to 44 in the paid workforce reach 85 per cent, the highest in the world.⁵⁴ The increase has been especially pronounced for mothers of children age five or younger, which went from 64 per cent in 1997 to 80 per cent in 2016. In the rest of Canada, the same demographic only saw a 4 per cent increase over that period. The additional tax revenues from increased women's labour participation offset the public cost of the program. A challenge that remains with the program is to meet demand: there are not enough government-subsidized child care spots for every parent who wants one. Less than 45 per cent of Quebec's children have a spot in a non-profit daycare centre, called "centres de la petite enfance (CPE)," or regulated child care home. For-profit providers are increasingly making up much of the gap. While parents receive a tax rebate when using for-profit child care, the level of quality is lower than in non-profit CPE.⁵⁵

In the past year, the province of British Columbia has taken steps to implement affordable, high-quality and universal child care by launching a pilot program offering \$10-a-day child care, in large part the result of successful advocacy by the Coalition of Child Care

Advocates of BC. The campaign demonstrates how community organizing, coalition-building and strategic advocacy can draw support for the issue of child care from both the public and political decision-makers.

The affordable child care for all plan

Child care advocates around the world have been pushing governments to acknowledge the value of early childhood education and care to society and to recognize it as a public good. Here in Canada, a broad coalition of child care and gender equality advocates have joined forces and developed the Affordable Child Care for All Plan.⁵⁶ This plan calls for the federal government to share responsibility for ensuring that all children in Canada—regardless of where they live, their ability, their family circumstances or their culture—have access to affordable, high-quality child care.

A publicly funded child care system cannot be built overnight. It requires a long-term plan and investments with clear benchmarks and timelines. The Affordable Child Care for All Plan calls for a federal investment of \$1 billion in 2020, and a further increase of \$1 billion each year over 10 years. It calls on the federal government to work with the provinces and territories to address the issues of affordability, accessibility and quality. This will require a significant expansion of public and non-profit

FIRST-HAND THOUGHTS:

BRAD, single dad with shared custody
(Gatineau, Quebec)

// QUEBEC HAS SOME OF THE HIGHEST TAXES IN NORTH AMERICA BUT WE GET A BETTER OUTCOME FOR IT. IF YOUR KIDS ARE SPENDING ALMOST HALF THEIR WAKING HOURS IN CHILD CARE, AND WITH CHILD CARE WORKERS, YOU DON'T WANT THOSE WORKERS TO BE PREOCCUPIED WITH JOB INSECURITY FEARS AND FINANCIAL INSTABILITY STRESS. THESE INDIVIDUALS HELP SHAPE OUR CHILDREN'S MINDS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES AT A VERY EARLY AGE, WE WANT THEM TO FOCUS ON THE KIDS AND NOT BE DISTRACTED. IT'S IMPORTANT TO KEEP THESE POINTS IN MIND WHEN THINKING ABOUT CHILD CARE.



Dads, and especially single dads, need to step up and speak out more too—the government won't value childcare until the people do."

services, with funding to subsidize operations coupled with set fees, and a workforce strategy to improve working conditions and thereby quality of service. The plan also highlights the importance of working with Indigenous leaders and communities to develop and sustain Indigenous early childhood education and child care.

Public child care that will ensure accessibility, affordability and quality for all Canadian families is within reach. It requires political leadership, collaboration with the provinces and territories and long-term investments. As evidence clearly shows, the financial and societal

benefits are significant. Public child care is key to closing the economic gender gap, enabling women to pursue job opportunities and decent work and to reduce their financial losses due to caring responsibilities. Getting more women to work is essential to growing Canada's economy, and that growth will ensure investments made in child care will be recovered in tax revenues. Women working in the child care sector deserve good wages and benefits and families should not have to make tough choices between working and caring. We all want our children to grow up in an environment that fosters their well-being and development. It is time for Canada to go the extra mile and make public child care a reality.



FIRST-HAND THOUGHTS:

KAREN NUTARAK (Pond Inlet, Nunavut) and **TESSA LOCHHEAD** (Iqaluit, Nunavut),
co-founders and co-directors of Pirurvik Preschool

/// CHILD CARE WORK HAS ONE OF THE MOST UNDERVALUED AND LEAST APPRECIATED WORKFORCES IN CANADA AND PROBABLY AROUND THE WORLD. IN NUNAVUT, IT'S ONE OF THE LOWEST PAID JOBS, WHICH CONTRIBUTES TO THE CYCLE OF POVERTY, KEEPS WORKERS IN A VULNERABLE STATE, AND RESULTS IN A HIGH TURNOVER OF STAFF—WHICH INEVITABLY AFFECTS THE CHILDREN AS WELL.

Child care work is stressful and incredibly hands-on. Our compensation does not match the qualifications and skills these workers bring. We are unappreciated, treated like babysitters and paid like babysitters, which is demoralizing.

The discrepancies and services available between northern and southern communities is huge. We're far away and the federal government doesn't see what's up here. The high cost of living, especially in Nunavut, makes affording child care extremely difficult. The lack of buildings (especially safe buildings) for daycares and preschools is an added problem. We need more money to build the spaces required and to train additional educators so that mothers and children have increased opportunities to access proper child care.

Tax benefits feel like a divide-and-conquer strategy. These benefits really only help some parents. They don't add to the quality of child care in Canada or support the workers themselves. A tax benefit mostly helps parents who already have jobs, but what about the parents who don't have time to find work because they need to be home with their kids? Affordable child care for all would boost the economy and help pull people out of the cycle of poverty."

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Become a #ChildCareChampion!

PLEDGE YOUR SUPPORT. Add your name in support of the Affordable Child Care for All Plan at WWW.CHILDCAREFORALL.CA.

CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS. Let them know that child care matters to you and your community.

SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION. Let a care worker in your life know how much their work is valued!

To the world's best daycare staff:
Thank you for everything you do for our children every single day. These kids are so lucky to have you influence and shape their lives. We see your commitment, passion, and affection - and we could not be more grateful.

Thank-you note from parents to their daycare staff in appreciation for the work they do.
Photo by: Deborah Schratter, working mom (Vancouver, British Columbia)



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