

The parent trap: child care fees in Canada's biggest cities ^[1]

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Source: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Format: Report

Publication Date: 10 Nov 2014

AVAILABILITY

Full text (PDF) ^[2]

Executive summary:

While Canada spends less on early childhood education and care than most OECD countries, Canadian parents are among the most likely to be employed. As Canadian parents are working parents, child care fees can play a major role in decision-making and labour force participation, particularly for women.

This study examines, for the first time, median unsubsidized child care fees in Canada's big cities for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. It also develops an affordability index that compares child care fees to women's income. Infant spaces (<1.5 years) are the hardest to find and the most expensive.

Torontonians pay the most for infant child care at \$1,676 a month. Parents in St. Johns pay the second most at \$1,394 a month. The lowest fees are found in the Quebec cities of Gatineau, Laval, Montreal, Longueuil and Quebec City, where infant care costs \$152 a month thanks to Quebec's \$7-a-day child care policy (increased to \$7.30-a-day in October 2014). The second-lowest infant fees are found in Winnipeg (\$651 a month) where a provincial fee cap is also in place.

There are roughly twice as many toddler spaces (1.5-3 years) as infant spaces and fees are lower. Toronto has the highest toddler fees at \$1,324 a month. Vancouver, Burnaby, London, Brampton and Mississauga all have median toddler fees over \$1,000 a month. Again, the least expensive toddler spaces are in the Quebec cities already mentioned, where it is also \$152 a month (\$7 a day), followed by Winnipeg at \$451 a month.

There are many more preschooler spaces (3-5 years) than toddler spaces and fees are the lowest of the three age categories. Toronto again has the highest median preschooler fees at \$998 a month, although Calgary, London, Brampton, Mississauga and Ottawa all have fees above \$900 a month. As in the infant and toddler categories, preschool fees are lowest in Quebec at \$152 a month (or \$7 a day).

Comparing these rates to income, we found that Brampton is the least affordable city in Canada for child care. In Brampton, fees are worth 36% of a woman's income, the equivalent of four months' worth of work. This is largely due to lower overall incomes for women in Brampton. Surrey, Windsor,

London and Toronto are not far behind with child care fees that absorb 34% to 35% of a woman's income. The most affordable city for child care in Canada is Gatineau, where child care takes up 4% of a woman's income, which is paid for in only two weeks' worth of work. Affordable child care is an important issue not only for parents but also for the Canadian economy as it plays a significant role in labour force participation, particularly for women. When parents are given an affordable choice, they choose to work, which increases incomes for all Canadians.

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