

# Vast majority of Toronto parents can't afford daycare <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Toronto Star

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 18 Oct 2016

## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

If nothing is done to address Toronto's ruinously high cost of daycare, there is no point in adding many more spaces, a ground-breaking city report warns.

Three-quarters of city families can't afford licensed child care, according to the report, the first of its kind to quantify parent demand and affordability.

Middle-income families are least likely to use the service because they earn too much to qualify for fee subsidies but not enough to absorb the full cost of care, which can top \$20,000 a year for infants and toddlers, says the report commissioned by the city to inform its daycare growth strategy.

Toronto's child population is expected to jump by almost 23 per cent in the next 15 years.

But without lower fees or increased subsidies, there is little room to expand the city's licensed child-care system, concludes the study led by University of Toronto economists Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky.

"Growth... requires addressing affordability," the report says. "If policies that significantly reduce costs were implemented, Toronto would see dramatic increases in the demand for licensed child care and dramatic increases in parental employment."

The report based its findings on three affordability scenarios, including offering fee subsidies to every parent who qualifies, capping fees at 10 per cent of household income or charging no more than \$20 per day, per child.

When child care is affordable, demand soars from less than 30 per cent to more than 52 per cent and the probability of mothers with young children working full-time jumps to 60 per cent from the current 47 per cent, it shows.

High quality, affordable daycare supports child development and assists working parents whose labour fuels the local economy and helps to fight poverty, the report notes.

But if nothing changes on the affordability front, just 7,300 more spots in Toronto's current 69,000-space system would be used, the report says.

The city's community development and recreation committee will discuss the findings Thursday.

The research comes a month after Queen's Park announced plans to add 100,000 licensed child care spaces for children up to age 4 over the next five years, including an estimated 30,000 for Toronto.

Growth in school-aged care is expected next fall when school boards will be required to offer after-class programming based on demand.

Meantime, Ottawa is drafting an early learning and child-care framework with the provinces to set the template for the first federal infusion of new money for daycare in a decade.

But if these plans don't address the high cost of care, few parents will be willing or able to enroll their children, the research shows.

"There is no demand for unaffordable child care," said Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "They are just going to have to tackle the issue of affordability."

Beaches-East York Councillor Janet Davis said the report confirms what many Toronto parents have known for years.

"Child care is beyond the reach of most families," she said. "It demonstrates that if child care was more affordable, the majority of families would want to use it."

Davis said she will be asking the committee Thursday to direct city staff to develop a "made-in-Toronto" plan to expand child care to meet the needs of Toronto families.

“We run the largest child-care system outside of Quebec,” she said. “We need to use this research to put together a model for the provincial and federal governments and say this is what we need for the families in our city.”

-reprinted from Toronto Star

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** affordability <sup>[4]</sup>

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