

# Child care for all of us: Universal child care for Canadians by 2020<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF<sup>[2]</sup>

## Summary

“For Canadian families, high quality, affordable child care is more than a convenience — it’s a necessity.” These words in the 2016 federal budget, together with the Liberals’ election promise of “working with provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples to establish a National Framework on Early Learning and Child Care that meets...the needs of Canadian families wherever they live,” signal a new federal government commitment to child care that is available, affordable and of consistently high quality for all those who choose to use it.

Renewed federal leadership on child care could not be more timely. In 2008, Canada ranked last on 10 child care (ECEC) benchmarks among peer nations. The Conservative government had just cancelled its predecessor’s national child care program, with its substantial cash transfers to provinces and territories, and withdrawn the federal government from any role in improving child care provision across the country. It is disturbing but not surprising that, despite some initiatives in a number of provinces, child care across Canada remains unaffordable, unavailable and inconsistent in quality to this day. Indeed, the proverbial “patchwork” of early childhood services experienced by families who struggle to balance work and family is remarkably similar, structurally and systemically, across Canada.

A robust body of research and policy analysis confirms the importance and benefits of a universal approach to child care that is affordable to all (not necessarily free), non-compulsory, available, appropriate and diverse enough to meet the varied needs of families. Yet, notwithstanding the contemporary international consensus and consistent research evidence that affirms a universal approach is more effective than a more targeted one, concerns have arisen that Canada’s new directions may not include a universal approach to ECEC. This would represent a shift in the longstanding Canadian understanding that future government child care policy would support services that would grow to accommodate “all families who choose to use them,” that is, universal child care.

Given that the federal government has also committed to a “research, evidence-based policy, and best practices in the delivery of early learning and child care,” the national framework needs to set the stage for a universal, broadly comprehensive approach that ensures accessible, affordable, inclusive and high-quality services will grow, over time, to serve all children and families everywhere in Canada.

A Shared Framework for Building an Early Childhood Education and Care System for All — developed by the cross-Canada child care community — offers a blueprint for building such a system. The document sets out “a shared vision anchored in an evidence-based framework for federal, provincial and territorial governments to use in building equitable early childhood education and care (ECEC) for all.” The framework calls for federal leadership and funding while recognizing key roles for provinces, territories and Indigenous communities. It also affirms that, “while there are many points of commonality in our shared vision, we recognize that Indigenous communities may choose unique approaches and content.” It proposes a long-term approach to building a child care system for Canada grounded in three overarching principles: universality, high quality, and comprehensiveness.

Underpinning these principles are three interrelated “understandings” essential to achieving an evidence-based national framework. First, Canada needs to move away from its current market-based approach to child care. Second, there needs to be a recognition that building a comprehensive ECEC system is a journey, not an event, which requires a clear long-term vision matched by sustained, adequate public funding. Third, Canada needs to confirm the leadership role required of the federal government which, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, will be needed to achieve a universal, high quality, comprehensive system.

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

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

access<sup>[5]</sup>

universality<sup>[6]</sup>

## Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/16/12/child-care-all-us-universal-child-care-canadians-2020> [2]

[https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National Office/2016/12/Child\\_Care\\_AFB2017\\_technical\\_paper.pdf](https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2016/12/Child_Care_AFB2017_technical_paper.pdf) [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/access>

[6] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8932>