

Access to child care is fundamental to women's economic security in Canada: What needs to happen ^[1]

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SUMMARY

This brief takes as a starting point that 21st century women's economic security is closely linked to decently paid employment. Thus, access to child care is fundamental to advancing women's economic security in Canada as it is evident that if mothers of young children are to be in the workforce, affordable care for their children is needed to cover their absence. Without child care, women with young children are less likely to be employed, undermining their own economic security as well as their families. This is not only so for low income women but for modest, middle and even high income women.

Other witnesses before this committee have offered considerable detail about the strong links between accessible child care and women's economic security. Thus, this brief will discuss how to move child care forward to support women's economic security better than it now does.

Two key characteristics of Canada's child care situation are of particular relevance to women's economic security: a) the severe space shortages in every province/territory, and b) sky-high parent fees in most of Canada that prevent many women and families from using a regulated space even if they can find one. These are both directly linked to structural aspects of Canadian child care policy and both are amenable to public policy solutions, as evidence from Quebec and other countries shows. Further, quality is a third main child care element pertinent to children and society as well as to mothers/parents. As considerable research shows that child care quality is key in determining whether it is beneficial or negative for children, quality—as well as the availability of spaces and whether they are affordable—needs to be taken into account.

The brief argues that Canada needs to develop a much improved child care situation based on the best evidence. Thus, to be successful, this development needs to be supported both by substantial public funding and by robust, well-designed policy at both federal and provincial/territorial levels. Without both of these—much more money and much more policy—real economic security will continue to be elusive for women in Canada.

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