

# Rate of mothers entering workforce plateaued in Alberta as it rose in Quebec, study finds <sup>[1]</sup>

Expensive daycare and higher single incomes in Alberta possibly keeping women at home, U of C researchers say

**Author:** CBC News

**Source:** CBC News

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 29 Nov 2017

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## EXCERPTS

Workforce participation by women with young children is rising in Quebec and Ontario, while in Alberta the numbers have been pretty flat since the early 1990s, according to a new study.

Researchers at the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy found that more women with children took jobs in Quebec around the same time the province brought in low-cost daycare there in the 1997.

In 1976, only 30 per cent of women in Quebec with a working spouse and at least one child under six were also employed, compared to 37 per cent in Alberta and 40 per cent in Ontario.

From 1976 to the early-90s, the figures rose at about the same rate in all three provinces to more than 65 per cent.

But after 1997 - the year Quebec introduced a universal \$5-a-day daycare program - the participation rate of women in the workforce rose faster in that province.

"Comparing the low cost of childcare with employment income, more women in Quebec may have found it advantageous to choose employment," the study says.

### Alberta pilot program lauded

One of the authors of the study, economist Ron Kneebone, says the high cost of childcare in Alberta is one possible reason why the numbers flatlined in the province while they continued to rise in Quebec.

"An alternative possibility is that household income grew sufficiently large as to enable Alberta households to be able to afford only one wage earner," the study said.

Kneebone says, given the changing employment and income picture in Alberta after the recent recession, more women might now find they need to enter the workforce.

"We're suggesting the government could look at the model of Quebec, where the government has invested in relatively inexpensive daycare, as a way of encouraging that," he said.

The Alberta NDP promised during the 2015 election to move toward \$25-a-day daycare.

The government introduced a \$10-million pilot program late last year that is allowing 18 daycare centres across the province to offer \$25-a-day care for at least three years.

Premier Rachel Notley has said her government still plans to move toward a province-wide program when finances allow for it.

Daycare operator Ilona Boyce, who is also executive director with the Heartland Agency and EvenStart programs, says she hopes the program is expanded.

"I think that's the most progressive legislation I've seen in my lifetime and we're at the forefront here in Alberta piloting it," she said.

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