

Investment in child care would have immediate benefits to B.C.'s economy, researcher says ^[1]

'These children are at a serious risk of not being able to fully realize their potential,' says economist

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EXCERPTS

The true cost of unaffordable child care is the wasted potential of British Columbia's children, according to Iglia Ivanova, a senior economist and researcher with the Vancouver branch of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

A new report from the CCPA ranks Vancouver, Richmond and Surrey among the most expensive cities for child care in the country, with rate increases outpacing inflation.

"We have one-third of children showing up in kindergarten not meeting developmental benchmarks for early childhood development," said Ivanova told Rick Cluff, host of The Early Edition.

"These children are at a serious risk of not being able to fully realize their potential and so this is what early childhood education and care can help with."

'We need to think of this as an investment'

Since the provincial New Democratic government is expected to reveal its child-care policy in the new year, Ivanova says politicians should look to provinces that have already reduced costs to parents and increased available spaces.

Specifically, the report mentions Quebec, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island where governments provide more funding to child care centres which in turn have lower fees.

Ivanova said the cost of investing in affordable and accessible child care will pay for itself in a surprisingly short amount of time as parents, especially women, return to the workforce.

"It's a pretty short-term effect actually," she said.

In the long term, society will benefit from improved early childhood development, according to Ivanova.

"We need to think of this as an investment. It's an investment in children, it's an investment in families and it's an investment in the economy."

Looking to the East

The report's authors included information gathered from licensed full-time child-care centres and home based operations in 28 municipalities across the country between June and October of 2017.

Not surprisingly, the report shows infant care to be the most expensive category. Infant care in Vancouver costs around \$1,360 each month while people in Montreal — where child care is heavily subsidized — pay only \$168 per month.

For toddler care, Vancouverites pay the second highest fees at about \$1,300 each month. Richmond ranks third with fees averaging \$1,200 per month.

According to the CCPA, pre-school care makes up the bulk of services provided to families and is the most affordable due to lower staffing needs. In this category, B.C. ranks in the middle of the pack, with parents paying between \$800 per month in Surrey and \$980 per month in Richmond.

The number of staff and child-care facilities need to increase, she said, but the net benefits of that investment will quickly become apparent, "It'll take some time to train early childhood educators, but it's not impossible. In Quebec, they also rolled out the program over a number of years, it wasn't done overnight. But now look at where they're at," said Ivanova.

"They still have problems. They don't have enough spaces for all families, they have some wait lists, but they're doing so much better than anywhere else."

[The Early Edition radio clip, "CCPA report on child care costs", available online]

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