

# What makes Quebec such an outlier on child care? <sup>[1]</sup>

Specific political and social conditions set Quebec on the path to becoming a leader in child care. What's kept the other provinces from following suit?

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## EXCERPTS

Several provincial governments have recently increased public funding of child care services. The Alberta government announced a modest investment in child care in December 2017, and the BC government proposed a \$1 billion investment over three years in its 2018 budget. In its latest budget, the Ontario government announced a very ambitious plan to provide free child care services for children aged 2½-to-4 years starting in 2020.

Despite these announcements, as we show in our study for the IRPP, the other Canadian provinces are far from matching the level of investment in child care that has been in place in Quebec since the late 1990s.

As shown in figure 1, public spending on child care services in Canada (0.2 percent of GDP) is the lowest of all OECD countries, tied with Turkey and Latvia (see figure 1). The UK spends 1.4 percent of GDP on child care services and Australia 0.8 percent; even in the US, such spending is 0.6 percent of GDP.

The low level of public funding for child care in Canada is a policy puzzle: despite popular demand and an international consensus around the benefits of child care spending in encouraging female labour market participation, public child care funding across Canada remains extremely low in comparative perspective.

To explain this, researchers have tended to focus on the federal government's inability to implement a national child care program. From a Quebec perspective, this focus on the federal government is surprising, since there is a broad consensus that early childhood education and child care are within provincial jurisdiction. As shown in figure 1, Quebec's level of child-care spending is close to the OECD average.

Shouldn't we instead ask why the other provinces have not developed ambitious public child care programs?

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