

# Universal child care key to closing gender gap, advocate says <sup>[1]</sup>

An Alberta labour advocate says universal child care is needed if more women are going to participate in the workforce

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

“It’s not a choice if you can’t afford child care, so you can’t work and you can’t participate in the workforce at the level you want,” said Siobhan Vipond, secretary treasurer of the Alberta Federation of Labour. “That means the cycle of poverty just doesn’t end.”

Vipond said a Statistics Canada study released last week on work and families shows women are still bearing the brunt of unpaid work.

According to the report, in Edmonton in 2015, 19 per cent of couples where the youngest child was six to 17 years old and just under 33 per cent of families where the youngest child was younger than six years old had two parents working.

The only city in the report to have a lower proportion of families where both parents worked full time was Abbotsford-Mission, B.C.

That same study showed that the Maritime provinces and Quebec had the highest proportions of couples with children where both parents worked full-year, full-time. The lowest proportions were found in Alberta and British Columbia.

Quebec has had a low-fee universal child-care system for more than two decades.

The study’s author, Andre Bernard, said he couldn’t comment on policy, such as universal daycare in Quebec, but said there were clear variations from one province to another.

“Obviously, higher child-care costs represent a barrier to full-time employment for both parents, young children in particular,” Bernard said.

Alberta has the highest median income single-earner families with two parents at \$94,000, according to Statistics Canada.

While that high single income may be a factor in the low percentage of Edmonton couples where both parents work full-year and full-time with children under 18, Vipond argues even for some of those families, having a parent stay at home is not a choice.

For example, when a spouse has a fly-in, fly-out job where they are gone for weeks at a time, it is difficult for the other parent to get a job and manage child care, Vipond said.

Alberta’s provincial government brought in a province-wide pilot program in 2017 providing \$25-per-day affordable child-care spaces.

In April, the government announced the program would be expanded, with plans to make a total of 7,276 child-care spaces available across Alberta for just \$25 per day.

But those spaces are only available for eligible low-income families, and Vipond wants to see access to child care expanded.

For those not currently covered by the \$25-a-day program, child care can be expensive and there can be long wait lists for available spaces, Vipond said.

She pointed to a paper from the International Monetary Fund that said universal child care would mean \$8 billion in tax revenue generated across Canada, suggesting a universal child-care program could potentially pay for itself.

Universal child care is also important for single-parent families, Vipond said.

The Statistics Canada study showed one-third of single mothers did not report any labour market activity in 2015 nationally, compared to less than 30 per cent in 2005.

Mothers account for 80 per cent of single-parent households, but the number of single fathers working full-year, full-time also dropped. Statistics Canada reported from 2005 to 2015, those numbers fell “from 53 per cent to 46 per cent among those with a child under six and from 60 per cent to 55 per cent among those with an older child.”

**Related link:**

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

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