

Child care deserts in Canada ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full PDF online (EN) ^[2]

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Excutive summary

Ensuring Canadian families have access to child care is vital for achieving a range of public goals, including closing the gender wage gap in the economy, spurring economic growth, easing the burden on struggling parents and supporting healthy child development.¹ High child care fees are an obvious obstacle for cash-strapped parents, as the CCPA has documented in other reports.² But a lack of local licensed spaces will also limit the choices parents have when it comes to raising their children and reentering the workforce.

This report attempts to map, for the first time in Canada, a complete list of licensed child care spaces across the country against the number of children in a given postal code. In doing so, a number of “child care deserts” are identified as postal codes where there are at least three children in potential competition for each licensed space.³ The concept of a “child care desert” is similar to that of a “food desert,” understood as a community without sufficient access to healthful and affordable food. Child care deserts are those parts of Canada without adequate access to child care, irrespective of fees. Both coverage rates and child care desert calculations only include licensed spaces at all points in this report.

Licensed child care coverage is highest in Charlottetown, Prince Edward

Island (P.E.I.) and many of the bigger cities in Quebec. These cities have an average coverage rate of 70% or better, meaning there are at least seven spaces for every 10 children not yet in school. These cities are also in provinces that set child care fees. The lowest average coverage is found in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and in Brampton and Kitchener, Ontario, where there is one space for every four to five children.

An estimated 776,000 children (44% of all non-school-aged children) in Canada live in child care deserts, communities that are parched for available child care. Breaking it down, less than 5% of children in Charlottetown and Quebec's bigger cities live in child care deserts (although Quebec City has 9% of its children living in child care deserts), while all of Saskatoon's postal codes have more than three children for every one licensed space, making the city one vast desert. Brampton, Ontario, Surrey, British Columbia (B.C.), and Kitchener, Ontario, don't fare much better, with 95%, 94% and 87% of their non-school-aged children, respectively, living in a child care desert. Meanwhile, there are no deserts in Victoria, B.C., despite the city's lower average coverage rate.

While readers can examine any area they wish in our interactive map of Canada's child care deserts, this report focuses on selected larger centres to reveal some common trends.

A high child care coverage rate on the Island of Montreal, Quebec leaves few postal codes behind, with the best coverage in Downtown Montreal East (H3B) and the worst (8%) in Dollard-des-Ormeaux (H9G). But even in the latter community, high coverage in neighbouring postal codes likely provides parents with nearby options for child care. And, in contrast to other cities, high coverage is not limited to Montreal's downtown core.

The City of Toronto, Ontario, has a high concentration of child care through the middle of the city starting at Union Station and running north along Yonge Street until Highway 401. Outside of this north-south vein, child

care coverage rates tend to be significantly lower and create many child care deserts. Sparse coverage exists in most of Scarborough, York and Etobicoke, and there are far more children living in the Downsview and North York areas than there are licensed child care spaces.

As in Toronto, coverage rates in Calgary, Alberta, are high downtown, then fall substantially when reaching the suburbs. But within Calgary coverage is varied: high in the city's southeast and in postal codes along the Bow River, but much lower in the northern and southwest sections.

The City of Ottawa, Ontario, continues the trend of having high coverage in the downtown core along the Ottawa River. The southern portion of Kanata along March Road also has high coverage. However, in much of the rest of the city, including Orleans, Nepean and the rural areas that surround the suburbs, coverage is much lower.

Metro Vancouver in B.C. has particularly low coverage, with over half of children living in child care deserts. Only at the University of British Columbia or in the southern sections of West and North Vancouver do you find anywhere near one space per child. Almost all of the postal codes in both Surrey and Burnaby are child care deserts, despite the large number of nonschool-aged children living there. Even large portions of downtown Vancouver have surprisingly low coverage.

Aggregated at the provincial/territorial level, Quebec, Yukon and P.E.I. have the highest average child care coverage rates. Saskatchewan, Nunavut, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Manitoba have the lowest average coverage rates. No matter the province, larger cities with populations over 100,000 have higher coverage rates. However, outside of big cities the coverage rates often don't differ substantially between smaller centres, small towns and rural areas.

Canadians should have access to affordable child care near where they live, no matter where they live. Our research into child care deserts shows

this is not the case in far too much of the country.

Improving equitable access to child care will require addressing the price and the availability of licensed spaces. That is more difficult to accomplish where child care is offered in a purely market-driven way; in these scenarios it is easy to end up with child care deserts. Smart public policy will be essential to ensuring more equitable outcomes.

Related link: Lack of licensed care creates daycare 'deserts' across Canada ^[4]

Region: Canada ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/18/06/child-care-deserts-canada>

Links

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