

# Daycare difference? Quebec fertility rate outpacing Ontario's <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** CTV News

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 17 Jul 2018

## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Quebec's long-term attempt to boost its fertility rate by offering cheap childcare appears to be paying off, according to a new study from Statistics Canada.

The study, which was released Wednesday, shows that Quebec's fertility rate bottomed out at 1.45 children per mother in 2000. It has rebounded since then, hitting a high of 1.73 children per mother in 2009, and sat at 1.59 children per mother in 2016.

In Ontario, by way of contrast, the provincial fertility rate fell from 1.49 to a record low of 1.46 over the same period. Quebec has had the higher fertility rate of the two provinces since 2005 – the first time it has done so over an extended period of time since the 1950s.

StatsCan says the difference can likely be chalked up to Quebec's universal, low-cost childcare plan, which was enacted in 1997 amid panic about the decline in birth rates. The province also made changes to increase parental leave benefits in 2006, some of which the federal government plans to introduce across the country in 2019.

Tammy Schirle, an economics professor at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont., says there is reason to believe a connection exists between universal childcare and increased child birth rates.

"If we make having kids cheaper, people will tend to have more children," she told CTVNews.ca.

In addition to increasing fertility rates, experts believe the implementation of universal child care has led to more Quebec women joining the workforce.

Quebec women aged 15 to 44 have traditionally been less likely to have jobs than their Ontario counterparts. Quebec surpassed Ontario in this category for the first time in 2003. The gap between the two is now significantly larger, with 80.8 per cent of Quebec women and 74.5 per cent of Ontario women participating in the workforce as of 2016.

Additionally, most of the recent increases in Quebec have involved women with young children – those who are eligible for the childcare program – joining the workforce. No similar pattern was found among employment data for Ontario women.

Schirle says the findings are not a surprise given that increased child care services free up a mother's time for other pursuits.

"Having accessible and affordable childcare increases a woman's ability to work," she said.

The idea of boosting childcare benefits to improve economic outcomes has also been backed by Bank of Canada governor Stephen Poloz, who said earlier this year that extending the Quebec model across Canada could result in 300,000 more Canadians joining the workforce.

Noting the slow but steady decline of fertility rates in both Ontario and Quebec over the past decade, Schirle says any governments looking at aping Quebec's approach will need to take a long-term view of the impact their actions will have on parents, some of whom may find their familial and employment demands too much to handle.

"At the end of the day, moms aren't necessarily having an easy time trying to balance life and work," she said.

Between 1996 and 2016, childcare costs borne by parents increased by 72 per cent in Ontario and 28 per cent in Quebec.

**Related link:**

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

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