

Childcare deserts and distributional disadvantages: the legacies of split childcare policies and programmes in Canada ^[1]

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Abstract

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies and services in Canada exhibit marked gaps in access, creating 'childcare deserts' and distributional disadvantages. Cognate family policies that support children and families, such as parental leave and child benefits, are also underdeveloped. This article examines the current state of ECEC services in Canada and the reasons behind the uncoordinated array of services and policy, namely, a liberal welfare state tradition that historically has encouraged private and market-based care, a comparatively decentralised federal system that militates against coordinated policy-making, and a welfare state built on gendered assumptions about care work. The article assesses recent government initiatives, including the federal 2017 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, concluding that existing federal and provincial initiatives have limited potential to bring about paradigmatic third-order change.

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