

Report: Vancouver still among most expensive cities for child care but new policies offer hope ^[1]

The median cost of full-time, full-day child care in Vancouver last year was about \$1,400 a month for an infant, \$1,407 for a toddler, and \$1,000 for a preschooler.

Author: Ip, Stephanie

Source: Vancouver Sun

Format: Article

Publication Date: 5 Feb 2019

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Vancouver remains among the most expensive cities for child care, but a newly released report suggests B.C.'s recent set-fee policies are a step in the right direction.

According to the report, released this week by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the median cost of full-time, full-day child care in Vancouver last year was about \$1,400 a month for an infant, \$1,407 for a toddler, and \$1,000 for a preschooler.

In the infant age group, Vancouver's fees were the highest in the country outside of Ontario. Toronto and the surrounding areas reported median fees of up to \$1,685 a month last year. That trend translates to the toddler and preschool age group as well.

Fee hikes have also outpaced the rate of inflation, which was three per cent from July 2017 to July 2018, in 17 of the 28 cities surveyed for the report.

Vancouver had a median monthly fee increase of 5.3 per cent, the eighth-highest increase on Canada. Burnaby had the third-highest increase in Canada at 7.1 per cent, while Surrey was fourth at 6.3 per cent.

And though child care fees have risen faster than inflation, the number of provinces now turning to set fee policies to help has also doubled, providing some hope to parents across the country.

"For the first time in five years we are seeing movement, with more provinces using public policy to make child care more affordable," said CCPA senior economist David Macdonald, who co-authored the report. It is the fifth year the CCPA has conducted the study.

"It's clear public policy matters for affordability, but it's also clear that much more needs to be done."

In 2018, B.C. launched a fee reduction program, announced as part of a billion-dollar child care plan, which aimed to cut daycare costs by up to \$350 a month per space depending on a child's age and the type of child care facility they are registered with. The money would go to the daycare, with savings passed on to parents.

The provincial government also began converting 2,500 spaces at 53 universal child care prototype sites into \$10 a day spots for eligible parents.

"Because this program was rolled out in the fall of 2018, and child care providers began signing up for the fee reduction initiative after our phone survey for this report was conducted, we will need to assess the results of both measures in next year's report," wrote Macdonald and co-author Martha Friendly in the study.

Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador were also in various stages of implementing set fee policies at the time of the study. The report notes that similar programs in other provinces, some of which have been in place for years, have been effective in keeping costs low.

Child care advocate Sharon Gregson said the CCPA's report doesn't take into account some of the effects that have already begun to take place in B.C. following the government's implementation of the \$10 a day template. She notes that more than 50,000 children are already benefiting from recently implemented policies.

"We always knew it would take up to 10 years to really turn the child care crisis around," said Gregson.

"We're only in Year 1 and we're already starting to see fantastic improvement like affordability for families. Particularly noteworthy is the \$10 a day prototype that they're running across the province, they've already started on wage enhancements for childhood educators and now the big challenge is to create enough new spaces to meet demand."

Gregson said it's not a dream but a very real possibility that B.C. could soon match other provinces like Quebec, which has long had set fee

policies in place.

Among all three age groups, Montreal, Quebec City, Longueuil, Laval and Gatineau dominate the bottom end of the fee ranking, with monthly fees for infants, toddlers and preschoolers as low as \$175 in Montreal.

But even when fees are manageable, the report notes that availability of child care spaces can cause additional stress and that any government measures that aim for fee reduction must also tackle availability, something Gregson says will be B.C.'s next priority.

The study was conducted via thousands of phone calls with child care centres, in-home care facilities and child care agencies across the country between May and August 2018.

Related link: Developmental milestones: Child care fees in Canada's big cities 2018 [3]

Region: British Columbia [4]

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