

# Why Canada needs to make child care a right <sup>[1]</sup>

Deep-rooted problems leave parents with few choices

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Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

The state of child care in Canada is a complete and utter dumpster fire.

Problems within the child care industry have grown more and more evident in recent years. Six years ago, a CBC Marketplace investigation revealed an uncomfortable reality.

This reality was that the entire industry is almost completely unregulated. This means literally anyone can call themselves a “daycare” and accept children with absolutely zero qualifications to care for kids.

The consequence of this is that most people caring for children will never be certified in CPR, first aid or have any real experience caring for children. The result of this horrific system is astonishing: the death of several toddlers.

Many young children, like two-year-old Eva Ravikovich who died under the care of an unlicensed daycare caring for 29 children and 14 dogs simultaneously, are simply not safe under current daycare regulations.

The only reason parents must turn to unlicensed daycare centres is because, according to 2013 data, just 20 per cent of parents who wish to put their children in a daycare can get a properly licensed space.

There is simply not enough space for kids in these licensed facilities.

But the statistics representing the lack of access to licensed daycare are misleading because it only represents the parents who can afford daycare.

In Canada, there is huge disparity in the monthly price of child care. It can range from \$175 in Montreal to \$1,675 in Toronto, with a national average of about \$933. Coupling this with the rising cost of living — with the national average rent for a one-bedroom apartment costing over \$1,000 — and stagnant provincial minimum wages, the hundreds of dollars per month puts daycare out of reach for many Canadians.

In Ontario, child care costs account for nearly a third of the net income of a family — one of the highest proportions in the developed world.

There are plenty of people who wish to put their children in quality day care, but simply cannot because of the price tag.

Canada has severely lagged on the issue of maternity and paternity leave. While Canada only requires employers to offer 17 weeks of paid leave at around half of the new parent’s salary, countries like Croatia, Denmark, Serbia and Sweden all offer at least a year of paid leave, with pay ranging from 80 to 100 per cent of the employee’s salary.

If we are going to force new mothers back into the workforce with little to no time with their new child, the least we, as a society, can do is provide quality child care as a right to all working parents.

This is not only the moral option, but it is the financially sound investment. Child care has an incredibly high return on investment. The U.S.-based National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs found that high-quality child care can return between US\$4 and US\$9 for every dollar spent. Higher estimates, like a 2009 study of Perry Preschool, a Michigan preschool for three- to five-year-olds, estimated the return to be between US\$7 and US\$12 for every dollar invested.

Effectively, this is taxpayer dollars invested wisely. Publicly funded child care incentives would have positive results for parents and generate additional long-term economic growth. A true win-win.

An infusion of government cash into child care to guarantee access for families is only one part of the solution. The systemic issues with child care providers must also be addressed. And who better than our current, self-proclaimed male feminist Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to take up the cause?

While Trudeau’s Liberals have generally resorted to incrementalism, in the form of moderate increases to the Canadian Child Benefit, the current state of child care deserves specific legislative addressment.

What this entails is first fixing the current unconscionable state of unregulated daycares, by phasing out unregulated private child care entirely. Simultaneously, the federal government must begin investing in fully-licensed daycare seriously, until the supply meets the social requirement of the country.

Above all else, Canada must provide quality, licensed child care as a right to all working parents.

**Related link:**

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

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