

Majority of Canadian kids younger than 6 in some form of child care, StatCan reports ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Location, quality and affordability are key concerns for Canadian parents using child care, according to a new Statistics Canada survey.

The data, released Wednesday, on the eve of an expected new child care rebate to be announced in the Ontario budget, shows 60 percent of Canadian children under age 6 — or about 1.4 million — are in some type of formal or informal care.

This is up from 54 percent of children aged 6 months to 5 years who were reported to be in non-parental care in a 2002-2003 StatCan survey.

“The findings support an increase in child care participation in Canada over the past two decades,” said the report. “While the majority of parents are able to find child care arrangements, those that have difficulty may experience challenges related to work.”

The data, collected between mid-January and mid-February this year, included kids in child care centres, in-home care by a relative or non-relative as well as before- and after-school programs. Occasional babysitting and kindergarten were not counted.

The study, part of StatCan’s rapid response survey program, introduced last year, is designed to inform government policies aimed at ensuring parents have “affordable, accessible and quality child care options for their young children,” said StatCan researcher Leanne Findlay.

“The purpose was to identify some of the data gaps around usage and types of child care used for those age 0 to 5,” Findlay said in an interview.

Child care researchers welcomed the report — and data that will be available for further study — as an important addition to the country’s knowledge base on the topic.

“It’s wonderful, it’s spectacular that they are able to produce child care data this quickly,” said University of Toronto economist Gordon Cleveland, who has written major reports on child care affordability for the City of Toronto and the previous provincial government.

Until now, he has been forced to use survey data from 2010-11.

“Most of the results will need more work because (StatCan) is doing it very quickly and using only a few highlights,” he said. “I am looking to get more modulated results.”

Cleveland is particularly interested in examining the Ontario data in light of the expected new child care rebate program.

According to the survey, child care participation rates vary by province and age, with about two-thirds of children between the ages of 1 and 5 in care, compared with about one-quarter under age 1. The lower rates of infants in care likely reflect parents’ access to parental leave, the report said.

Children living in Quebec (80 percent) and Prince Edward Island (almost 70 percent) were more likely to be in non-parental care than those in other provinces, the report said.

Ontario children were among those less likely to be in non-parental care at 53 percent, according to the report. However families in this province may be relying on full-day kindergarten for their main child care arrangement, and kindergarten wasn’t counted as child care in the survey, noted Martha Friendly of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, who helped advise StatsCan on survey questions.

The top reasons parents chose a specific type of care were location (61 percent), characteristics of the individual providing care (53 percent), hours of operation (41) and affordability (40 percent), the report found.

One-third of those using child care reported difficulty finding appropriate care. However, economist David Macdonald of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives said he thinks a closer look at the data will show that number is likely higher.

Related link: Survey on Early Learning and Child Care arrangements, 2019 ^[3]

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