

# To close the wage gap, focus on child care <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Star Editorial Board

**Source:** The Toronto Star

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 11 Oct 2019

## AVAILABILITY

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

## EXCERPTS

A study out this week from Statistics Canada, highlighting just how stubbornly persistent the gender wage gap is in this country, should have been crucial fodder for federal party leaders out on the election campaign trail.

But the analysis, which compares the size of the gap in 2018 to 20 years ago, is getting scant attention, if any, from them. Or anyone else for that matter.

That's a mistake. After all, closing the wage gap would help not only women, but men, families and the economy as a whole.

And understanding why it is larger in Canada than in other comparable OECD countries could help all party leaders create policies to close it and give voters the ammunition they need to fight for change.

The study took a close look at the fact that Canadian women in their core working years earned on average 13.3 per cent less per hour than men in 2018.

It's true that back in 1998 women earned 18.8 per cent less. So some progress has been made.

But many of the factors that contribute to the wage gap have been eliminated in the past 20 years, the study authors point out.

For example, women now are more likely than men to have a university degree; they are graduating in fields of study once dominated by men at post-secondary institutions; and they have increased their representation in higher-status occupations like medicine and law.

So what gives? The study's authors don't know. Indeed, they found that two-thirds of the gender wage gap in 2018 was unexplained by "standard controls" such as occupation and industry.

As they note, then, the persistence of the wage gap "warrants continued attention."

Politicians should heed that suggestion considering the fact that the annual wage gap (as opposed to the gap in hourly pay) is actually 30 per cent, because women are over-represented in less well-paid, part-time work.

Canada doesn't have to reinvent the wheel to address this persistent problem.

Research in other industrialized countries have shown that closing the gap is not difficult when the political will exists to do so.

It boils down to wage transparency and, basically, creating two programs: affordable, accessible child care and generous parental leave policies for men and women so they can share child-rearing responsibilities.

These are not pie-in-the-sky goals. Programs like these have been proven to work in Nordic countries like Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland, which consistently rank high in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Reports.

Still, Canadian governments have continually failed to implement these policies. Which is likely why Canada came in at 50 out of 149 countries in the forum's 2018 ranking.

So where to start?

With a universal child care program. According to numerous studies that's the No. 1 way to close the gap quickly.

This has been on the political agenda for many years. Former prime minister Paul Martin campaigned in 2006 on the promise of a national child care program, but that died when the Conservatives won that election.

To their credit, Justin Trudeau's Liberals have since committed \$7.5 billion over 11 years to child care. And in this campaign they are promising to create an additional 250,000 before- and after-school spaces for children from kindergarten to age 10.

But their plan isn't even as ambitious as what Martin proposed more than a decade ago, never mind universal, like Quebec's.

Meanwhile, the sole commitment that Andrew Scheer has made on this front is that he won't ditch Trudeau's under-funded plan.

Only the Green Party and the New Democrats say they are committed to universal child care. But neither is likely to form the next government.

So it's imperative that Trudeau and Scheer wake up to the dire need for more subsidized child care spaces.

There are currently 17,000 children on the wait list for subsidized daycare in Toronto, alone, for heaven's sake.

That need is something that Trudeau seemed to at least recognize in the last election campaign when he promised to create an "affordable, high quality, flexible and fully inclusive child care program."

But critics say he hasn't delivered, even though he acknowledges Canada could add \$150 billion to its economy over the next eight years if more women entered and advanced in the workplace.

That's exactly what research shows universal, affordable child care helps women do.

Child care is the most effective way to close the wage gap, but it's about more than that. It's also about reducing poverty, increasing employment, helping families and growing the economy.

All parties should commit to such a program. So why aren't the Conservatives and Liberals putting their money where their mouths are? Perhaps it's because like so many employers, they expect women to continue to settle for less.

That wasn't good enough in 1998, never mind 2018.

**Related link:**

**Region:** [Canada](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** [mother's labour force participation](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

[federal election](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

[wages](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

---

**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/10/close-wage-gap-focus-child-care>  
**Links**

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/10/close-wage-gap-focus-child-care> <sup>[2]</sup>

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2019/10/11/to-close-the-wage-gap-focus-on-child-care.html> <sup>[3]</sup>

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> <sup>[4]</sup> <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8142> <sup>[5]</sup>

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-election> <sup>[6]</sup> <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/wages>