

Child care sticker shock plagues parents in Toronto and across the country ^[1]

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Source: The Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 12 Mar 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTED

Child care remains ruinously expensive in most Canadian cities, with Toronto parents paying the highest median fees in the country at an eye-popping \$21,000 a year for infants, according to the latest **annual survey**. ^[3]

In cities where provinces have introduced fee caps and other measures, parents are getting some relief, according to the report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives being released Thursday.

But too often that relief is modest and fleeting, says report co-author David Macdonald, senior economist for the left-leaning think tank.

"There have certainly been experiments in policy, but there is a lot of nuance as to whether, in the long term, they will actually reduce fees for parents," he said in an interview.

Over the past two years, parents in Brampton and Mississauga saw median preschool fees drop by an average of 9 per cent and 1 per cent respectively to \$955 and \$1,042 a month, the report shows.

But those savings will evaporate in May when Peel Region ends a \$12-a-day fee reduction program due to recent Ontario child care cuts, Macdonald noted.

In Alberta, Conservative Premier Jason Kenney is expected to cancel the previous NDP government's \$25-a-day pilot program that helped to lower fees in some Calgary and Edmonton centres, he added.

Only in Quebec, where programs receive generous provincial funding and fees have been capped for more than two decades at \$5-, \$7- and now \$8.25-a day, is child care truly affordable for most parents, says the survey of 2019 fees.

Toronto mother Carolina Studart has lived the shocking difference. She and her partner Samuel Leclerc moved from Montreal in 2018 where monthly fees for children of all ages amount to just \$179 in publicly funded centres and homes, which run about 70 per cent of the licensed spots in that province.

Today, the couple pays their local child care centre \$2,058 a month to care for their 2-year-old daughter Eva.

"I couldn't believe it when we came here," Studart said. "We are considered too rich to get a (child care) subsidy, but after paying for rent and daycare, we are really too poor to have a nice quality of life.

"Other provinces should look at Quebec where women are supported to go back to work after having children," she added.

Studart, who is completing her PhD in organizational psychology, says she feels lucky she can rely on Leclerc's income as an information technology worker.

"If I didn't have this person in my life, I would have to stay home with Eva and I wouldn't be able to pursue my career," she said.

The annual survey, now in its sixth year, found cities in southern Ontario continue to charge the highest child care fees in Canada with Toronto parents still paying the most at \$1,774 a month for an infant, or \$21,288 a year.

Median monthly fees for Toronto toddlers (age 18 months to 2-1/2) top \$1,457, and preschoolers (age 2-1/2 to 4) — the largest age category for licensed spaces in the country — cost \$1,207, according to the report, which examined fees in licensed centres and homes in 37 cities across the country last October.

Toronto, Oakville and the Nunavut capital of Iqaluit, which was surveyed for the first time last year, are virtually tied for the most costly preschool care, where parents pay median monthly fees of between \$1,207 and \$1,213, the report says.

The next highest preschool fees were in Calgary at \$1,075 a month.

The report ^[3], which for the first time includes information about cities in every province and territory, focuses on what has happened to

fees since 2017 when Ottawa announced new child care funding for the provinces based on the goals of accessibility, affordability, quality, inclusiveness and flexibility.

As in previous years, it found fees are lowest when services are supported by public operating funds and fees are capped province-wide.

Fees also tend to be lower in non-profit centres as opposed to those operated by for-profit businesses, the report shows.

In three-quarters of the 25 cities that kept comparable data for both for-profit and non-profit centres, fees for preschoolers were at least 10-per-cent higher in for-profit centres, according to the report.

In Calgary, Richmond, B.C., Richmond Hill, Ont., and Edmonton, preschool fees were 50-per-cent to 60-per-cent higher at for-profit centres, the report says.

In Toronto, preschool fees were 31 per cent more costly in for-profit centres than non-profit centres, the report says.

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