

Child care restrictions preventing some from going back to work as economy reopens ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

TORONTO -- As provinces begin the slow process of reopening the economy, a continued freeze on most child care services is shedding light on what experts describe as a child care crisis, one that is preventing parents from returning to the workforce in some cases.

With Montreal-area businesses and daycares set to reopen on May 25 and June 1, respectively, Cherie Luague says she's eager to go back to her job of six years at a clothing manufacturer.

But with daycares only able to accommodate half of their capacity due to physical distancing measures and schools closed, she says she has nowhere to send her son should she return to work.

"I'd like to go back to work, of course, because I'm scared I'm going to lose the job," the Montreal-area mother told CTV News.

In Ontario, parents hoping to return to work eagerly await news from Premier Doug Ford, who is expected to give guidance about when licensed child care and public schools can reopen this week, but emergency measures still stand in the way.

"If I were to be travelling to the stores and my husband is left at home with the two kids all throughout the day, then he can't get his work done," Jill Holancin, a retail district manager, told CTV News.

"It's scary. Neither of us wants to lose our jobs during a pandemic."

More than three million Canadians are out of work thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Statistics Canada, and 2.5 million more had their hours slashed as public health restrictions forced the closure of businesses and sent workers home. In most cases, child-care centres and services have closed for all but essential workers.

With each province handling the economic restart differently and different public health measures coming into play, the federal government has been quietly probing how to provide provinces with more money annually for child care.

In Quebec, for example, public health officials are looking at the possibility of day camps serving as a stand-in for childcare for parents who have to work over the summer.

Speaking to The Canadian Press on Saturday, Social Development Minister Ahmed Hussen said there is a desire for the federal government to help co-ordinate an area of provincial jurisdiction to ensure more uniformity across the country so "Canadians have access to affordable, accessible, quality child care as they go back to work."

The Liberals have acknowledged that access to child care is essential in restarting the economy, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau noting "the need for child care has never been made clearer," during a recent press briefing.

But accessibility is just one issue. Cost plays a huge factor in the likelihood of securing child care for many Canadians as the pandemic puts added strain on finances.

Some experts have noted that in many jurisdictions, free childcare has been provided for essential workers -- provisions that may need to be expanded as the economy restarts.

"When people's finances have been stripped and childcare is such a big, monthly cost for young families, it's unclear who's going to be sending their kids back to childcare, which means less household income," economist Armine Yalnizyan told CTV's Your Morning earlier this month.

The impact of this uncertainty is also felt disproportionately by women, who have seen steeper job losses than their male counterparts, and are more often in part-time work.

In May, Statistics Canada reported that 1.5 million women lost jobs over March and April, suggesting that women will face different challenges in recovering from the economic effects of COVID-19.

“Childcare has always been an issue that has disproportionately impacted women, because women tend to take on the bulk of child-care responsibilities,” Canadian Women’s Foundation spokesperson Andrea Gunraj told CTV News.

While industry bodies have called on employers to be patient and lenient with workers who may not be able to secure child care, experts say more needs to be done to address the issue as the country begins to find its new normal.

“This is not a short-term phenomenon,” said Yalnizyan.

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