

There is no economic recovery without adequate child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The economic fallout of COVID-19 is stark — and women are feeling the brunt of it.

Over 1.5 million women lost jobs in March and April, according to Statistics Canada. That's a 17 per cent drop in employment levels since February. Even with workplaces and services beginning to reopen, families will struggle to return to work without adequate child care in place.

Advocates, employers and policy-makers alike fear that the burden of care will fall on women.

With Canadian women typically contributing about 40 per cent of household income, there can be no full economic recovery without what economist Armine Yalnizyan has dubbed a "she-covery."

Child care is key to making that possible.

It's become clear that child care is a vital part of social infrastructure. Without child care, workers in women-dominated sectors that keep us healthy, safe and fed could not keep operating. This is why we saw several jurisdictions move quickly to make child care available to essential workers as a central component of their response efforts.

But that temporary solution is a far cry from what's actually needed to address the gaping holes in a severely underfunded and fragmented system. It's a system in which child care costs far too much for many families, and even when affordable, is highly competitive — sometimes with three or more children to every one licenced space.

As we begin to shape the new normal, child care must be at the heart of the post-COVID-19 economy. Child care encourages participation in the labour market and is also an important source of employment for women — an economic driver in and of itself.

Investments in the care economy will largely pay for themselves as middle class families engage in greater labour-market participation, higher productivity, rising incomes, and increased tax revenue.

The federal government has the opportunity to spearhead a comprehensive pan-Canadian effort to build back better in the child care sector. Such a sector would ensure children have access to safe early learning and care and that parents are able to return to the paid labour force with relatively little worry.

In the short-term, the government will have to work with the provinces and territories to provide immediate funds to stabilize existing child care infrastructure.

The federal government has already committed to establishing a Federal Child Care Secretariat in order to help strengthen Canada's social infrastructure.

The secretariat will play a fundamental role in the reconstruction process, which will require long-term commitment and teamwork.

The secretariat will also need to develop a workforce strategy to raise the quality of early learning in child care, improve working conditions for early childhood educators and oversee the expansion of the system.

Through collaboration, creativity and trust, we can take meaningful steps forward to ensure a robust economic recovery for all.

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