

# Child care strategy a golden opportunity <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:**

**Source:** The Hamilton Spectator

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 23 Jun 2020

## AVAILABILITY

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

## EXCERPTS

It is often said that there are opportunities as well as challenges for Canada as the country and economy begin to emerge from the first wave of COVID-19.

That is certainly true of child care. The lack of a national strategy to ensure accessible and affordable care is a challenge that threatens economic recovery. The ability of senior governments to address this long-standing fracture in our economic and social fabric is a golden opportunity. But will it happen?

It could. All the ingredients are in place. Ottawa has identified child care, along with testing, contact tracing, health-care capacity, vulnerable populations (such as seniors), personal protective equipment and municipalities as urgent priorities for investment. And it has put its money where its mouth is, offering \$14 billion for provinces and territories to invest in those priorities as part of a “safe restart” strategy in the next six to eight months.

There is even a new blueprint available. It’s courtesy of a network of policy experts, including Brock University Associate Professor of Sociology and Associate Dean of Social Sciences Kate Bezanson, who wrote the blueprint along with Sheridan College Early Childhood Education Professor Monica Lysack, veteran political adviser Andrew Bevan and former senior policy adviser Kate Hammer.

They pull no punches, quickly identifying women as being most severely impacted by the pandemic. The service sector, among those most badly damaged, is largely made up of female workers. They tend to be lower-wage workers and without protections afforded workers in other sectors. As Brock’s Bezanson says: “There’s no way our economy can reopen, reboot and recover if 40 per cent of its labour market cannot engage the way it did before.”

She’s referring to the state of licensed child care, which has been crippled by the pandemic and all the associated issues. As reopening begins to take hold, thousands of daycare spaces previously available will be gone. And thousands of female workers who previously worked won’t be able to because of a lack of accessible and affordable child care.

There’s an answer, and the blueprint offers it up. The authors call for federal dollars to be invested in re-opening regulated child-care spaces, but with new measures such as more space to allow for safe distancing, summer programming to make up for missing summer camps and lower child-to-staff ratios to reduce the spread of infection, along with strenuous new cleaning requirements.

So far, so good. Then things start to get complicated. Child care is provincial jurisdiction, so Ottawa needs to funnel the child-care spending through provincial governments. Provincial and territorial governments are thrilled about the \$14 billion in recovery spending, but they are not interested in any restrictions on how or where that money is spent.

In the case of Ontario, for example, that could mean that other investment priorities get a bigger slice of the recovery pie, and child care could end up a poor cousin. That cannot happen.

Canada’s patchwork approach to child care has historically meant some parents have good access to affordable care, some have some access to more expensive care, and many have little or no access at all, either because the care isn’t practical or they cannot afford it. Quebec’s rollout of universal child care wasn’t perfect, but we do know that it allowed workforce participation by women to increase dramatically.

Bottom line, Ottawa must exert strong leadership on child care, and provinces, including Ontario, must recognize the importance of equitable access to affordable care as a cornerstone of economic recovery. Do that and everyone wins.

**Related link:**

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** funding <sup>[4]</sup>

system <sup>[5]</sup>

## Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/06/child-care-strategy-golden-opportunity> [2]

<https://www.thespec.com/opinion/editorials/2020/06/23/child-care-strategy-a-golden-opportunity.html> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/system>