

# The post-pandemic future: Affordable child care will save the economy <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Singh, Jagmeet

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## AVAILABILITY

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

## EXCERPTS

For decades, women have told us how necessary child care is for their ability to work. Before the pandemic, nine per cent of parents with small children had to change their work schedule because they didn't have child care, while seven per cent had to work fewer hours and another six per cent postponed their return to work entirely. We know that women were largely the ones shouldering those responsibilities.

One of the biggest barriers to child care is price. It's the second biggest cost for parents after housing—and sometimes it's even more expensive than a mortgage. In Toronto, you might pay \$21,000 per year for an infant or \$14,500 per year for a young kid, with lots of families paying much more. Another challenge is the lack of available space. In Toronto last year, there were 109,105 children under the age of four, but only 46,050 licensed spaces for that age group. That means 58 per cent of kids didn't have access to licensed child care.

Now Covid is making that crisis even worse. As businesses reopen, child care providers are reducing their capacity due to physical distancing measures. And as for schools, parents are worried about sending their kids back safely. According to a report from RBC, women's participation in the workforce is down to its lowest level in three decades; the same report suggests women are not returning to work because they shoulder more child-care responsibilities and that they may have to refuse work if the shortage continues. Women make up about half of Canada's workforce—and our workforce cannot afford to lose them. It's simple. There's no recovery without women recovering, and they cannot recover without access to child care. It is fundamental to restarting our economy.

This year, we need to immediately invest \$2.5 billion in child care to stabilize the industry, to help subsidize providers who are complying with public-health directives, and to serve as the basis for finally building a universal child care system that delivers the help families need. Beyond this immediate investment, the government must invest an additional \$10 billion over the next four years. This will fund 500,000 affordable, public, licensed child care spaces, with the goal of creating a system that costs parents \$10 per day.

British Columbia has already set up a pilot program following this model, and parents have said it's life-changing. They pay \$10 per child per day or less for full-time care. That's just \$200 a month—a drastic change from the \$1,360 monthly median cost for infant child care in Vancouver—and the program is saving families up to \$15,000 per child per year. For some families, the difference is everything: their credit cards aren't maxed out every month, they can buy nutritious food and access better housing.

In the long term, government must also bring in legislation to enshrine the commitment to quality, affordable and publicly funded child care into law, and set out the principles, conditions and requirements for federal transfer payments to provinces. Studies show that affordable child care gives back to the economy. In Quebec, for every dollar the government spends on child care, they see a return of \$1.50. It pays for itself and then some.

In the last few months, our world has changed dramatically. Many are wondering when things will return to normal. But this crisis has taught us that we need to do better than normal. We have the opportunity to rebuild our child care system to help parents in Toronto and across the country. We have the opportunity to build a Canada where we take better care of one another. Not just during a crisis, but always.

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

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

economic recovery <sup>[5]</sup>

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