

A strong child care system is a key enabler of Canada's economic prosperity ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Canada continues to face a series of significant policy choices that will impact our ability to grow our population and secure our long-term economic prosperity and global influence in this century. Child care is one such policy choice. And it is in front of us today.

A universal child care system could increase annual GDP by \$63 billion to \$107 billion per year. Improving this critical social system will support the well-being of children and families, create jobs, positively impact labour force participation and the economy, and help to attract and retain newcomers to Canada.

But the patchwork approach that Canada has historically taken with child care has been insufficient to address the issues of access, affordability and quality.

The federal government has made a commitment to a strong pan-Canadian system that will include provincial variation. As of today, the first bilateral federal-provincial agreements under this plan had been signed with British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and Yukon.

In the coming year, however, as political debate heats up and policy, program and funding decisions get made, there is a risk that this momentum will stall, just as with previous efforts to build a national child care system. We cannot allow that to happen. All children and parents in Canada deserve access to quality, accessible and affordable child care. Our long-term economic prosperity depends on it.

How do we avoid the pitfalls of the past? We must maintain consensus across parties, regions, constituencies, and governments that strengthening the child care system is a critical pillar and enabler of Canada's economic prosperity. Child care must be re-conceptualized as part of core public services, like health care and unemployment insurance. It also must also be a key pillar in community planning efforts, just like schools, parks and public transit, accommodating needs of different communities. Engaging those who deliver child care in design will be critical to success.

Century Initiative's new Key Insight Report identifies core issues in our child care system, summarizes past efforts to build a national child care system, and key learnings from other models. It also identifies critical next steps to ensure continued momentum. The report builds on Century Initiative's National Scorecard on Canada's Growth and Prosperity, released earlier this year, which found gaps in Canada's current performance on early learning and child care.

Related link: Report: Canada's early learning and child care system: Building a foundation for sustainable population growth ^[3]

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