

Opinion: Alberta leaves mothers with case of childcare FOMO ^[1]

Author: Cotey, Stefani

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EXCERPTS

I am a young, well educated woman, working at the height of my career, where both my level of experience and income are paying dividends. I am also a mom of two children under the age of 7.

For me, as is the case for many women across this province, those are two roles that often do not eco-exist easily.

For me to merge those two roles, I need high quality licensed, affordable child care. I need to work to provide for my family, but to do so, I need to know that my children are in a safe place where they are continuously learning. I also need it to be affordable, so that going to work itself is not just an exercise in direct transfer of my paycheck to our child care provider.

So I have to be honest, when I heard what has been happening in other provinces, I developed a real case of FOMO – Fear Of Missing Out.

In early July, BC and Nova Scotia entered into agreements with the federal government to make licensed high quality childcare accessible and affordable for families in their respective provinces. Shortly thereafter, Yukon, PEI and Newfoundland Labrador signed similar agreements. Alberta's progress is eerily silent.

So we wait – while I, along with many other women across this province NEED affordable child care. We need to work, we need to contribute to the economy, we need to add our skills and education in ways that will help diversify the economy.

The current child care reality for Alberta families is in Edmonton, the median monthly fees for two children total \$2000 a month of after tax dollars (\$1050 for an infant, \$950 for a toddler). In Calgary those numbers jump to \$1300 for an infant, and \$1250 a month for a toddler, totalling \$2550 per month.

If you happen to live in one of Alberta's two urban centers, which I do, this equates to an expense of between \$24,000 – \$30,600 a year. For my family, the licensed facility we use costs us \$2300/month (\$27,600 per year).

According to StatsCan's latest available data in 2019 the median income of women aged 16 and over, was \$36,400 a year, gross (\$31,300 net). A woman in Alberta could work 40 hour weeks only to bring home \$700 a year. That's if she has absolutely no other bills to pay other than taxes.

Exactly how does this contribute to the economy?

How does this encourage educated, capable and innovative women to reenter the workforce and help diversify our economy?

Imagine how much more I could contribute to the economy if my entire paycheck didn't have to go towards childcare.

The numbers above are median and do not distinguish between licensed and unlicensed facilities. If we learned anything from the past 18 months of COVID19 care, it's that when it comes to caring for our loved ones, at either end of the age spectrum (parents, grandparents or children), we need regulated, licensed care space — and we need a lot of them.

What we don't need are more subsidies. Subsidies have to be applied for, they are not barrier free, and they certainly do not create more spaces. Providing someone a child care subsidy is like giving them a coupon for an item that is out of stock. It's useless.

If we truly are committed to diversifying the economy and getting people back to work, we must acknowledge that for so many women in this province, this only happens when child care is not just available, but of high quality, accessible and safe. And right now, there's a lot of money available to make this happen.

Alberta children deserve no less than any other province. I don't want to have child care FOMO, I'm happy for my fellow mothers in the provinces and territories that have reached agreements. I just want to celebrate this win with them, and not just for them.

Region: Alberta ^[3]

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