

Greater public role in child care will accelerate gains ^[1]

Author: McCracken, Molly & Prentice, Susan

Source: Winnipeg Free Press

Format: Article

Publication Date: 7 Apr 2025

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

In Manitoba, the parents of more than 39,000 children now pay just \$10/day for child care, thanks to new federal investments. This is a wise and cost-effective program for children and families — but there are still too many families who can't find a licensed space.

At present, just 20.1 per cent of Manitoba children aged 0-12 have access to a licensed child-care program. It is time to develop innovative ways to expand child-care access in Manitoba, and a stronger public role is the best place to start.

Expanding public child care will generate economic opportunities and build economic resilience. Between now and 2031, Ottawa will transfer over \$2 billion to Manitoba to support child care. The province of Manitoba should ensure it has maximum impact.

The new, more affordable child-care plan has stimulated economic activity. Economists confirm that women's labour force participation has grown across the country, particularly in full-time jobs, as more affordable child care helps more mothers work.

The gains in women's labour force participation have been most striking in Manitoba, which saw the greatest jump in the number of mothers newly entering the labour force. Manitoba has seen an eight per cent increase in the rate of mothers' labour force participation, nearly twice that of Ontario, since 2019.

Moreover, the early learning and child care sector itself is an employment creator, generating more than 40,000 new jobs across Canada in recent years. In fact, the sector ranks as the sixth-largest job-creating sector in Canada's entire economy over the past five years, with a far larger employment boost than traditionally assumed drivers like natural resources or manufacturing.

Additional new jobs have been created in child-care facility construction, renovations and supply chain purchases. A recent study by the Centre for Future Work calculates that \$32 billion in additional GDP was created in 2024 from the combination of more child-care services, increased indirect (upstream and downstream) spin-off jobs, and increased female labour supply compared to 2019.

Child care is an effective lever of economic development.

The smart "build, build, build" focus of the 2025 Manitoba Budget can fuel child-care expansion with its positive economic returns. Manitoba has committed to creating 23,000 new spaces across the province, and stepping up the pace of growth will provide needed economic and social development.

The first to begin will be a public affirmation of child care's essential role in early childhood development, the well-being of families, gender equity, Indigenous reconciliation, sustainable development and social infrastructure. The federal government has such a declaration in Bill 35, the Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act, which takes a rights-based approach. To date, Manitoba's early learning legislation is silent on its vision and these shared policy goals.

To realize the vision, Manitoba needs to develop new mechanisms to plan, fund and deliver early learning and child care services where they are needed. Today, most Manitoba children live in a child-care desert. Where services can be found, the relatively small stock of child-care services is nearly all owned and operated by non-profit, and often charitable, parent-led organizations. Over 94 per cent of Manitoba's centres are non-profit independent businesses. This model has many strengths. Yet it requires volunteers to develop essential services, including fundraising to build new facilities.

It is long overdue to bring public bodies into the sector as delivery agents. This starts with provincial leadership to create much-needed new spaces, just as is done with hospitals and schools. This is historically how we have ensured equitable access to needed services.

We can follow the example of other jurisdictions. In Quebec, for example, school boards offer care to children aged six to 12. In Ontario, for over 80 years, cities and towns have owned and operated child care centres, meaning early childhood educators are municipal employees.

There are promising signs that some public bodies in Manitoba are already stepping up. The Manitoba Métis Federation has an ambitious project to start up Métis early learning and child-care programs, and more than half a dozen centres have already opened. There are First Nations centres in Lake St. Martin, Peguis, and Sioux Valley, among others. But there's not a single space owned and operated by Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson or any other town or city across the province.

The Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM) has partnered with a provincewide organization to operate French-language child-care

centres. In contrast, there is scant leadership from English-language school boards to ensure older children have child care before and after school, or that younger children can experience a full day. While over half of Manitoba's child-care centres are located in an English public school or on school property, they are there as rent-paying tenants and not as education partners.

It's time for the province to lead with other public entities — school divisions, health authorities, First Nations, Métis and Inuit governments and other public bodies — to collaborate and accelerate the creation of child care in our province. A greater public role for child care will accelerate economic and social gains for Manitoba at this time of economic uncertainty.

Molly McCracken is the chair of the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba (CCCM) and director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives — Manitoba (CCPA MB). Susan Prentice is the Duff Roblin professor of government at the University of Manitoba, a member of CCCM and a CCPA MB research associate.

Full text shared with permission from the authors, Molly McCracken and Susan Prentice.

Related link: Province, feds team up to open more Manitoba child care spaces ^[3]

Region: Manitoba ^[4]

Tags: child care policy ^[5]

First Nations ^[6]

Métis ^[7]

women's labour force participation ^[8]

Source URL (modified on 9 Apr 2025): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/25/04/greater-public-role-child-care-will-accelerate-gains>
Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/25/04/greater-public-role-child-care-will-accelerate-gains> ^[2]

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/analysis/2025/04/07/greater-public-role-in-child-care-will-accelerate-gains> ^[3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/25/02/province-feds-team-open-more-manitoba-child-care-spaces> ^[4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7857> ^[5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care-policy> ^[6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/first-nations> ^[7] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9385> ^[8]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/womens-labour-force-participation>