

Reality Check: Parsing the Conservatives' child care facts for accuracy ^[1]

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The March 25, 2025 statement by Pierre Poilievre about Conservative Party policy on child care contains a number of inaccuracies. This Reality Check assesses the accuracy of the statement's data and information, and comments on the implied policy solutions.

The content of this document is based on Statistics Canada tables from surveys from 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023; data collected and published by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit and by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (sources linked in the text); and additional calculations conducted by us and colleagues using Statistics Canada's Public Use Microdata Files.

Pierre Poilievre's statement:

"We all believe that there should be more affordable child care in this country. The Liberals though have imposed a massive top-down bureaucratic system that has actually meant 120,000 fewer kids have daycare spaces than when they first created the program. A third more families are struggling to get child care spaces than when the Liberals first created this program.

Now they're making even more promises on the eve of an election and in order to get a fourth term in in power after the lost Liberal decade. Why do we have worse child care today than when the Liberals took office? Because they've imposed top down government knows best rules that have shut down private daycares that don't meet the government um knows best model the one-size fits all model, and more and most of the money has gone been consumed by bureaucracy.

So while honoring the agreements on child care with the provinces we're going to give more freedom and flexibility to parents, providers, and provinces to support the child care of all the kids. Why would we leave Why do the Liberals want to leave kids out in the cold if their parents are night shift workers or work on weekends? Why do they want to leave kids out in the cold if their parents have opted for private child care or home-based child care?

We should support all child care options by having more flexibility. Then parents can decide which child care options they favor. Provinces can decide how to deliver those services on the front line with more flexibility and freedom for parents, provinces, and providers will massively expand the availability of child care and reduce the bureaucracy that stands in the way. Thank you very much".

(See Pierre Poilievre's [statement](#) ^[3] in full at 31 minutes).

This Reality Check will assess the following claims:

- There are now 120,000 fewer children using child care spaces than when the program started;
- One-third more families are struggling to get child care spaces than when the program started;
- Child care today is worse than when the Liberals took office;
- Governments have been shutting down private daycares;
- Governments are imposing a one-size-fits-all child care model;
- Most of the nearly \$30 billion allocated by the federal government has been consumed by bureaucracy;
- Children whose parents are night-shift workers or work weekends are left out in the cold by the federally funded program;

- Children who use private child care or home-based child care are left out in the cold by the federally funded program.

Parsing the facts

Mr. Poilievre: “The Liberals have imposed a massive top-down bureaucratic system that has actually meant 120,000 fewer kids have daycare spaces than when they first created the program”.

Reality Check: Statistics Canada’s regular surveys of child care use show that this is not so. In fact, there were 177,900 more children 0 – 5 years of age in centre-based “daycare spaces” in 2023 than there were in 2020.

Statistics Canada began regular collection of child care data in 2019; the Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements (SELCCA), conducted in 2019, 2020 and 2022, surveys parents about their use of all types of non-parental care for children 0 – 5 years, licensed and unlicensed (formal and informal), relatives, full-day and part-day, centres and home child care. The Canadian Survey of Early Learning and Child Care, a similar parent survey with a bigger sample and additional questions was conducted in 2023.

The data [4] show that parents reported 594,100 children 0-5 years Canada-wide were in centre-based child care spaces in late 2020 right before announcement of the \$10-a-day child care program – otherwise known as CWELCC - in April 2021. This number grew to 772,000 children 0-5 years old in centre spaces in the first half of 2023. Thus, the number of children in licensed centre care grew by 177,900 “since they first created the program” until 2023.

The data show children in centre spaces increasing between 2020 and 2023, while other forms of child care (care by relatives and family child care, licensed and unlicensed) all decreased. The decrease in child care use (all types of child care) was statistically significant only in Ontario.

Mr. Poilievre: “A third more families are struggling to get child care spaces than when the Liberals first created this program”.

Reality Check: There is truth in this statement, but context allows us to understand why this has happened.

Statistics Canada asked parents if they had difficulty finding child care. Looking at comparable data [5] from the 2020 and 2023 surveys, we calculated the percent of parents who looked for, and were using some form of non-parental care but had difficulty finding it. This shows more parents – about 10% more—reporting difficulty finding child care in 2023 (49.3%) than in 2020 (39.8%).

Additional data sheds light on why parental difficulty finding child care increased by about 10 percent between 2020 and 2023. In 2020, many parents did not look for child care because it was too costly. After CWELCC’s substantial fee reductions, while many more children were in licensed centres – both a higher proportion and a higher absolute number in 2023 than in 2020 – the number seeking to use fee-reduced licensed child care, especially centres was even greater. Thus, the numbers show two things: many more children – 177,900 more – found places in centres and a substantial number of parents were having difficulty finding the child care they sought.

Consistent with this, our calculations from the 2023 survey data show parents prefer child care centres over other options. In 2023, three-quarters of children in any form of non-parental child care were in licensed child care. On top of this, a majority of those not currently using any non-parental child care said they would like to use child care too. Of these, 62% would prefer to use a child care centre.

Mr. Poilievre: “Why do we have worse child care today than when the Liberals took office?”

Reality Check: Mr. Poilievre does not provide a definition of “worse”, but in the context of his statement, this appears to refer to the availability and affordability of child care to parents. Data show these two aspects have gotten far better, not worse, since the Liberals took office.

Between 2015, when the Liberals took office, and 2023, the number of child care spaces [6] grew by 426,203. In 2014, licensed child care spaces for 0-12-year olds (centres and licensed home child care) totalled 1,201,008, while in 2023, there were 1,627,211 total licensed spaces – a considerable expansion, especially as the time period included the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of the pandemic, child care provision (both centres and licensed child care homes) decreased for the first time. Between 2019 and 2021, there was a net loss [7] of 477 centres (from 17,542 in 2019 to 17,065 in 2021) and 3,673 family child care homes (17 percent of home child care supply). This loss of child care provision had a negative impact on the availability of spaces right before the \$10-a-day plan was announced in 2021.

A second way child care has gotten better, not worse – and the most strikingly successful part of the policy changes thus far – is that parent fees decreased dramatically as a result of the \$10-a-day plan. In 2014 [8], the highest median monthly infant fee was in Toronto, at \$1,676 /month. Second highest was St. Johns, NL at \$1,394. The lowest median infant fees in 2014 outside Quebec (where all fees were capped at \$152/month) were \$651/ month in Winnipeg (by 2014, Quebec and Manitoba had already adopted capped fees).

In 2025, eight provinces/territories [9] had capped fees at \$10/day (approximately \$220/month). Fees are also capped at \$22/day (\$484/month) in Ontario and regionally capped in New Brunswick. These fee changes mean that parents are paying fees that are 1/6, 1/4 or 1/3 of the fee levels that existed before the federally-funded CWELCC program.

Mr. Poilievre: “...they’ve imposed top-down government knows best rules that have shut down private daycares that don’t meet the government-knows-best model” ...

This statement is not accurate. Child care agreements signed with provinces and territories provide operational funding to the vast majority of *existing* child care operators who are willing to lower fees to parents, accept operational funding, and account for how they spend government funds. The small minority of child care operators who do not accept these conditions can, and do, continue to exist, can charge whatever fees they wish, but do not receive operational funding. The federal government, based on the evidence ^[10] on quality and use of public funds, has specified that federally funded new expansion be primarily public and non-profit. No jurisdictions are shutting down private (for-profit) daycares.

Mr. Poilievre: “...they’ve imposed top-down government-knows-best rules...the one-size fits all model and more...”

Reality Check: Rather than being “one-size-fits-all”, the \$10-a-day plan’s model of early learning and child care provides a variety of child care options to parents as well as considerable flexibility for provinces and territories to make policy choices. From the federal perspective, provinces and territories can fund all types of licensed child care programs for 0 – 5 year olds: full-day child care centres, family home child care, part-day preschools/nursery schools and before-and-after school child care for children up to age six. The federal government has specified ^[11] that federally funded child care must be licensed.

Mr. Poilievre: “most of the money has been consumed by bureaucracy”

Reality Check: This claim is perplexing and, frankly, outrageous. Child care fees charged to parents have dropped to an average of \$10 a day or less in eight out of thirteen Canadian jurisdictions, and all the remaining jurisdictions have lowered parent fees very substantially. This would not have been possible if “most of the money was consumed by bureaucracy”, as most of the money is spent making licensed child care much more affordable for parents.

Public financial data ^[12] show most public funding is transferred to child care service providers to operate licensed child care programs with significantly reduced parent fee revenue. As with education, health care or even roads, there are some administrative costs. But the data show that most of the public funding can be attributed directly to covering the on-the-ground costs of delivering publicly funded child care.

Mr. Poilievre: “Why do the Liberals want to leave kids out in the cold if their parents are night shift workers or work on weekends?”

Reality Check: Federal child care funding is equally available to fund weekday child care, evening child care, weekend child care or other non-standard-hours child care. Provinces and territories determine priorities for service expansion; several have included non-standard hours child care as a priority in their action plans ^[13]. Non-standard hours child care, most agree, is in short supply but is as eligible for federal funds as any other child care. There have been several provincial/territorial non-standard hours initiatives ^[14] and new ^[15] non-standard hours centres funded.

Mr. Poilievre: “Why do they want to leave kids out in the cold if their parents have opted for private child care or home-based child care?”

The \$10-a-day program leaves neither group of children “out in the cold”. Under the \$10-a-day plan, based on the evidence on quality and accountability, the federal government specified that expansion should be “primarily” not-for-profit. However, for-profit child care already existing before the agreements is funded under the same terms as non-profit or public child care. Provinces and territories negotiated a range of interpretations of this condition in their bi-lateral agreements and action plans ^[16]. For instance, Ontario negotiated that the existing proportions of non-profit and for-profit child care (70%/30%) would, at least, be maintained. In Alberta, where almost 70% of spaces are for-profit, the agreement specified that 42,500 of new spaces would be either non-profit, public, or home child care but there was no limit on private for-profit child care.

In all provinces/ territories, licensed home child care is fully included in federal funding. Indeed, the 2021 – 2023 period saw the first increase ^[7] in the number of licensed family child care homes in nearly 20 years – from 17,840 active family care homes in 2021, to 20,221 homes in 2023.

What would happen to \$10-a-day child care under a Conservative government?

As he states, Mr. Poilievre wants more flexibility, more parental choice, more freedom for parents, provinces and providers. He wants less bureaucracy. The alternatives to the \$10-a-day plan is reminiscent of Erin O’Toole’s Conservatives in the last federal election (who proposed spousal income-splitting and improving the Child Care Expense Deduction or the child care policy of Stephen Harper’s government (of which Mr. Poilievre was a member). In 2007, the Harper government cancelled agreements with provinces/territories to begin building a federally funded child care system and brought in the Universal Child Care Benefit, a cheque to parents of all children 0- 6 years of \$100/month to be used for any variety of child care or any family expense. During the nine year-long UCCB, expansion of child

care spaces ^[17] slowed down, with 85, 816 fewer additional spaces during the UCCB expenditure period than in the previous six year period and , the for-profit sector's share of child care spaces—after dropping steadily through 2004— began to rise again in 2006, increasing from 21% of total spaces in 2006 to almost 30% in 2012.

These forms of flexibility and freedom mean an **end to the caps on fees** ^[18] that parents pay (goodbye to \$10 a day child care), no targets for space creation, no plans for equitable access to child care, no restrictions on the amount of for-profit child care, and no requirement to use funds on licensed child care. Less bureaucracy means no requirements for child care providers to be financially accountable for the billions of dollars of public money they receive. These solutions would be a dream for private corporations delivering child care and a nightmare for cash-strapped parents.

The \$10-a-day plan was developed to change Canada's long-standing inadequate child care situation. As the \$10-a-day plan is being built; working toward its goals is the best way to ensure child care now and in the future. This means *affordability* (maximum \$10-a-day parent fees, with mechanisms to ensure affordability for low income families); *quality* (qualified, well-paid educators, evidence-based program standards, primarily non-profit and public ownership); *accessibility* (child care available when and where needed), *inclusion* (of children with disabilities, infants, rural and remote communities, parents working non-standard hours, under-represented groups such as newcomers).

Achieving these goals for all is **underway** ^[19], but the work is far from complete. Time to redouble efforts to provide affordable child care universally for all who need it, not to follow Mr. Poilievre's call to raise parent fees and reduce accountability for funds.

Related link: Eight things to know about \$10-a-day child care ^[20]

Region: Canada ^[21]

Tags: \$10aDay ^[22]

CWELCC ^[23]

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Links

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