

For-profit child care: Past, present and future ^[1]

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\$10

After many years of relative political inattention in Canada, the federal government has committed to developing a national early learning and child care program. In 2005, the first beginnings of the national program were laid down through a \$5 billion/five year initiative consisting of bilateral agreements with provinces and territories.

Until now, there has been no national policy on child care and Canada has relied on non-profit organizations and privately owned businesses to provide most of its child care services; in 2004, about 20% of these were for-profit operations. Historically, federal funding policies and provincial choices have produced wide differences across the country in the distribution of non-profit, for-profit and government-operated services. However, as Canadian child care is now poised for growth, important policy decisions about how child care services are best delivered will need to be made.

This paper presents new evidence as well as reviewing existing evidence that supports reasons to look to the non-profit and public sectors as the optimum sites for the expected growth of Canadian child care services. It makes the case that if Canada is to avoid 'big-box' child care (and more for-profit child care generally - both international and home-grown), then careful attention must be paid to the research and policy evidence about what happens when public funds and public policy support for-profit child care.

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