

Child care costs across Canada ^[1]

Author: Hoffman, John

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Excerpts from the article:

Outrageous fees. Vast cost discrepancies. Staggering wait-lists. Our survey reveals a lot about the reality of child care for families across Canada

One statement, from a parent in Nova Scotia, pretty well sums up the story coming out of the Today's Parent Child Care Fees Survey. She said she felt lucky to live in an area where child care fees are relatively affordable, but added, "Friends of ours living in a major city pay over two times the amount we pay for child care." Indeed, our survey data weaves a tale of staggering inconsistency and variability in child care fees.

In analyzing our survey results, we zeroed in on the cost of preschool care because we wanted to make sure we were comparing apples to apples. Preschool care fees are lower than those for toddler or infant care. That's because younger children require more staff and, as we shall see, staffing is the biggest single cost in the child care business. And 73% of our respondents have children in the preschool group.

Most respondents (outside of Quebec) said they paid between \$600 and \$800 a month for full-time, centre-based preschool care. That in itself is a pretty wide range. The difference between paying \$600 versus \$800 a month adds up to \$2,400 a year: a lot of money for a young family. But some parents reported paying as little as \$400 a month, while others were paying well over \$1,000 a month. The biggest surprise? Wide variations in what parents pay within the same province or region, even the same city.

Average fee per month by province*

Newfoundland \$588

Nova Scotia \$601

PEI \$546

New Brunswick \$563

Ontario \$814

Manitoba \$399

Saskatchewan \$610

Alberta \$750

BC \$775

*Non-subsidized fees for full-time preschool care.

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Some parents pay low fees, others pay high; some find spots, others can't; some are ecstatic about the service they receive, others are frustrated and concerned.

It all comes down to a lack of both federal and provincial policy about child care, says Martha Friendly. "As a country, Canada hasn't even taken the first steps toward putting in place any sort of national policy framework for child care," she says.

"All we have, for the most part, are minimal standards for health, safety, training and staff ratios, and a patchwork of regional systems for subsidizing fees. But we haven't decided what our goals are for child care, what we want child care to be, how governments will support it, how we'll know if we're doing a good job providing the service."

And until we do, until we create policy that starts to turn that patchwork into something resembling a system that parents (and their children) can count on - including supports for stay-home parents - we'll keep hearing that fees, availability and quality of care are all over the place.

And we'll keep hearing comments like this one from a Nova Scotia parent: "I feel the kids would be better taken care of if the facility were able to pay employees competitive wages. The quality of care is below acceptable at my centre, but with only two to choose from, it leaves working parents little room to complain."

Related link: Child care: Do it for the parents; another reason for a national child care strategy ^[2]

Region: Canada ^[3]

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