

# Maternal and child services needed in north, says study <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Too many women in Canada continue to die during pregnancy or childbirth, particularly in remote northern communities, says a study by Save the Children.

The international arm of Save the Children compared 164 countries in its 12th annual Mother's Index, ranking Norway in the top spot, Canada in 20th place and Afghanistan at the bottom.

Released annually before Mother's Day, the group analyzes maternal and child health indicators, the economic and political status of women, lifespan, maternity-leave benefits and other factors.

About one in 5,600 Canadian women dies from pregnancy-related causes during or shortly after pregnancy, slightly higher than the last survey. A woman in Canada is almost three times as likely as a woman in Italy or Ireland to die from pregnancy-related causes and her lifetime risk of maternal death is roughly six times as high as a woman in Greece.

At the same time, the number of babies stillborn in Canada remains at 3.3 per 1,000 births, with three times more stillbirths in Inuit communities, according to "Missing Midwives & the State of the World's Mothers," which was prepared in concert with the international report by Save the Children Canada and the Canadian Association of Midwives.

"Sometimes the wealth of a country can throw you off. But in statistics you have to look at areas where poverty exists," says Patricia Erb, president and chief executive officer of Save the Children. "Canada has it in the indigenous or First Nations communities."

Erb said Canada must ensure that remote communities have more doctors, midwives and nurses, as well as access to education.

Canada also fared poorly relative to other developed countries in the mortality rate of children in their first five years, unchanged since 2009 with six deaths for every 1,000 children under 5. A child in Canada is more than twice as likely to die before reaching age 5 than a children in France, Greece, Iceland, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia or Sweden. Again, Canada's performance was affected by the problems in isolated communities.

Canada also lost marks because of its maternity-leave policies, though the methodology of the study sold the country somewhat short, counting only the 17 weeks of maternity leave, not the gender-neutral parental leave that allows for nearly a year off.

But what really knocked Canada down the rankings was the lack of financial support for parents on leave. Canada pays only 55 per cent of wages, which is on par with Slovakia and less generous than all countries for which the numbers were available, save Greece (at 50 per cent of wages).

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The study also says that only 70 per cent of children in Canada are enrolled in preschool. Annie Kidder, executive director of People for Education, said she regards that as unacceptable.

She points to Quebec as a model for accessible low-cost child care. Available preschool frees up parents to work or get an education. "It is linked to so many other outcomes," said Kidder. "There's kind of a domino effect."

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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