

# Small changes to daycare policy has big impact on jobs <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

As a working mom (with the most perfect toddler in the world), I pay attention to our Early Childhood Education programs. What matters most to me -- her teachers are incredibly caring, she learns something every day, and she has tons of fun with the other kids.

As a labour economist, I pay attention to the government's role in structuring childcare programs and ultimately the implications for Canada's productive capacity and gender equality. Recently, Ontario has introduced several changes to our Early Childhood Education programs including the introduction of full day kindergarten programs for 4 and 5 year olds. They are, however, leaving many important details up to local school boards. These details matter and the Province should be paying more attention.

In the Waterloo Region, the local school boards would like to offer a "seamless day" where the before and after school care for children ages 4-7 is provided by the school in the child's classroom. Current providers of before and after school child care in the region have expressed several concerns, including an expectation of higher costs for parents, and a lack of child care services in summer months.

What should the province be paying attention to?

First, what impact do inexpensive child care programs have on the employment and career opportunities of parents? We know that providing inexpensive child care will significantly increase the employment rates of secondary earners in the family -- and these are typically women.

For example, Kevin Milligan and Michael Baker evaluated the impact of introducing \$5/day daycare in Quebec, and found that the employment of women in two-parent families rose by 7.7 percentage points. At a time when governments are focused on increasing employment opportunities for seniors as the baby boomers move toward retirement, a shift of focus towards parents of young children may prove to be more productive. Such policies are also important for gender equality, reducing the labour market penalties that women face when spending time away from their careers.

Second, how might the lack of summer programs with the school affect the type of jobs that women can take on? Current providers of before and after school programs would not be able to fill the summer gap -- they could not cover the facility costs with only 2-3 months of child care revenue. As a result, many women would be restricted to (lower wage) part-time and casual work that allows them to leave their jobs for the summer. This prevents many women from taking on full time career employment. The long term implications for women are huge -- they lose job experience, seniority, benefits, and even retirement pensions.

Clearly, it is extremely difficult to design a "perfect" child care program that suits the needs of all children and their parents. But there are some basic design issues that have important implications for the economy and all Canadians, not just those of us with perfect toddlers.

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**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** economics <sup>[3]</sup>

gender <sup>[4]</sup>

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