

# There's no need to fear a national child care program <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Beach, Jane; Friendly, Martha; Prentice, Susan & White, Linda

**Source:** Globe and Mail

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 13 Nov 2013

## EXCERPTS

Parents desperate for a childcare space; sky-high fees; sometimes dangerous unlicensed arrangements; limited accountability - The Globe and Mail's comprehensive **Daycare Project** <sup>[2]</sup> sketched a bleak picture for families across Canada. It highlighted initiatives making a difference in two provinces; Quebec's ambitious but still uneven work-in-progress and PEI's more modest steps towards public management. The series reinforced the urgent need for high quality childcare experienced by families everywhere in Canada and underscored its benefits for families, children and the economy. The painfully obvious conclusion is that we need a national childcare program.

The spectre of "one-size-fits-all" childcare is regularly trotted out as a fearsome consequence of a national program. This misinterprets and reframes the concept of a national childcare program proposed by experts, policymakers and advocates from the 1980s until today.

The idea of national social programs has historically been a unifying theme in Canada, a federation from its beginnings. Although Canada's form of federalism may have hindered development of the kind of robust social safety net created by some other states, we have built a national health program shaped by the overarching Canada Health Act's five principles but designed and delivered by provinces/territories. Other national social programs such as pensions and parental leave benefits follow a "one-size-fits-all" model in most of Canada, with Quebec delivering its own programs. The Universal Child Care Benefit is also "one-size-fits-all"; as then-HRSDC Minister Diane Finley has noted, it treats all families the same "whether they live in downtown Toronto, rural PEI or Inuvik". Thus, interpretations of Canadian federalism as well as the desirability of "one-size-fits-all" depend on ideology and politics.

The Globe and Mail's **editorial** <sup>[3]</sup> that concluded the series recommended looking to the provinces as "laboratories of innovation" to produce the proverbial thousand points of light. But as we have written elsewhere, the evidence doesn't support this approach: "the record of provincial policy innovation with regard to childcare has not been outstanding... without a federal role to provide the glue and substantial funding to scale-up provincial efforts".

Proponents of a national childcare program envision a system growing over time to include all children, regardless of families' work status/ income/ region. It would offer a range of high quality services including parenting programs for parents staying at home with young children, part-day nursery schools, centres and regulated home childcare. Services would be affordable, publicly-funded, publicly-managed, not-for-profit, participatory and inclusive. Childcare would be part of a broader public policy including improved parental benefits and other family supports such as a national child benefit.

Based on the evidence, this is demonstrably the best way to ensure real options ("choice") for families - an overarching national policy framework including shared principles, an accountability framework, robust service systems designed and administered by each province/ territory, local management and planning and a voice for parents. Such a program would fit with Canadian federalism and provide a real range of options for families. Yet such a flexible and locally tailored program is dismissed as "one-size-fits-all".

But perhaps we should consider the idea that sometimes one size really does fit all. Surely there are basic assurances upon which Canadian families should be able to rely. Should not all children be able to access an early childhood education and childcare program in their neighbourhood? Should sky-high fees exclude parents from regulated childcare in some provinces but not others? Shouldn't "high quality" mean early childhood training and decent wages for childcare programs in every province?

Without a doubt, some shared principles for childcare are appropriate for all children and families - "whether they live in downtown Toronto, rural PEI or Inuvik". This would be consistent with the Social Union Framework Agreement's (1999) recognition of the importance of "services of reasonably comparable quality for Canadians wherever they live or move" and can be seen as one of the principal reasons to have a federal government.

All the evidence demonstrates that families' childcare needs will remain unmet without a well-designed national childcare program based on shared principles, best evidence and solid accountability. Such a program can be structured to fit the brand of federalism that created other national social programs valued by Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

**Related link:** [Globe and Mail's Daycare Project series](#) [2]

**Region:** [Canada](#) [4]

**Tags:** [advocacy](#) [5]

[federal programs](#) [6]

---

**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/11/there%E2%80%99s-no-need-fear-national-child-care-program>

#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/11/there%E2%80%99s-no-need-fear-national-child-care-program> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/13/10/daycare-project> [3] <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/we-dont-all-need-to-imitate-quebec-on-daycare/article15088356/> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-programs>