

Canadian families desperately need a national child-care program ^[1]

Editorial

Author: Toronto Star

Source: Toronto Star ^[2]

Format: Article

Publication Date: 22 Jun 2014

EXCERPTS

Canadian families are doing their share for a prosperous future - they're having more babies - but governments are letting them down.

Public spending on licensed child care remains grossly inadequate, and so is the supply of space. Meanwhile hard-pressed parents face crushing costs as a "baby boomlet" puts new strain on Canada's over-stretched child care resources.

That's the finding of a new report ^[3] by the Toronto-based Childcare Resource and Research Unit and analysts at the universities of Guelph and Manitoba.

The status quo is bad for families, bad for children, and bad for the economy. It's important that policy-makers, at every level of government, take note and make changes.

Need for reform appears especially pressing in light of census figures showing that the number of children, aged 4 and under, jumped by 11 per cent between 2006 and 2011. That's the biggest increase in half a century. Statistics Canada attributed this to a slightly higher fertility rate and the fact that the children of baby boomers have now entered their own child-bearing years.

In an ideal world of efficient planning and far-sighted government, measures would have been in place to boost licensed child-care spaces and help parents cope with the costs of this boomlet. But that's not the world in which Canadian families live.

Already inadequate child-care resources have been left to stagnate in the face of increased need.

As reported by the Star's Laurie Monsebraaten ^[4], almost 70 per cent of mothers with children aged two or under were in the workplace in 2012. And almost 77 per cent of moms with kids between the ages of 3 and 5 had outside jobs.

But space in licensed daycare centres was available for just 22.5 per cent of Canadian children, from birth to age 5. That's a huge gap.

In the absence of better alternatives, this need is most commonly filled through unlicensed daycare and assistance from other family members, especially grandparents. That's hardly optimal.

Worries persist even for those families fortunate enough to secure licensed daycare space. Many struggle with child-care expenses that are a heavier burden than university costs, according to the report.

"The range of parent fees by jurisdiction was enormous," wrote authors of the study, "ranging (for an infant) from \$1,824 per year in Quebec to more than \$12,000 per year in Ontario - almost seven times as much."

Costs are reasonable in Quebec because of that province's ambitious child care system, with regulated fees requiring parents to pay just \$7 a day. In contrast, families across much of the rest of Canada have been left in the lurch, especially after Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives unilaterally scrapped a national child-card plan that would have given provinces \$5 billion over five years to create 100,000 new regulated child-care spaces. The impact of that irresponsible decision continues to reverberate.

Government refusal to adequately fund this sector isn't just a slap to families; it also hurts workers who take care of the kids. In 2012, the year for which the latest good data is available, the median wage for child care staff was just 69 per cent of the average wage in Canada, wrote study authors.

A fundamental problem is that this country has no nation-wide child-care program. That's nothing short of a national shame given the importance of what's at stake.

Quality child-care gives kids a good start early in life. It's particularly important for youngsters from low-income and single-income families. It allows more women to enter the workplace, boosting family revenues and enhancing the Canadian economy. And it would help provide parents with a healthier work-life balance, including those responsible for the latest baby boomlet.

Now, more than ever, Canada needs a national child-care plan.

- Read online at Toronto Star ^[2]

Related link: REPORT: The state of early childhood education and care in Canada 2012 ^[3]

Region: Canada [5]

Tags: funding [6]

federalism [7]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/06/canadian-families-desperately-need-national-child-care-program>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/06/canadian-families-desperately-need-national-child-care-program> [2]

https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2014/06/22/canadian_families_desperately_need_a_national_childcare_program_editorial.html [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/14/06/state-early-childhood-education-and-care-canada-2012> [4]

https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/06/20/baby_boom_meets_daycare_bust_in_canada.html [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federalism>