

Why Canada needs a new approach to child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Canada has one of the worst early childhood education and care systems among advanced industrialized countries. It spends significantly less than most countries, not only compared to countries like Sweden and France, but also less than the United States and the United Kingdom - countries not known for large public investment in social programs.

Considering that the labour force participation of women is relatively high in Canada and that Canadian children perform well in international standardized testing, those opposed to greater government intervention can legitimately ask why we should spend scarce taxpayer dollars on this issue. After all, governments are already grappling with deficits and escalating program costs associated with an ageing population. Why should governments build a child care system?

The answer has a lot to do with Canada's economic challenges. Women now constitute a majority of university graduates, yet, too often, these highly educated women are forced to make career sacrifices due to a lack of adequate and reliable child care services, with negative consequences for our economy. Women are more likely to work part-time than men (70% of part-time jobs are occupied by women) and are much more likely than men to have to take time off for family reasons. In fact, this trend is increasing at a dangerously fast pace with potentially negative consequences for Canada's productivity.

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