

# Childcare is everybody's issue this upcoming Canadian federal election <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

I want to begin by making three declarations about child care.

Child care is not a women's issue- like many other Canadian families, my spouse cares equally about where and how child care services are provided for our children.

Next: Child care is a labour issue! All members, all committees, all labour leaders should fight for better, more affordable, safe and adequate child care for all. When the jobs of our sisters and brothers rely on obtaining and maintaining affordable, safe, and adequate child care, it becomes a labour issue.

And finally, child care is an issue everybody should care about, whether you have children or not, whether your children are older, and regardless of your economic situation.

Let's rewind to 13 years ago when I was filled with excitement about having my first child, my son. Young and working full-time, I was somewhat comforted by the fact that I could even have one full year at home with my son. I would keep him safe, stimulated, providing him with the affirmation, confidence and the love he needs. I had read and built a mental library of facts, statistics about a child's early years. Today, the World Health Organization states that "Early childhood development is considered to be the most important phase in life which determines the quality of health, well-being, learning and behaviour across the life span."

In their document "10 Facts About Early Child Development As a Social Determinant of Health" it clearly states that high quality early childhood care and education programs can improve children's chances for success in later life. I read similar literature and I promised my son stability, safety, and a nurturing environment. But what happens when I go back to work, I thought.

I remember my spouse and I looking in our neighbourhood at regulated childcare centres that would have cost us \$900/month - more than what we were paying for rent at the time. I remember going through the lengthy and intrusive process of applying for childcare subsidy. We complied only to find that two young people having not established their careers yet, and by no means living in luxury, did not qualify for subsidy.

Luckily we had a connection with a provider who operated an unregulated private home daycare that was nearly half the price of the licensed and regulated centres around. We were lucky that we knew, by word of mouth from people we trusted, that a reliable, safe, and affordable provider is available. We were lucky we weren't forced to take any risks with the safety and well-being of our son. Many parents have very difficult decisions to make and unimaginable risks to take. We were able to dodge that, but we were so close.

When my son was 3, I was studying at Kings University College, University of Western Ontario and was the primary provider for D. Even then, I did not initially qualify. I was stuck. I pleaded with the worker to make it happen. How would I study? How would I keep him safe? The worker advised me to cash in our RESP for him and enrol in an unlicensed centre to make it work. I refused to touch the RESP and protested in my own quasi sit-in protest in her office until we were able to make it work under the regulations. I was relieved, but thought about the parents that didn't have the audacity to demand the right for safe, affordable and adequate childcare. What did they do? That sums up our first experience with childcare. Today, we still support a reliable home daycare because it is more affordable.

You see, the problem isn't the unlicensed childcare providers, particularly. They are workers too, many providing safe and adequate child care services with the quality of a regulated centre - Let's not dismiss either that some are not safe, and do not provide a nurturing environment. That happens too.

The problem is the affordability and accessibility of childcare in general. The problem is the lack of choices and options for parents to freely make the best decision possible for the care of their children.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released a paper called "Time to Grow Up: Family Policies for the Way We Live Now". It states that nationally, there are over 1 million children under the age of five who have two working parents but only 500 000 regulated

childcare spaces.- the 1 million does not include families with one income. That's a national crisis, if you ask me!

This study also explains the direct connection to other policies including parental leave and other benefits and tax policies for families with children.

So, what can we all do about this? I will leave you with a few recommendations from someone who has been around the block a few times with struggles with child care:

We must first demand that every party includes child care and family benefits on their platforms for the upcoming Canadian Federal Elections.

We must collaborate with campaigns that have surfaced pushing for electoral reform. We don't want 39% of the vote dictate how we live and what our values are.

We must demand to have our government truly invest in children and families. We have to point to what sane economists are saying: there is a direct economical benefit and huge returns in investing in children and families.

We must demand for a federal mandate to assess and revise the low-income cut offs region to region, municipality to municipality. Then, demand for a revision of the subsidy programs for childcare.

We must fight for the workers who provide care for our children. We must organize, and bargain for better wages and working conditions.

We must demand more regulated and licensed child care centres with adequate resources. We must encourage these centres to be staffed adequately so that shift workers have access to childcare too. Labour Market info is pointing to more and more part-time jobs, and less regular full-time.

Childcare is everybody's problem. Our future leaders are among the children without adequate childcare. Let's put childcare on the table this election!

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** affordability <sup>[4]</sup>

quality <sup>[5]</sup>

election <sup>[6]</sup>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/15/03/childcare-everybody%E2%80%99s-issue-upcoming-canadian-federal-election> [2]

<http://womenincolour.com/2015/03/02/childcare-is-everybodys-issue-this-upcoming-canadian-federal-election/> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/election> [7]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/accessibility>