

# Imagine a national child care strategy <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

There are 16,802 children in Toronto currently on the waiting list for affordable child care. Many of their mothers make weekly phone calls, crossing their fingers and hoping that a space has finally opened up for their child.

With their children in a secure and safe child care centre, women can get back to work, upgrade their skills or advance their education. But the odds that she will hear that a space has opened up for her child are against her since the City can only provide 19% of the child care spaces needed for Toronto's children. And for the 70% of women who may be employed in precarious, part-time work they are simply not eligible for subsidized child care at all.

Women need child care so they can participate equally in the labour force, pursue career advancement, and contribute to their families' prosperity. Yet, the cost of child care in Toronto is a staggering \$19,200 annually, an unthinkable expense when the average salary for a woman is only \$32,000. Depending on income, women in Toronto can expect to pay as much as 50% of their earnings on child care costs.

YWCA Toronto consulted with the women from our programs who told us that the high cost of child care prevents them from lifting their families out of poverty. They believe the Universal Child Care Benefit is inadequate - the \$160 benefit only covers the cost of 15 hours of child care per month. They told us that the same is true if they are living in affordable housing where the benefits of subsidized rent are being offset by the cost of child care. Families are falling behind instead of moving ahead.

This is why we must have a national child care strategy in Canada. Imagine the benefits of child care programs like those in the province of Quebec where families pay rates starting at just over \$7 per day or \$2,600 annually. Or the recently announced NDP national child care strategy where families would pay \$15 per day or \$5,500 annually. Not to mention European countries that publically fund the full cost of child care.

Imagine child care services that reflect the non-standard hours that women work - evenings, weekends, and shift work. Imagine before and after school programs where children flourish and are safe. Imagine that women are not caught in Catch 22 situations - needing to work full-time to qualify for affordable child care and needing child care in place in order to find full-time work. Imagine no waiting lists, the opportunity to build a strong economic future for your family, and never having to compromise the quality of care for your child.

Around the world, countries are tackling these issues - ensuring that women have full equality and that children have the ability to develop to their full potential. Many countries use 1% of their GDP as the international bench mark for funding universally accessible child care initiatives from birth to the start of school. Innovative policies such as publically funded parental leaves, child care, early learning centres, pre-school, as well as flexible work arrangements build stronger families, communities and economies.

When will Toronto's mothers and children have these same opportunities? During this election year join us in calling for a national child care strategy. When there is political will, change is possible. Now is the time for action.

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

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

affordability <sup>[5]</sup>

accessibility <sup>[6]</sup>

availability <sup>[7]</sup>

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