

Province must fund child care to tackle gender wage gap, report says ^[1]

Author: Mojtehdzadeh, Sara

Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 25 Aug 2016

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Ontario must immediately commit to an affordable and publicly funded child-care system if it hopes to eliminate the significant pay gap between men and women, a government-commissioned report says.

The recommendations on reducing wage inequity call for urgent investment in both child care and elder care, arguing that “insufficient options” often force women to shoulder unpaid caregiving roles — sometimes at the expense of paid work.

“While the statistics and the research demonstrate clearly the many barriers to pay equity, what resonated the most was hearing individual stories of the difficulties of coping with multiple jobs, juggling family responsibilities and not realizing a return on their investment in education,” said Emanuela Heyninck, who sat on the Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee and is head of the province’s Pay Equity Office.

On average, women’s annual earnings in Ontario are 29 per cent lower than men’s. In 2014, Premier Kathleen Wynne directed the Ministry of Labour to tackle that disparity — and the committee’s report serves as the blueprint for change.

Its top recommendation is immediate investment in child care, suggesting that committing 1 per cent of the province’s gross domestic product to child-care spending as a “useful” benchmark. Currently, Ontario spends 0.6 per cent of GDP on early childhood education, while Quebec dedicates double that amount to its subsidized child-care program that caps daily fees at \$20 a day.

The impact, the report argues, is felt disproportionately by women. The Star has reported extensively on spiraling childcare costs especially on low-income families, as well as the pervasive reach of unequal pay which follows women across industry, income bracket, and age. Women are more likely to miss work, retire early, turn down job opportunities, or quit their jobs because of unpaid family responsibilities, research shows.

Toronto single mom Charlotte Genoa, 29, says accessible child care would come as welcome relief. She and her daughter Daisy, who is almost 2, have been on the waitlist for subsidized daycare for six months. In the interim, Genoa is paying \$80 a day for her little girl’s care while she is at work.

“I put off going back to work for so long, longer than most people, because of the cost,” she told the Star. “And I think that’s a huge issue. I’ve talked to so many moms who step away for so long and find it really, really hard to go back because the competition is so high.”

In addition to reducing inequality, the report — which was compiled by four experts in business, gender, and equity issues — estimates that every public dollar invested in child care would add \$2.47 to the Ontario economy through women’s increased working hours and wages.

“When we create the opportunity for women to have economic security, we create prosperity for all workers and their families,” said Labour Minister Kevin Flynn. “We need to close the gender wage gap. It’s the right thing to do, and I look forward to moving forward with this important work.”

“It’s an opportunity to really shift to a new gear and talk about building a new system,” said Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, adding that Canada lags behind other industrialized countries in providing good quality, affordable early childhood education.

Other unpaid caring roles are also taking a toll on women, the gender wage gap committee found — in particular, supporting elderly family members. With the number of seniors poised to double to more than 4 million by 2041, the report called on government to ensure its long-term care system can cope with the increase.

“We heard many stories about the pressures facing the ‘sandwich’ generation who provide care for children and aging relatives,” reads the report, which held months of public consultation on pay issues across the province.

Overall, the report notes women's work is often undervalued, and female-dominated sectors tend to be underpaid and precarious. Groups like the Equal Pay Coalition have called on the government to erase the gender gap by 2025 and some action has already been taken, including a salary bump for child care and personal support workers. But the pay gap committee recommended revisiting the impact and scale of these efforts.

"You can't build a quality (child care) system without dealing with the issues facing the workforce," said Ferns, adding efforts to improve pay for early childhood education workers should go hand-in-hand with building an affordable childcare program.

Other recommendations include requiring boards of publicly traded companies to be at least 30 per cent female, establishing a shared parental leave allowance, and developing pay transparency policies.

"More and more jurisdictions are looking at encouraging businesses to voluntarily address this lack of women in decision-making positions," Heyninck said. "There is a growing body of opinion that transparency allows for a more equal playing field for employees."

It's the kind of leadership that Genoa says she is anxiously waiting for.

"I don't think we've figured it out in Canada," she said. "I feel like a lot of other countries have gotten a handle on it and we just don't make it priority. And therefore you're not making women a priority at all."

Ontario's wage gap by the numbers:\$2.6 billion: Potential increase in government revenue from closing the gender wage gap.

- 42 per cent: Proportion of dual income families in 1976.
- 68 per cent: Proportion of dual income families in 2014.
- 20 per cent: Proportion of Ontario children in licenced child care programs.
- 1.8 million: Number of women who are unpaid caregivers in Ontario.

-reprinted from Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: gender equality ^[4]
wages ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/16/08/province-must-fund-child-care-tackle-gender-wage-gap-report-says>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/16/08/province-must-fund-child-care-tackle-gender-wage-gap-report-says> [2]

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2016/08/25/province-must-fund-child-care-to-tackle-gender-wage-gap-report-says.html> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/gender-equality> [5]

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