

How child care costs compare in Canada (hint: they're way more than tuition) ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

In Vancouver and Toronto, a year of daycare for your baby costs more than a year of university tuition fees to study law, engineering, pharmacy, nursing, business, education, arts, humanities, architecture, math or veterinary medicine.

It's not much different across the rest of the country.

Dentistry and medicine are the only post-secondary programs that will set you back more than child care. In Newfoundland, though, even those are cheaper than the annual fee for supervised playtime and naptime.

To make it worse, you don't get to save 18 years for it like you can with tuition.

"There's no RESP for child care," Don Giesbrecht, the CEO of the Canadian Child Care Federation pointed out.

It's a financial blow that hits fast and hard.

"A huge chunk of change goes to child care," said Vancouver mom Megan Hooft. "It is the second-highest cost after housing, and our housing prices are off the charts so we are in a predicament."

"Add to that, limited options, and you just feel stuck."

Hooft's two-year-old son Grayson spent the past year in an unlicensed day home until the caregiver moved. He's now in a licensed one part time as he waits for a spot in one of the city's daycares. The number of names before him has somehow doubled to the 600s in the past year.

But that's a whole other issue.

"We have an affordability crisis in Vancouver," Mary Clare Zak, the city's director of social policy, said of child-care costs.

"I think what a lot of parents do is if they're middle class and working they either go into debt and barely squeak by."

"It is a real problem. I don't think Toronto is far behind us."

In fact, it's even worse there. Toronto had the most expensive child care fees in the country, according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Its 2015 report gathered the median monthly costs of child care from local government and administrative databases.

The numbers showed it cost \$1,736 a month, on average, to put a one-year-old in child care in Canada's largest city. Ontario in general has the highest fees. In Ottawa, high costs force some parents to go across the river to Gatineau, Que., where rates are \$10,000 a year cheaper.

Quebec's universal child-care system (and low tuition rates) makes it the most affordable province. Since 1997, when the subsidized child-care program was introduced, the most a family paid was \$7.55 per day. A new sliding scale has pushed the max to \$20 a day.

That rate is still less than half the \$45 to \$75 a day most Vancouver families pay for child care. And the money doesn't seem to trickle down to often-underpaid early childhood educators.

A Unicef report card on child care gave Canada a failing grade in 2008. We tied for last place (with Ireland) when ranked against other OECD nations.

Even the U.S. is ahead of Canada when it comes to public investment in early education.

The federal government has promised to give \$400 million next year to provinces and territories for child care. The contribution is

conditional on the feds and provinces agreeing on a national child-care framework which is currently being negotiated by both sides.

In the meantime, provinces and cities are looking at their own potential cost-alleviating solutions.

In B.C., for example, a \$10 a day campaign has won wide support. It's also been met with resistance from the province. Minister of Children and Families Stephanie Cadieux has argued the province doesn't have the \$1.5 to \$2.5 billion in its budget that a universal child-care system might cost to set up.

Whatever the solution, for Hooft and many other parents, change can't come soon enough.

"You have a multitude of issues," she said. "No spaces, long wait lists, not many flexible options."

"We're looking at pre-school options for next year when Grayson is three. Apparently there is more choice, but I'll wait and see how the process goes."

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