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Half of big Canadian cities cut child care fees by 50 per cent in 2022, another quarter got close
Despite progress on fees, every level of government must do more to make child care accessible for all

OTTAWA— Canada is making solid progress in offering more affordable child care. Child care fees have been cut by 50 per cent in half (18) of the 32 cities where provinces pledged to; another quarter were close to that goal; and the final quarter of cities missed the target by a larger margin. Overall, the fee reduction funded by federal dollars has been a big success, says a new report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

In *Measuring Matters: Assessing Canada's progress toward $10-a-day child care for all,* CCPA Senior Economist David Macdonald and the Childcare Resource and Research Unit's Martha Friendly surveyed licensed child care in 37 cities as part of their annual parent fee phone survey. Using data from 2023, and previous fee surveys, the report evaluates the first federal target of halving fees by December 2022. The second federal target is an average fee of $10-a-day by 2026.

"The federal government created a fast-tracked plan of halving fees by December 2022, and the provinces and territories mostly delivered— except Alberta, B.C. and P.E.I.," says Macdonald. "Seven jurisdictions now have set fees, and five jurisdictions are already at $10 a day or less, three years ahead of target!"

Among the report's findings:

Infant care remains most expensive in Richmond, B.C., and Toronto, with a median of $900 a month for full-time care. Toddler child care is also most expensive in Richmond, B.C., with a median of $905 a month, followed by $808 a month in Calgary, and $725 a month in Toronto. For preschoolers, Calgary is the most expensive city, at $810 a month, followed by $800 a month in Richmond, B.C. and $600 a month in Oakville, Vaughan, Toronto, Burnaby, and Surrey.

Full-time child care fees are lowest in cities where provinces have moved to set fees across all age groups. This includes Quebec's cities, but also St. John's, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, and Iqaluit, where fees are $10 a day. In some cities — Toronto or Richmond, B.C.— many parents pay much more than the median fee reported. Setting fees would eliminate this variation and make costs more predictable for parents.

The gap between for-profit and not-for-profit fees has widened, especially in high-fee cities with many for-profit centres, such as Surrey, Burnaby, and Richmond, B.C., as well as Richmond Hill and Markham, Ontario. Half of the cities analyzed have no extra capacity to accept new children in the next week.

Expansion still needs to be tackled: centres in half the cities analyzed said they have no room to accept new children in the next week.

"If achieving the vision of an affordable, high quality child care system for all is our goal," says Friendly, "then all provinces/territories must move to set fees, as seven already have. They must also develop concrete expansion strategies to ensure agreed-upon space targets are met; focus expansion exclusively on public and non-profit child care; and transform their traditional funding models into a public model that operationally funds programs."

Measuring Matters is available at: https://monitormag.ca/reports/measuring-matters/

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