

## Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2001: Summary

This BRIEFing NOTE summarizes *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2001* (Friendly, Beach and Turiano, 180 pages), available in print from the Childcare Resource and Research Unit and online at [www.childcarecanada.org](http://www.childcarecanada.org).

cared for in private unregulated arrangements while their parents are at work.

### Policy Context

In Canada, provincial/territorial governments are responsible for ECEC. While the federal government has historically shaped health and social programs including child care that fall within provincial jurisdiction, Canadian constitutional arrangements have determined that education – including kindergarten – is a provincial responsibility with no federal role. The federal government provides a number of programs of ECEC services targeted to specific populations – Aboriginal people, military families and new Canadians – as well as maternity/parental leave benefits and a tax deduction for child care expenses. Otherwise, the provinces/territories set policy, financing and service provision. Thus, fourteen Canadian jurisdictions - the federal government, ten provinces and three territories - are involved in ECEC programs.

While the recognition that early childhood education and “care” while parents are employed are inseparable has broadened in Canada, policy, funding and service delivery have not reflected this. In general, “care” and “early childhood education” are separate mandates. In each jurisdiction there is a multiplicity of “child development” services and care and education programs for children and families.

Overall, Canadian ECEC services are either not sensitive to the needs of parents in the labour force (kindergarten) or are inaccessible to many families because the costs are too high or the services unavailable (regulated child care). At the same time, research indicates that the quality of much of Canada’s available regulated child care is less than exemplary. In any case, the majority of young children are

### Demographic Context

Over the 1990s, and especially since 1995, the number of young children is declining in almost all regions of Canada.

Children aged 0-12 years				
Age	1992	1995	1998	2001
	#	#	#	#
0-2 years	1,164,815	1,142,482	1,065,100	1,016,700
3-5 years	1,094,525	1,202,092	1,180,800	1,073,900
6-12 years	2,679,775	2,719,120	2,831,600	2,800,600
<b>Total 0-12</b>	<b>4,949,115</b>	<b>5,063,694</b>	<b>5,077,500</b>	<b>4,891,300</b>

While the labour force rate of mothers of young children continued to rise in the 1990s, the number of younger children with mothers in the paid labour force has dropped somewhat as the number of children has declined since 1995.

Labour force participation rate of mothers with children 0-15 years (rounded)			
	1995	1998	2001
	%	%	%
With youngest child less than 3 years	62	64	65.8
With youngest child 3-5 years	68	70	73.4
With youngest child 6-15 years	77	78	80.7

Children aged 0-12 years with mothers in the paid labour force				
Age	1992	1995	1998	2001
	#	#	#	#
0-2 years	686,221	672,827	636,000	623,000
3-5 years	690,559	716,749	738,000	695,000
6-12 years	1,456,849	1,860,976	1,949,000	1,990,700
<b>Total 0-12</b>	<b>2,834,029</b>	<b>3,250,552</b>	<b>3,323,000</b>	<b>3,308,700</b>

## Family policy

Maternity and parental leave provisions are shared between federal and provincial governments with provinces setting the length of leave and conditions of eligibility under employment legislation and the federal government providing benefits under Employment Insurance (EI). In 2000, the federal government doubled the duration of the benefit to 50 weeks (combined maternity/parental); the length of provincial leaves at least matches the length of the benefit. The EI benefit pays 55% of wages (up to a ceiling of \$413 in 2001) for eligible workers. (It should be noted that for a variety of reasons, many new parents are not eligible).

## Early childhood education and services

All provinces and territories provide public kindergarten and regulated child care services. Although many aspects of regulated child care services including range and scope of services offered, eligibility, funding, teacher/staff training, wages, and monitoring vary across provinces/territories, kindergarten provision is more widely available and tends to be more consistent across regions.

### Kindergarten

- In almost all jurisdictions, Ministries of Education have responsibility for kindergarten.
- Kindergarten is publicly funded with no parent fees and is an entitlement in most provinces.
- Kindergarten is primarily for five-year-olds; in Ontario, kindergarten is provided for almost all four year olds too. Some other provinces offer limited four year old kindergarten.
- Kindergarten is part-time (usually 2.5 hours a day) in most jurisdictions but full school day in three provinces.
- Kindergarten is compulsory for five year olds in three provinces.
- Generally, educational requirements, wages and working conditions for kindergarten teachers are similar to those of other elementary teachers (a university degree is usually required). No jurisdiction requires specialization in early childhood.
- There are an estimated 320,000 children in five year old kindergarten (no data are available for two jurisdictions) and an estimated 150,000 in four year old kindergarten (115,000 of these are in Ontario).
- Province/territory-wide kindergarten curricula are generally play-based or developmentally appropriate.

## Regulated child care

- In most jurisdictions, a Ministry of Social/Community Services is responsible for regulated child care.
- Child care is generally a user pay service; there is no entitlement to service in any province/territory.
- All provinces/territories regulate child care centres and each has a mechanism for regulating family child care (in a provider's home) although most family child care operates outside of regulation. Six jurisdictions have a distinct regulatory category for nursery schools/preschools; in four jurisdictions, nursery schools operate outside of regulation. Centre-based care for school-age children is regulated under child care legislation in most jurisdictions.
- Most Canadian child care (77%) is operated on a not-for-profit basis (usually by community or parent organizations with some public operation in Ontario and Quebec). While only 13% of centre-based services are operated for profit, these form a large sector in a few provinces. The proportion of not-for-profit child care has increased over the decade from 70% to 77%.
- Inclusion of children with disabilities in regular ECEC services is the preferred approach in Canada; financial support for inclusion is usually available but variable;
- From the perspective of policy and funding, regulated child care has been relatively stagnant at best in most of Canada during the past decade. However, in 1997, Quebec began to develop a universal, publicly-funded program that blends care and education within a family policy framework.

### Aboriginal child care services

- There are seven federal government programs for Aboriginal ECEC targeted to specific populations and, in some cases, specific provinces.
- Aboriginal child care can be found in all provinces/territories both on and off Aboriginal lands.
- There are 425 child care centres and family child care services on Aboriginal land.
- In six jurisdictions, on-reserve child care is regulated by the province or territory.

### Quality

- In a 1998/1999 study of child care quality (in seven jurisdictions), mean provincial scores on the ECERs-R (preschool rooms), ITERs (infant/toddler rooms) and FDCRs (family child care), ranged from 4.0 to 5.6 (ECERs-R) and 3.6 to 5.6 (ITERs) and 3.9 to 5.5 (FDCRs). (N.B. The ECERs-R, ITERs and FDCRs scales are widely used in research as a tool for assessing

quality. Each scale ranges from 2.0 (inadequate) to 7.0 (excellent)).

- One province – Quebec – has adopted a curriculum for child care services.

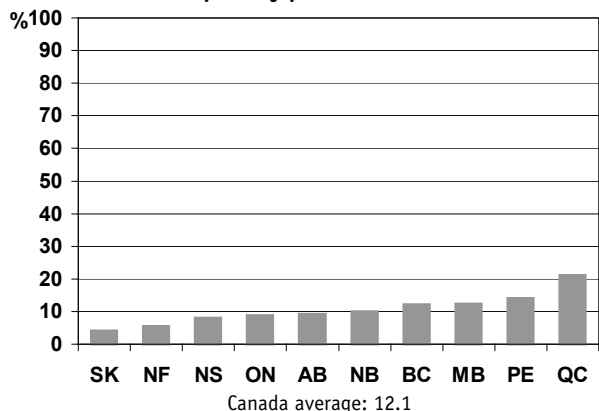
**Human resources**

- No jurisdiction requires all child care staff to have postsecondary ECE training.
- Provincial/territorial educational requirements for teachers and other workers in regulated child care centres and nursery schools range from no training requirements to a community college diploma (one to three years).
- The number of child care staff with one, two, three and B.A.-level ECE training increased considerably between 1991 and 1998.
- According to 1998 cross-Canada data, average hourly wages in regulated child care centres range by province from minimum wage to double that (more current comparable data are not available).
- Generally, regulated family day care has no minimum educational requirements and providers earn low wages.
- Between 1998 and 2001, five provinces increased public funding for child care wages and five increased training requirements in centres and family child care.

**Accessibility**

- In 2001, there were enough regulated child care spaces to accommodate 12.1% of children aged 0-12, up from 7.5% in 1992.
- By province, in 2001, the percent of children for whom there was a regulated space ranged from 4.2% in Saskatchewan to 21.1% in Quebec.

**Percent of children for whom there is a regulated child care space by province - 2001**



- In 2001, 40% of regulated spaces were in Quebec.
- From 1992 to 2001, the percent of children for whom a regulated space was available dropped only in Alberta

but the percentage increases in the other provinces were almost all less than +3%.

- Growth in regulated child care has slowed dramatically. Over the past decade, regulated child care spaces grew from 371,573 to 593,430. However, most of this increase was in Quebec. Child care spaces in Quebec grew 156,517 spaces (from 78,388 in 1992 to 234,905 in 2001) while in the rest of Canada the growth was 65,340 spaces (from 293,185 in 1992 to 358,525 in 2001).
- In comparison, in the 1980-1990 decade, regulated child care spaces outside Quebec grew by 160,980 (in 1990, there was a total of 211,483 including 74,301 in Quebec).

**All children 0-12yrs, children with mothers in the paid labour force and regulated child care spaces - Canada, 1992-2001**



- In 1992, the proportion of children in regulated child care who received a fee subsidy was 36%; it was 36% in 2001 (it should be noted, however, that in 2001, Quebec no longer uses a system that subsidizes individual children).
- Subsidy eligibility levels (in constant dollars) dropped in the period 1992 to 2001 in seven of the nine jurisdictions for which data were available. Most jurisdictions have not adjusted their eligibility levels or have adjusted them very little during the past decade.

**Financing of ECEC programs**

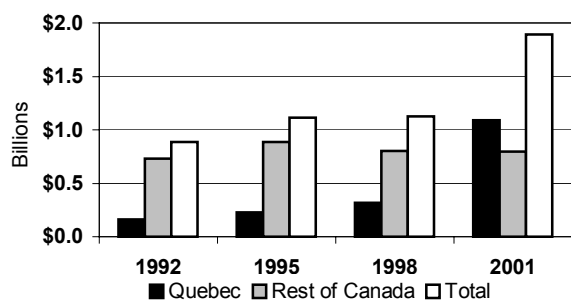
**Kindergarten**

- Kindergarten programs are publicly financed as universal programs by provinces/territories. In 2001, annual per pupil expenditures for part-day programs were in the range of \$2000-\$3000.
- While financial data about spending on kindergarten is not consistently available across Canada, available data suggests a very rough annual estimate of \$1.5 billion.

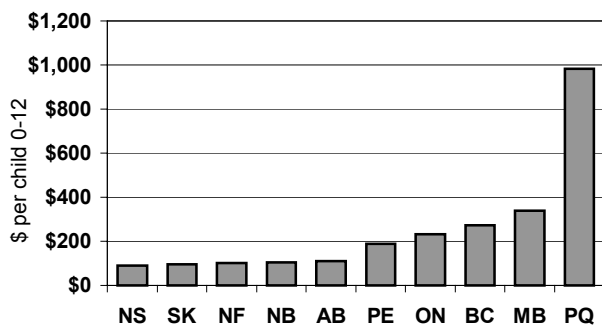
## Regulated child care

- In Canada, regulated child care is generally financed through a combination of parent fees, provincially funded fee subsidies for low income families and other provincial government funding. In 1998, a national study found that 49% of average centre revenue came from parent fees, 17.6% from fee subsidies and 30.5% from other provincial government funding; there was considerable variation among provinces regarding the relative weights of these.
- In 2001, provincial/territorial expenditures on regulated child care totaled \$1,889,860,170.
- Of this total, 58% was spent by Quebec.
- While Quebec's spending on regulated child care increased dramatically over the past decade, total spending in the rest of Canada dropped about \$70,000,000 (in constant dollars).
- There was considerable variation in provincial/territorial approaches to spending for child care over the decade with several provinces increasing spending considerably, and two reducing their spending (Ontario and Alberta).
- From the perspective of per (child) capita spending, the jurisdictions range from a low of \$91 (Nova Scotia) to \$980 (Quebec) in 2001.

Public spending on regulated child care in Canada 1992-2001  
(constant 2001 \$)



Public spending on regulated child care by each child 0-12  
by province 2001



## Further readings (selected)

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