

THE PANDEMIC EXPERIENCE HAS CREATED AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE FOR CANADIAN CHILD CARE SERVICES

Highlights of a national survey

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For the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Canadian Child Care Federation and Child Care Now
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A survey of regulated centres and family child care homes was distributed online across Canada in English and French in April-May 2020. The survey, completed by the person most responsible for the centre(s) or home, was designed to learn about the effects¹ of the COVID-19 pandemic on early learning and child care provision, finances, and concerns for the future. This report provides highlights of preliminary results; a separate report will provide data for a more detailed picture. Valid surveys representing 8,300 facilities — 5,729 centres and 2,571 family child care homes — were provided by 6,564 respondents.

The COVID 19 pandemic has cast early learning and child care (ELCC) in a new light for many Canadians—as an essential service necessary for rebuilding a well-functioning economy. However, the Canadian child care sector suffered from a confusing, uneven and often less-than-adequate approach by governments to supporting services and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The preliminary results of a national survey show significant differences between how jurisdictions responded to the health crisis with respect to ELCC policy, staff, provision funding and parent fees. While the pandemic brought similar challenges to child care services and parents in different regions, the survey showed that how they fared depended on their location in Canada.

What was open, what was closed?

72% of child care centres closed in Canada as a whole.²

Centres were mostly or entirely closed in eight provinces/territories.

Percent of centres closed ranged from 33% (SK) to 100% (NS, NU).

Only 39% of regulated family child care homes were closed in Canada as a whole.

Regulated family child care homes were mostly closed in four provinces.

Percent of homes closed ranged from 15% (AB) to 98%-99% (NL, NS) closed.

1 The survey focused on service provision, financing and future viability, not on aspects of service provision associated with quality, health and safety considerations, which are also important.

2. During the reference week of April 27 to May 1, 2020.

Will child care services re-open?

Most currently-closed centres said they would definitely re-open but a substantial minority expressed uncertainty.

64% will definitely re-open

36% were less certain, including:

1% Definitely remain closed

2% Probably remain closed

23% Probably re-open

10% Not sure

As with centres, most currently-closed family child care home providers said they would definitely re-open but 38% were uncertain about re-opening.

62% said they will “definitely re-open”

38% were more uncertain including;

2% Definitely remain closed

3.5% Probably remain closed

20% Probably re-open

12.5% Not sure

For whom was childcare available? What fees did parents pay?

Child care restricted to children of essential workers was more common in centres than in family child care homes, with considerable variation by jurisdiction.

74% of centres cared only for essential worker's children. The range was from 35% of centres in SK to 100% of centres in PE, YT.

24% of family child care homes cared only for essential workers' children. The range was from 12% of homes in ON and AB to 100% of homes in NB.

Parents who were essential workers paid full fees in almost half the centres. Whether essential worker parents paid fees in centres depended mostly on where they lived.

- 34% Percent of centres in which essential worker parents paid no fees
- 8% Percent of centres in which essential workers paid reduced fees.
- 49% Percent of centres in which essential worker parents paid full fees
- 9% Other

How are staff faring?

71% of centres Canada-wide laid off staff. The pattern of layoffs depended on jurisdiction.

- 16% Less than half front line staff
- 10% More than half front line staff
- 21% All front line staff except director
- 24% All staff including director laid off
- 29% No staff were laid off

56% of centres in AB and 41% of centres in New Brunswick reported that all staff were laid off, while in NL, PE and NS, more than 75% of centres had laid off no staff.

“ [My staff] can not live on reduced hours being paid at 75% in an already underpaid and under-appreciated ESSENTIAL industry. ”

— Quebec

“ We need to continue to advocate for a universal child-care system. Although parents are not required to pay during the pandemic, once they return, many will be financially burdened having not worked, and to once again pay enormous child-care fees. ”

— Manitoba

“ Recruitment and retention of staff is always an issue — COVID just compounds it. ”

— British Columbia

Over 90% of laid-off centre staff were reported as having applied for a federal benefit programme.

- 87% of centres - Staff applied for the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)
- 64% of centres - Staff applied for Employment Insurance (EI)
- 3% of centres - Staff applied for Top-Up for Low Income Workers.

Only 37% of family child care providers said they had applied for a federal benefit programme.

- 63% Did not apply for any federal benefit programme
- 36% Applied for CERB
- 7% Applied for EI
- 2% Applied for Top-Up for Low Income Workers.

What is the financial situation of service providers?

More than two-thirds, 68%, of centres reported their financial situation was worse than before COVID 19.

- 8% Not sure
- 3% Much better³
- 3% Somewhat better
- 19% About the same
- 29% Somewhat worse
- 38% Much worse

“ We had difficulty figuring out what support, if any, was available for us as a Licensed Home Daycare. It felt like we fell between the cracks for programs and assistance being offered. ”

— Manitoba

A majority of centres, 54%, were receiving less government funding than before COVID-19. Funding depended on where they were located.

- 27% Received all their normal funding
- 41% A portion of normal funding
- 13% None of their normal funding
- 11% More than normal funding⁴
- 8% Other

In AB, 57% of centres were getting none of their normal funding.

In seven jurisdictions (NL, PE, NS, NB, QC, SK, YT), at least 50% of centres were receiving all of their normal funding or more.

“ It took us ten years to build up a reserve that will be wiped out in three months. ”

— Ontario

42% of regulated family child care providers were receiving less government funding than before COVID-19.

- 37% Received all their normal funding
- 29% Received a portion of normal funding
- 13% None of their normal funding
- 9% Received more than their normal funding
- 13% Other

A minority of centres were accessing each federal benefit programme at the time of the survey.

Several federal benefit programmes were aimed at employers, small businesses and community organizations.

- 36% Of centres had received or applied for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy.
- 25% Had received or applied for Canada Emergency Business Account funds.
- 3% Had received or applied for Canada Emergency Fund for Rent Assistance funds.
- 1% Had received or applied for the Emergency Fund for Community Support.

“ It is difficult enough to make it through, then add all the regulations of COVID with zero guidance from anyone, that leaves us high, dry and broke. ”

— Saskatchewan

While 4% of centres said federal benefits and provincial/territorial funding together met their needs completely, 8% said this didn't meet their needs at all.

- 8% Not at all
- 14% A little
- 34% Somewhat
- 21% Mostly
- 4% Completely
- 19% Don't know

The provinces with the highest proportion of centres reporting that their needs were “completely” or “mostly” met by these government funds were PEI (47%), BC (36%), MB (35%) and NB (34%).

³ Some previously unfunded centres in several provinces were funded during the pandemic.

⁴ Some provinces covered parent fees as well as normal centre funding, or provided additional funding for cleaning or equipment.

Concerns for the future

93% of centres had multiple concerns about re-opening; only 2% had no concerns. The most common concerns across Canada were coping with COVID-19 health and safety costs, the cost of lower enrolment, and staffing difficulties.

- 88% COVID-19 health- and safety-related costs
- 85% Lower enrolment
- 65% Staffing difficulties
- 59% Re-opening costs
- 40% Lack of reserve funds
- 33% Return to pre-COVID funding
- 2% Centre unlikely to re-open
- 2% None of the above

Family child care providers had similar concerns about re-opening. Their main concerns were also health and safety and lower enrolment costs.

- 74% Lower enrolment
- 68% COVID-19 health- and safety-related costs
- 32% Cost of re-opening
- 23% Return to pre-COVID funding
- 10% Unlikely to re-open
- 8% None of the above

Most centres continued to be concerned about operating in the longer-term – six months after re-opening.

- 82% COVID-19 health- and safety-related costs
- 73% Lower enrolment
- 62% Staffing difficulties
- 41% Lack of reserve funds
- 36% Return to inadequate pre-COVID 19 funding
- 2% Centre unlikely to re-open
- 4% None of the above

“ The lack of clear information has been overwhelming and exhausting leaving many providers feeling very discouraged and frustrated. I think many will leave the field all together. ”

— Saskatchewan

A majority of family child care providers also continued to have substantial concerns about the longer term.

- 65% COVID-19 health- and safety-related costs
- 67% Lower enrolment
- 27% Return to inadequate pre-COVID 19 funding
- 10% Unlikely to re-open
- 10% None of the above

“ We have been a valuable presence in these rural communities for 46 years, the only licensed child care organization, but I fear for the future. ”

— Ontario

acknowledgements

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