

Child Care as a National Priority

2017 pre-budget consultation brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance on behalf of the Women's Centre of Calgary, The First 2000 Days Network and Vibrant Communities Calgary.

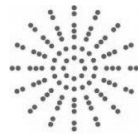
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INTRODUCTION

This consultation recommendation is sent on behalf of the Women's Centre of Calgary, the First 2000 Days Network, and Vibrant Communities Calgary. Together, we are the conveners of a Calgary Early Learning and Child Care Roadmap Strategy made up of several dozen stakeholders from across the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) sector. The goal of this process is to identify barriers to child care, and outline recommendations toward creating an accessible, affordable, quality child care system within a municipal scope by late 2016.

Throughout Alberta, there is a severe shortage of affordable, accessible, quality child care spaces. The numbers are startling; the average cost of full-time child care in Calgary is \$1,100 per month per child, with costs rising much higher for infants or for children with special needs. Child care costs can often exceed housing costs for Calgary families. There are only enough licenced spaces for 1 in 5 children age 0-5 years old.¹ Wait lists are too long, driving families to often take any space they can find. This demand has led to rising costs, increasing numbers of unregulated, unlicensed day homes, and a growing scarcity of developmentally-appropriate child care facilities with well-trained, well-paid staff. This phenomenon is especially relevant for the Women's Centre, as women have consistently identified lack of accessible, affordable, quality childcare as a priority.

While we are three municipal organizations, the Roadmap recognizes that provincial and federal systems changes are necessary to improve access to services in communities of all sizes. Today, ELCC falls under the jurisdiction of both the federal and provincial governments, with the provinces maintaining primary responsibility for the funding and delivery of services. In Alberta, the Ministry of Human Services is responsible for child care and the Ministry of Education is responsible for Early Childhood Services including kindergarten.

Under this model, municipalities in Alberta have seen a decrease in power over the last few decades and have been forced to pull funding for municipal programming that once provided parents with access to affordable, quality ELCC.²

¹ Ferns, C. and Friendly, M. (2014). The state of early childhood education and care in Canada 2012. Moving Childcare Forward Project. <http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/StateofECEC2012.pdf>

² Municipal Child Care in Alberta, Muttart Foundation, Nov. 2011

Q1. What federal measures would help Canadians generally - and such specific groups as the unemployed, Indigenous peoples, those with a disability and seniors – maximize, in the manner of their choosing, their contributions to the country’s economic growth?

The federal role in a child care initiative would primarily be focused on developing a national framework for universal, affordable, inclusive, high-quality child care systems across Canada (together with provinces, territories and the Indigenous community); and providing stable, sustained federal funding to ensure affordable, high-quality services and a much-needed expansion of child care programs so that child care can be accessible to every family.

A national child care funding framework would support Canadians, and women especially, in maximising their contributions to economic growth by:

- Allowing more women the opportunity to enter the workforce. In Quebec, an additional 70,000 women with young children entered the workforce in the 10 years since the introduction of a universal, affordable child care program.³
- Creating jobs in the Early Learning and Child Care sector. A national framework and adequate funding must address poor wages and working conditions for child care providers, the majority of whom are women. As of 2012, the median gross hourly wage for program staff in child care centres in Alberta was \$15.33 – far below a living wage in Calgary. The national figure was \$16.50.⁴
- Supporting lone-parent families. In Alberta, lone-parent families with one child have an income that is on average \$12,949 below the Low Income Cut Off levels.⁵ In 4 out of 5 cases, lone-parent families are led by women.

“I have a neighbour with three kids—she has been in Canada for years but couldn’t go to English classes because she didn’t have anyone to look after her children. Her husband lost his job and she was finally able to go to class because he could take care of the kids, but now they don’t have the income.”

- Women’s Centre Child Care interview participant, 2015

³ Fortin, P, Godbout L, and St-Cerny Suzie. (2012) Impact of Quebec’s Universal Low Fee Childcare Program on Female Labour Force Participation, Domestic Income and Government Budgets. University of Sherbrooke.

⁴ Ferns, C. and Friendly, M. (2014). The state of early childhood education and care in Canada 2012. Moving Childcare Forward Project

⁵ The Path Forward, PIA, 2016.

Q3. What federal measures would ensure that urban, rural and remote communities throughout Canada enable residents to make their desired contribution to the country's economic growth and businesses to expand, prosper and serve domestic and international customers in order to contribute to growth?

Investment in a national child care system would enable residents to contribute to economic growth via job creation; supporting women's greater participation in the workforce; and providing quality early learning for all of Canada's children, which would lead to more opportunities later in life.

- In Calgary, women can expect to spend 26% of their income on child care costs.⁶
- Child care is found to be the biggest job creator: investing \$1 million in child care would create almost 40 jobs.⁷
- Workforce shortages of child care workers: in meetings with dozens of ELCC stakeholders, child care centre staff have identified low compensation levels as a source of high turnover. Child care workers with the most education in early child development often leave to work in education.

"All of my experiences with child care have been so stressful and connected to other stresses in my life—the ability to pay bills, and to know that I can't be late on child care because I will lose that spot, and if I lose that spot I will lose my job."

- Women's Centre Child Care interview participant, 2015

⁶ Macdonald & Friendly, Nov. 2014, p22, Table 5.

⁷ Robert Fairholm, Child Care Human Resource Sector Council (http://www.ccsc-cssge.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/Projects-Pubs-Docs/2.8-WFS_LitSocioMain_Eng.pdf)

Through volunteer-led research and a series of interviews with women in our community, the Women’s Centre compiled a list of recommendations to create the conditions for an environment that welcomes and promotes affordable, quality child care.

- 1. Support a transition to a provincial ELCC program.** Provide sufficient funding for provinces to create a more systematic approach to the organization and delivery of ELCC.
- 2. Increase support and funding for municipal ELCC centres.** Cost sharing initiatives between federal, provincial and municipal governments have historically resulted in an increase in quality spaces provided by both urban and rural communities.
- 3. Support municipalities in taking a larger stake in the creation of child care spaces.** In Alberta, the Big City Charters framework examines tools for Edmonton and Calgary to have greater authority. This could potentially provide Calgary with the ability to require developers of new neighbourhoods to create child care spaces, or address other identified barriers that limit the number of spaces. The draft charter regulations will be available in Spring 2017.
- 4. Encourage child care that addresses the diverse needs of Albertans.** Programs and funding for First Nations and immigrant families are needed to address their exceptional needs and challenges in accessing quality child care. More funding for spaces for children with disabilities are required to ensure that they have a right to quality education and care.

We know that the current market-based approach does not work. Beyond a clear-cut case for universal, affordable child care as a boost to economic growth, Canada has a legal obligation as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to provide children with the right to a supportive education and equal opportunities later in life.

Canada also has a legal obligation to women through the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Women are disproportionately responsible for child care, and one of the key barriers that mothers face in getting themselves and their children out of poverty is the lack of access to affordable, quality early learning and child care. To fulfill their obligations to women and children, the Canadian government must prioritize quality ELCC programs.

“I am forced to stay at home because I don’t have child care.”

- Women’s Centre Child Care interview participant, 2015