



CFUW has been advocating for universal, accessible, affordable, publicly-funded child care since 1972. Our clubs have worked tirelessly to rally the voices of children and families around the need for high quality, affordable child care. CFUW is calling for a national program, in cooperation with all levels of government, to provide nationally regulated and affordable early-learning and child care.

Recommendations:

- **Follow through on the Government promise towards** the creation of a quality, affordable, universally accessible and comprehensive early learning and childcare program
 - emphasizing the development of the whole child that includes a variety of services to meet the needs and preferences of families;
 - that involves all levels of government through cost-sharing mechanisms, as in other human services such as health, education and social programs;
 - that recognizes the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity and of family types and needs.
- **Public Funding:** providing adequate, dedicated and sustained child care transfers directly to provinces and territories;
- **Public Planning:** requiring provincial and territorial childcare plans, with timelines and targets to reduce parent fees, to raise staff wages and to provide adequate resources to meet the needs of the community; policy based on evidence and best practices.

Success Story: Quebec

Quebec's universal child care program has proven to be an economic stimulus that supports the workforce participation of mothers, especially single mothers, which in turn increases their incomes and Canada's GDP. Twenty years after Quebec's childcare program was introduced in 1996, **70,000 more mothers had entered the workforce**, adding **\$5.1 billion** to Quebec's gross provincial income. During the same period, the number of female lone parents on social assistance decreased from **99,000 to 45,000**. Their real, after-tax median income also increased by 81 per cent.

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Child Care in Canada: Where We Are Now

According to the Canadian Council on Social Development, childcare is the largest component of the cost of raising a child.ⁱ As of October 2016, the OECD has ranked child care costs in Canada among the highest in the world.ⁱⁱ

Canada has the lowest child care access rates in the industrialized world - with regulated spaces for fewer than 20% of childrenⁱⁱⁱ and exceptionally high fees. It is particularly difficult for single parents to find affordable care.^{iv} Quality is constantly undermined by low wages and poor retention rates for early childhood educators.^v

What the World is Saying

- In 2006 OECD ranked Canada last out of 14 countries in terms of public investment in early childhood education and care services, and last out of 20 countries in terms of access.^{vi}
- UNICEF ranked Canada last out of 25 developed countries in terms of meeting suggested standards of early learning and care, along with other family policy benchmarks related to parental leave, child poverty and universal access to essential health services.^{vii}
- In November 2016, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women called on the Canadian government to fix the problem of inadequate and unaffordable child care, as it is stopped women from accessing education and full-time employment.^{viii}

In 2006 the bilateral agreements with provinces and territories were cancelled, cutting almost \$1.2 billion in federal transfers.^{ix} The current Child Care Benefit Program does not provide the support families need.

Sweden's Child Care System

In Sweden, the national government worked with municipalities to deliver high quality, affordable childcare. They rewarded municipalities with extra funding if they set maximums on how much parents would pay.

Fees are charged on a sliding scale based on income, and the average maximum charged is about \$300/month.

Wait lists do exist, but municipalities are required by law to find space within three months.

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Recommendations:

Public Funding: providing adequate, dedicated and sustained child care transfers directly to provinces and territories;

Public Planning: requiring provincial and territorial childcare plans, with timelines and targets to reduce parent fees, raise staff wages and add public or community-owned spaces;

Public Reporting: to ensure accountability for the provision of childcare services that support children, families and women in all of their roles.

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The Benefits of National Early Learning and Child Care

There is compelling evidence that investing in childcare services offers among the broadest benefits of any policy strategy a nation can adopt. Economic studies repeatedly show the multi-generational benefits of focused, accountable investments in early learning and child care outweigh the costs by at least two to one.^x Further, access to quality early learning and child care promotes health, advances women's equality, reduces crime, addresses child and family poverty, and deepens community social inclusion.^{xi}

Much of Europe has a well-established system of early learning and childcare and benefit from lower rates of school dropouts, decreased child poverty levels and enhanced maternal well-being.^{xii} Canada stands as one of the few economically advanced countries that has yet to produce a child care strategy.^{xiii} High quality childcare can only exist in the presence of a strong public policy framework.^{xiv}

Several childcare experts in Canada recommend a schedule for federal funding to reach 1% of the GDP by 2020 (\$10 billion annually), as recommended by the European Commission Network for Child Care and UNICEF.^{xv} This is about 1/6 of the public education budget – a modest share of public resources for an age group that accounts for one third of the child population.^{xvi}

Quebec's experience confirms the findings of cross-country studies conducted by the OECD and others: subsidized childcare boosts women's participation in the work force.^{xvii} Investing in childcare is one of the biggest returns on investment that a government can receive. The Canadian government committed to improving Canadians access to early learning and child care. The opportunity is here for a meaningful investment in Canadian women, children and families. It's time for a national early learning and child care system.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Dallaire, Jody and Anderson, Lynell, (April 2009).
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