



Since 1972 CFUW has pursued policies to increase funding for childcare and early learning. In recent years, B.C. Council, Toronto Caucus and CFUW Guelph have been taking action on this issue in big ways. The initial concern for many begins with women in poverty. After some investigation, it became clear that women are often impoverished because they cannot access childcare, and thus must cut back on working hours to care for their children. In today's world, parents need access to affordable, high-quality childcare. Affordable childcare creates jobs, allows parents, and particularly women, to participate more fully in the workforce, alleviates poverty and shrinks the wage gap. Our Toronto caucus have partnered with the Atkinson Centre to sign their open letter calling for a Childcare and Early Childhood Education (ECE) strategy. CFUW Guelph hosted a community forum on a National Childcare program, with guest speakers Martha Friendly, Zeenat Janmohamed of the Atkinson Centre and Lorna Reid of the University of Guelph Childcare and Learning Centre. B.C. Council initiated a province-wide collection of stories reflecting the reality Canadians face with access (or lack thereof) to childcare. This project was so effective that CFUW is replicating it across the country. High quality, affordable childcare and ECE are necessities for Canadian families. CFUW is calling for a national strategy, in cooperation with all levels of government, to provide nationally regulated and subsidized childcare.

We have several policies on childcare that have been developed since the 1970s, and that remain incredibly relevant as Canada continues to provide insufficient support for childcare.

- **Increase financial support** for quality daycare, private home daycare, lunch and after-school programs, and licensed day care centres.
- **Commission a comprehensive study** by trained personnel of sound child care services. Take steps to enter into agreement with the provinces leading to the adoption of a national day care act.
- **Create standards** for safe and healthy childcare centres, parental participation in decision-making, approved child/staff ratios.
- **Facilitate the provision** of an adequate supply of affordable, accessible childcare facilities that fulfil the purposes of providing safe, healthy, physical, social, emotion and intellectual development.
- **Give priority** to the creation of a quality, universally accessible and comprehensive early learning and childcare program that emphasizes the development of the whole child. Involve all levels of government through cost-sharing mechanisms, as in other human services such as health, education and social programs.

### 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.

331 Cooper Street, Suite 502  
Ottawa, ON, K2P 0G5  
Tel: 1-888-220-9606  
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## Background:

According to the Canadian Council on Social Development, childcare is already the largest component of the cost of raising a child.<sup>i</sup> Many young families are paying more for childcare than for their children to attend university.<sup>ii</sup>

**Canada has the lowest child care access rates in the industrialized world**, with regulated spaces for fewer than 20% of children<sup>iii</sup>. Fees are among the highest anywhere, often exceeding the annual cost of university. Canada's child-care costs are among the highest in the OECD countries, making it particularly difficult for single to find affordable care.<sup>iv</sup> Quality is constantly undermined by low wages and poor retention rates for early childhood educators.<sup>v</sup>

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.<sup>vi</sup> 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.<sup>vii</sup>

In 2006 the bilateral agreements with provinces and territories were cancelled, cutting almost \$1.2 billion in federal transfers.<sup>viii</sup> The Universal Taxable Family Allowance that was put in its' place does not build or sustain childcare services.

The number of children 0-5 years is on the increase, with the age group 0-4 growing at the highest rate in 50 years.<sup>ix</sup> The number of women entering the workforce is also on the rise, growing by 9% between 1995 and 2012.<sup>x</sup> At the same time, the supply of regulated childcare centre spaces for 0-5 year olds grew only 0.7% - with Quebec contributing disproportionately to Canada-wide public spending allocations in comparison with other provinces.<sup>xi</sup>

## 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 a National Child Care Strategy

There is compelling evidence that investing in childcare services offers among the broadest benefits of any policy strategy a nation can adopt. Economic studies have repeatedly shown that the multi-generational benefits of focused, accountable investments in childcare outweigh the costs by at least two to one.<sup>xii</sup> Further, access to quality childcare and Early Childhood Education services promotes health, advances women's equality, reduces crime, addresses child and family poverty, and deepens community social inclusion.<sup>xiii</sup>

Most of Europe has a well-established system of early learning and childcare and is reaping the benefits in lower rates of school dropouts, decreased child poverty levels and enhanced maternal well-being.<sup>xiv</sup> Canada stands as one of the few economically advanced countries that have yet to produce a child care strategy.<sup>xv</sup> High quality childcare can only exist in the presence of a strong public policy framework.<sup>xvi</sup>

Several childcare experts in Canada recommend a schedule for federal funding to reach 1% of the GFDP by 2020 (\$10 billion annually), as recommended by the European Commission Network for Child Care and UNICEF.<sup>xvii</sup> 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.<sup>xviii</sup> They also support enhancing maternity/paternal benefits to support parents to balance work and family responsibilities.

Quebec's experience also confirms the findings of cross-country studies conducted by the OECD and others, which have found that subsidized childcare helps boost women's participation in the work force.<sup>xix</sup> Investing in childcare is one of the biggest returns on investment that a government can receive. Pierre Fortin showed in his research that for every \$100 invested into it, Quebec's \$7-a-day child care program returned \$104 to the Quebec government, and \$43 to Ottawa – more than paying for the program.<sup>xx</sup>

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