

# RESEARCH REVIEW

## THE STATE OF CHILDCARE SERVICES IN CANADA: TOWARDS AFFORDABILITY

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Recently, the federal government announced a plan to provide \$10-a-day childcare. They hope to achieve this by 2026 and to decrease fees by the end of 2022. This is a monumental decision for Canadian families and all provinces and territories have signed agreements committing to this objective. While this decision is most welcome, the real life application requires thoughtful consideration given the current varied shortages in the area of childhood education. Canada presents a particular challenge due to the division between federal and provincial responsibilities and mixed practices across provinces and territories. High cost jurisdictions (like Alberta) would require a higher allocation of funds in order to provide the same quality of services as low-cost jurisdictions.

In his paper covering the history of childcare in Canada, the economist Gordon Cleveland explores the issues associated with such a decision. His field of research has long been centered on child care in Canada, and as such, he has observed significant changes over the years due to a number of factors, such as the increased number of children requiring childcare spaces, the decreased availability of these spaces, the lack of public funding, as well as benefits packages.

The overall aim of the federal government is to have childcare services delivered as a community-based system much like education and health. The country has made great strides in the provision and delivery of childcare services since 1986. For example, we have more spaces available for childcare services, which have led to families relying on centre provided care as opposed to relying on family members or neighbours. This change correlates with an increase in mothers with non-adult children joining the workforce. In addition, maternal and parental benefits are available in all provinces and territories to various degrees, which is of significant financial help for families.

There are shortcomings that explain the federal government's decision to review the current system. Childcare service fees have risen dramatically in all provinces except Quebec and Manitoba. The wages of educators are not adequate, and staffing is an issue as evidenced with poor staff to child ratios. Outside of Quebec, parental and maternal benefits leave much to be desired in terms of money and coverage.

The province of Quebec is the only province to have a model of low cost, comprehensive childcare services package. They have the most generous maternal and parental benefits as well as less than \$10- a day for childcare. It has been in place since 1977 and is highly regarded among Quebec families but it is not without its faults. There are concerns related to inadequate resources to supply quality services and a worry that lower income families are less likely to have access to the best quality services. Quebec also had the worst staff to child ratio among all provinces for children under 3 years old in 2019.

The author of the report identifies four main recommendations: increase public childcare facilities and focus on not-for-profit, provide competitive wages for early childhood educators, review the current state of maternity and parental benefits and minimize gaps, and finally governments should be ready to commit to additional funding when necessary.

There is no doubt that there is more support available to families now than in 1986. This has allowed families to have more options for childcare services outside of their familial networks. The recommendations provided target the current gaps in providing adequate childcare services. It is worthwhile to examine if childcare services will be equal

in all provinces. The different demographics, the cost of living as well as government priorities will shape the application of these recommendations in each province and territory. As well, provinces will need to engage in models that are flexible enough to suit a wide range of families. The needs of adoptive parents may be different from those of birth parents. Governments should also aim to support low-income families as much as possible as they are likely to remain marginalized from this system.

*Faiza Yallou currently lives in Edmonton and is interested in highlighting local projects aimed towards optimizing social determinants of health. Faiza is thrilled to be a part of the Edmonton social planning council and to raise awareness about the social issues in our community.*

## REFERENCES

Cleveland, Gordon. 2022. Early Learning and Child Care in Canada: Where have we come from, where are we going? IRPP Insight No. 44. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

