

Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century Position Statement



Early Childhood Education and Care

DECEMBER 2016



The Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century (CCPH21) a national network of 24 non-profit organizations, professional associations, health charities and research organizations that share the common goal to improve and sustain the health of Canadians. Formed in May 2003, it now includes 24 member organizations.

Mandate

- CCPH21 advocates for public policy to ensure that adequate public health functions are in place and information is made available to protect and promote health, and prevent disease and injury.
- CCPH21 aims to help all stakeholders work together for the future of public health by generating ideas and potential policy directions for discussion among both the public and decision-makers.

Principles

- Public health is a pan-Canadian responsibility requiring national leadership with a co-operative approach across sectors and jurisdictions.
- The public health system focuses on population health and complements the health care system.
- Communicable and non-communicable disease and injury are effectively addressed by public health approaches and must be considered together for a healthy population.
- Public health activities can reduce pressures on the health care system.
- Funding to public health is an essential and strategic investment for Canadians and the economy.
- Canada requires immediate and sustained action and investment in Public Health in order to protect, promote, and preserve the health of all people living in Canada.

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Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century Position Statement

Early Childhood Education and Care for Canada

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) plays an important part in healthy childhood development and provides valuable support to families with young children. Canada, however, does not have a pan-Canadian approach to ECEC.

The Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century (CCPH21) calls on the Federal government to work with provinces and territories to **establish a pan-Canadian early childhood education and care strategy** that provides a common vision including:

- Consensus that ECEC services should focus on the delivery of **stimulating learning and physical environments** that support child development and are consistent across Canada, while providing particular attention to the needs of children from vulnerable groups;
- **Universal access** to ECEC services, with fees that are **affordable** for all requiring the service, and **proportionate to their ability to pay**.
- **Targeted federal funding** that would be directed to support program development, provider education, delivery and performance evaluation in place of the current system of federal tax credits to individual Canadians; and
- Increased provincial and territorial **oversight and regulation** of all ECEC providers.

Context

The Government of Canada has committed to developing a “national early learning and childcare framework” that enshrines the concept of affordable, high-quality, fully-inclusive ECEC. They have also proposed modifying the existing tax code to provide for a renewed “Canada child benefit”.

High-quality early childhood education and care programs provide stimulating learning and physical environments that foster healthy childhood development, and provide particular attention to the needs of children in vulnerable groups. High-quality programs also place a priority on education and development as well as the provision of care. Staff in ECEC facilities are trained and adequately compensated, there are acceptable child-to-staff ratios and they are supportive of parent’s needs. The benefits to the child include:

- An increased capacity to learn, and social and learning experiences that supplement the child’s home environment,
- Reduced social inequalities and gaps in school readiness for children from different social and economic backgrounds, and
- A more favourable start to primary school with positive effects that can persist over the subsequent school years.

The availability of quality ECEC also allows parents to be employed and/or maintain a better family/work balance. This is especially important for low- and middle-income and single parent families.

In Canada childcare services are a responsibility of provinces and territories, and there is currently no pan-Canadian strategy on which to develop consistent quality and availability standards. This situation has resulted in a patchwork of services and programs across jurisdictions and two different funding models for ECEC. The Quebec system provides fixed fee services for all children five years of age and younger regardless of family income, with fees that are affordable and proportionate to family income. The province also invests directly in the development of these spaces. The remainder of Canada relies on tax credits to defray ECEC and other child-related expenses. This approach puts the onus on the family to pay for ECEC services prior to recouping the costs as an income tax deduction, and can be a significant financial burden. These differences result in inconsistent pricing, availability and quality of service across Canada that in turn affects a child’s access to opportunities and limits their healthy development.

Exacerbating this situation is the growing demand for childcare in Canada. The number of children aged 0 to 5 has increased by about 6% between 2009 and 2012 (about 2% per year) and the 0 to 4 age group had grown by 11% between 2006 and 2012, while the availability of regulated spaces has increased by only 0.7%. This situation is coupled with the rising number of women in the Canadian workforce who are of child-bearing age and may wish to return to work after having a child. It is further complicated by the growing number of single-parent families in Canada, elevated rates of child poverty, and the high cost of childcare.

Summary of Evidence

Purpose

To provide evidence-based information to corroborate the recommendations presented in the policy statement concerning early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Introduction

In 1989, the United Nations adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* which Canada ratified in 1991.^{1,2} The Convention recognizes that children are entitled to basic human rights that permit them to survive, develop and thrive, and that governments have a responsibility to provide and protect these rights. It includes the right to a standard of living that is adequate to ensure the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. The Convention also recognizes that parents are a child's first educators and play a crucial role in providing for their children's care, nurturance and development. Governments, however, have a responsibility to assist parents in performing these duties by providing programs and services that complement the parents' role. This responsibility should include the provision of adequate childcare of a quality that supports the child's development.

In Canada, the responsibility for childcare services falls mainly within the ambit of the provinces and territories (PTs). There is currently no unifying pan-Canadian framework, resulting in a patchwork of childcare services and programs across jurisdictions.³⁻⁵ As such, Canadian children are not being treated equally across PTs, which is negatively affecting their access to opportunities that encourage healthy development.⁵ This situation is exacerbated by a lack of trained early childhood educators, and an inadequate supply of programs to meet childcare needs.⁶

Current Status

In late-2015, the Government of Canada committed, through the mandate letters to the Ministers of Families, Children and Social Development and Indigenous and Northern Affairs, to developing a "National Early Learning and Childcare Framework" that enshrines the concept of available, affordable, high-quality, fully inclusive childcare. It has also proposed, through the mandate letter to the Minister of Finance, modifying the current childcare benefit in the Canadian tax code by enacting a renewed Canada Child Benefit.⁷ The CCPH21 2015 federal election platforms focused on the need for universal early childhood education and care.

Defining Quality Childcare*

The term "daycare" is commonly used to describe non-parental care that occurs outside of the child's home.³ Historically, however, daycare has rarely focused on the education and development of the child.⁵ Quality childcare programs, also referred to as "Early Childhood Education and Care" (ECEC), therefore emerged to provide stimulating learning and physical environments for children, with a focus on development, and to pay particular attention to the needs of children from vulnerable groups.^{5,8,9} Education, with a curriculum appropriate to the broad areas of child development, is a priority and learning opportunities are combined with the provision of care.¹⁰ In addition, ECEC facilities employ educators that are trained and adequately compensated, have acceptable child-to-staff ratios, and are supportive of parents' needs. They foster the development of positive relationships between staff and children, staff and parents, and among staff. Such programs also support socialization, language development, cognitive and physical development, and provide a successful transition to primary school.¹⁰⁻¹² These positive effects persist over the subsequent school years and are seen in higher rates of cognitive development (measured by academic achievement tests) and years of school attended.¹² As such, ECEC can set the stage for life-long learning. Offering children a wide-range of quality experiences in the early years can help them become their best physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually and, as such, is a determinant of health.¹³

All children and families can benefit from ECEC regardless of their social or economic backgrounds. It is, however, most beneficial for children who are more vulnerable to adverse physical and mental health outcomes as a result of their social circumstances,^{10,12} including: those living in poverty, Aboriginal children, and children whose families have recently immigrated to Canada.¹⁴ A summary of the population health benefits of ECEC can be found in Appendix 1.

Affordable, quality childcare may also reduce poverty as it allows parents to be employed,^{10,12} while fostering improved

* The focus of this paper is the provision of ECEC for those under five years of age, although it is recognized that the parental leave provisions of the Employment Insurance program provides a parent the option to stay home with their child for a 12-month period, and that Ontario maintains an optional full-day kindergarten program for four and five year-olds. The paper also does not address before and after school care, which is another challenge for parents.

opportunities, particularly for women (who are still generally the primary care givers), as it increases their ability to stay in or enter the workforce.¹⁵ There is a positive economic effect for the family⁴ that ripples through the community and society.¹⁵ In addition, the establishment of childcare centres and programs also creates employment in the economic sector.¹⁵ Investing in disadvantaged children during the early years has been shown to produce a greater return on investment than investing in interventions, such as remediation programs, tuition subsidies, training programs, or policing, later in life.¹⁶

The Canadian Situation

In Canada, provincial and territorial governments (PTs) are responsible for childcare services within their jurisdictions, and establish licensing requirements, regulations and pricing for regulated* childcare providers based in homes or centres.¹⁷ PTs also provide for the existence of “unregulated” services to meet the demand for childcare. These services are often home-based, and may be governed by laws limiting the number of children permitted, but operate without oversight for health, safety, or staff training requirements.¹⁷ There are also limited regulations for private childcare providers within a family home, such as nannies or babysitters. Within this spectrum of childcare services,

* Regulated childcares must meet provincial and territorial requirements related to cost, health, safety, and nutrition, and providers are monitored for their compliance to these regulations.⁴

regulated facilities are viewed as providing safer environments with less likelihood of child maltreatment, and having a greater potential for enhanced child development than unregulated services.

The requirements for training and education of early childcare educators are low. Only five of the provinces and territories require 50% of the staff working in regulated childcare centres to have at least one year of early childhood education and training.⁴ In 2012, childcare workers earned 69% of the average Canadian wage.⁴ These low wages may contribute to recruitment and retention challenges.

Regulated Childcare Considerations

Nationally, regulated childcare accounts for 22.5% of full- or part-time centre-based childcare spaces for preschool children, but this availability varies among the provinces and territories with Prince Edward Island and Quebec having the highest rates (46.5 and 36.3% respectively) (Table 1).⁴ The number of childcare spaces has not grown substantially over the past few years, increasing by only 0.7% between 2010 and 2012 despite a population increase.⁴

Regulated childcare is delivered through either for-profit or not-for-profit service providers, with the majority of regulated childcare sites being administered as not-for-profit organizations. Regulated, for-profit childcare facilities accounted for 29.4% of all regulated spaces in 2012 in Canada⁴ (see Table 1 for distribution by province/territory).

TABLE 1
Annual and monthly parent fees for regulated childcare spaces in Canada, 2012⁴

| | Regulated childcare spaces^a (%) | For-profit spaces^b (%) | Monthly parent fees^c (\$) | Annual parent fees^d (\$) |
|---------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Canada | 22.5 | 29.4 | 674 | 8088 |
| British Columbia | 24.6 | 44 | 761 | 9132 |
| Alberta | 19.9 | 51 | 790 | 9480 |
| Saskatchewan | 11.5 | 0.1 | 535 | 6432 |
| Manitoba | 20.5 | 5 | 431 | 5172 |
| Ontario | 20.8 | 25 | 835 | 10020 |
| Quebec | 36.3 | 22 | 152 | 1824 |
| New Brunswick | 30.7 | 62 | 620 | 7440 |
| Prince Edward Island | 46.5 | 80 | 544 | 6528 |
| Nova Scotia | 23.9 | 53 | 685 | 8220 |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | 18.9 | 65 | 783 | 9396 |
| Northwest Territories | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Yukon | 28.6 | 64 | N/A | N/A |
| Nunavut | 20.8 | 0 | N/A | N/A |

a Percent of regulated centre-based childcare spaces for children 0-5 years
 b Percent of regulated centre-based childcare spaces that are for-profit
 c Median full-time monthly parent fees in full-day centres for preschoolers
 d Median full-time annual parent fees in full-day centres for preschoolers

This proportion has been changing with for-profit facilities accounting for 58% of newly regulated childcare spaces created between 2010 and 2012.⁴ This trend is worrisome for many, as for-profit service providers have generally been shown to be of lower quality and more costly than not-for-profit providers,¹⁸ while not-for-profit providers are more likely to employ trained staff, offer higher wages and have more satisfied staff with less staff turnover.^{3,18,19} This may be the result of not-for-profit providers being alleviated from the pressure to produce profit, allowing for greater focus on the provision of childhood education. Additionally, not-for-profit providers may reinvest money earned into staff wages or subsidization of services for parents.

It should be noted that even though regulated facilities are monitored within a jurisdiction they may not all provide the same level of service, as they are not required to follow similar programs.^{4, 20} The scope and programming of childcare varies greatly between jurisdictions, childcare programs, facilities, and providers.

Overall, regulated care in Canada has been described as mediocre.³ This may be changing as some provinces and territories have started to adopt curriculum frameworks for childcare centres; however, their use is only mandatory in three provinces.*²⁰ Several provinces and territories† have also started to integrate education and childcare by shifting the responsibility of childcare services from their Ministries of Social Services to their Ministries of Education.⁴

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspective

A requirement for early childhood education and care is especially evident among First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, where the results of colonialization and structural violence include dislocation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples from their land, culture, spirituality, languages, traditional economies and governance systems, and has resulted in erosion of family structures. In particular, enforcement of the reserve system and Indian Residential Schools resulted in, among other things, wide spread abuse of children. These effects have left many survivors unprepared to become parents themselves, resulting in dysfunctional family relationships, parental substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and negative foster care experiences.

* New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Manitoba

† Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut have now moved responsibility for childcare into their Ministries of Education.

Attempts are being made to redress this situation through a series of programs that address both on-reserve, urban and northern community requirements (the Head Start programs).^{21,22} These efforts have resulted in approximately 67% of First Nations communities having licensed early learning and care programs for children under the age of six; however, only 22% of First Nations children have access to these resources.²³ As a result of these challenges Canada's Prime Minister has instructed the Ministers of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, and Families, Children and Social Development to develop a "National Early Learning and Childcare Framework" as a first step to delivering affordable, high quality, flexible and fully inclusive childcare.²⁴

An International Perspective on the Canadian Situation

In September 2012, the *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* released a report reviewing how Canada was meeting its obligations under the Convention.⁶ It recognized that the basic needs of the majority of children were being met, but was concerned with the country's state of ECEC services and that the lack of a national approach was preventing children from reaching their full potential. The Committee recommended the adoption of a national "strategy" that outlines the priorities and targets for ECEC, and that Canada improve the quality of its programs and increase the availability of free or affordable childcare.⁶ It also recommended the establishment of minimum training requirements for childcare workers and improvements in their working conditions.⁶

A Growing Need

There is a growing demand for childcare in Canada as the number of infants, toddlers and preschool children has been increasing since 2007, and is growing at a rate that has not been seen in 50 years.⁴ This includes a 6% increase in 0 to 5 year olds between 2009 and 2012, and an 11% increase in the 0 to 4 age group from 2006 to 2012. In addition, over 77% of Canadian women 25 to 44 years of age are in the workforce,²⁵ thereby further increasing the demand for childcare. In 2012, 69.7% of mothers whose youngest child was 0 to 2 years of age were employed, as were 76.6% of mothers whose youngest child was 3 to 5 years of age.⁴ Similarly, the number of lone-parent families has been increasing with over 16% of families now headed by a lone parent,²⁶ who is more likely to require assistance with childcare. The majority of these families are headed by women.

These challenges are further influenced by poverty. In 2013, Canada was ranked 21st out of 29 Organisation for

Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) nations in terms of relative child poverty.²⁷ In 2012, 13.8% of Canadian adults and 16.3% of children were living in low-income* situations.²⁸ Female lone-parent families had the lowest median income of all economic family types; 44.5% of children aged 17 and under were living in female lone-parent households that were in low-income situations.²⁸

Paying for Childcare

Two approaches for funding childcare exist in Canada. The majority of the country invests predominantly through a demand-side funding approach that provides support to parents in the form of subsidies or tax credits.^{10,29} The exception is the Province of Quebec, which has focused on supply-side funding which involves direct support and investment into ECEC services, programs, and infrastructure.^{10,29} This difference has resulted in a cost and supply differential between Quebec and the rest of Canada, whereby Quebec is better positioned to meet the growing demand for childcare at a lower cost to parents. The situation in Quebec is described in a subsequent section while the remainder of this section focuses on the situation in the other Canadian provinces and territories.

Most parents must pay for childcare and the rates vary across the country (Table 1).⁴ In 2012, the monthly median cost for preschool children was \$674 (includes Quebec) with Ontarians paying the highest median amounts at \$835 per month.⁴ These rates also vary according to the age of the child; in Ontario, the median fee for infants was \$1,152 per month.⁴ The costs of regulated childcare may be subsidized for some low-income families, usually for parents who are employed, but subsidies do not necessarily cover the entire cost and most parents must contribute financially. This limits the low-income parents' ability to improve their economic situation and can be a barrier for middle-income families. For example, in 2012, the average after-tax median income of a two-parent family was \$84,600.²⁸ In Ontario, the province that has the highest rates for regulated childcare, the average annual childcare cost for a preschool child is over \$10,000,⁴ which represents 11.8% of the two-parent family's income. For female lone-parent families, with an average after-tax median income of \$39,100 per year,²⁸ the annual cost for preschool care for a single child would take one quarter of their disposable

income. As a result, regulated childcare is out of reach for many of these families, forcing them to find lower cost, often lower quality – often unregulated – childcare. The alternative is for a parent to stay home and care for the children, thereby preventing them from improving their economic status.

ECEC in Quebec

Quebec began to transform its ECEC services in 1997 with the cornerstone being a childcare network with fixed fee services for all children five years of age or younger, regardless of family income.³⁰ The province directly funds these spaces instead of offering cash payments or tax credits to families. Financial support has been provided to build not-for-profit, home-based facilities, and to fund training programs for childcare workers in postsecondary institutions, while increasing the wages of childcare workers.³¹ As of April 1, 2015, the cost was \$7.30 per child per day for households earning less than \$50,000 per year,³² and increases to \$20 per day for those earning over \$155,000. Childcare is affordable to the majority of families. When considered on an annual basis, the median amount a parent(s) in Quebec pays is \$8,200 less per year than paid in Ontario.⁴ Quebec now has regulated childcare spaces for 36.3% of 0-5 year olds.⁴ In 2012, 30.5% of all regulated childcare spaces in Canada were based in Quebec.⁴

The availability of regulated childcare spaces has increased the parents' ability to be employed or to pursue further education.³⁰ The percentage of mothers-of-pre-schoolers who are in the workforce is the highest in Canada (76.0% versus 71.8%).³⁰ In 2005, they worked more hours per week than other Canadian mothers-of-pre-schoolers which has contributed to the improvement of the socioeconomic condition of women and their families.³¹

The fixed fee approach to childcare services is viewed as having resulted in more consistent, higher quality ECEC services in Quebec and has been shown to have positive effects on the behaviour and cognitive development of children, especially those who are most developmentally vulnerable.³⁰ There have been concerns raised, however, that these effects have been small and that the childcare system in Quebec is not providing the quality care required to have positive influences on the development of children.³³

* A household is considered low-income if the household after-tax income is less than half of the median income of Canadian households.¹⁹

Funding of Childcare

The Government of Canada provides funding for ECEC through a variety of mechanisms.^{4,29,34}

Canada Social Transfer (CST) (approximately \$1.2 billion)³⁵ Through the CST, the federal government transfers approximately \$1.2 billion^{35,36} annually to the provinces and territories to support post-secondary education, social assistance and social services, including early childhood education and care.⁴ As this is block funding, no portion is earmarked to ECEC at the PT level. The federal government also provides benefits through maternity and parental leave that fall under the Employment Insurance program (except in Quebec),⁴ where EI benefits are provided for 12 months for working parents commencing just prior to their child's birth. A similar program exists in Quebec under the auspices of the provincial government.

Beyond this 12-month period, outside of Quebec, childcare support is provided through:

Child Care Expense Deduction (annual cost \$955 million)³⁴ Parents are able to claim a portion of ECEC through this income tax deduction. As of 2015, the limits for the deduction are \$8,000 for children under age 7 and \$5,000 for children 7 to 16 years of age.²⁹ As families must have receipts showing the ECEC expenses that were incurred, there is often a disadvantage for families who have to use unregulated and/or private ECEC providers that do not provide receipts. In addition, parents must assume the cost of the service before being able to apply for the credit. This approach places lower income families at a disadvantage as they may not initially have the funds available to purchase the service and may have to forego it.

Universal Child Care Benefit (annual cost \$3.1 billion)³⁴

This benefit provides families with a payment of \$1,920 per year for each child under the age of six.³⁷ In 2015, it was also extended to children aged 6 to 17 years with a maximum benefit of \$720 per year per child.³⁷ This benefit is not tied to the use or cost of ECEC and is a taxable benefit, except for single parents.³⁸

Provincial Funding (annual cost \$1.62 billion)⁴

In 2012, provinces and territories other than Quebec provided \$1.62 billion to fund regulated ECEC through programs such as wage grants or general operational funding for ECEC service.⁴ Quebec, however, has replaced cash subsidies and tax credits to parents with a system that directly funds ECEC services.³⁰

It should be noted that the OECD has recommended that governments spend a minimum 1% of GDP to have adequate quality ECEC services,^{10,36} while the World Health Organization recommends 1.5 to 2.0% of GDP.³⁹ In 2003 (the most recent data available), Canada spent about 0.2% compared to the 0.7% average for OECD countries.³⁶

Funding Models

Without sufficient funds the quality and availability of ECEC services is compromised and results in inequitable access, especially for children who are socially or economically disadvantaged. It further establishes barriers for women in accessing full-time employment.¹⁰ In addition to the amount of funds that are invested, how the funds are invested affects the quality, accessibility and benefits of the services.^{10,29} In Canada, with the exception of Quebec, the strategy has predominantly involved demand-side funding.²⁹ The rationale is that this approach provides the parent with more control and choice of ECEC and is less costly for governments,¹⁰ with the majority of the cost delegated to parents.

As parents in a demand-side funding model are responsible for purchasing ECEC services, there is a belief that it will attract private entrepreneurs who will provide services to meet parent demand, and that competition among service providers would keep fees low. Under this model, subsidy programs may be established for low-income families. Service providers, however, are often hesitant to set-up ECEC services in low-income neighborhoods and families who are ineligible for subsidies may not be able to afford it. This type of funding model has also been criticized for not effectively supporting the provision of quality care and fostering the development of children, especially those who are more vulnerable. Thus, approaches are required to support an ECEC infrastructure that plans, monitors and regulates demand-side ECEC providers.¹⁰

A review of ECEC services in 20 OECD countries revealed that countries who invest in a supply-side funding model have more uniform services and better quality ECEC programs.¹⁰ Such ECEC service providers are publicly managed so governments have better control over the services that are provided. This also presents the opportunity for advantages of scale to be gained. The results of publicly managed ECEC services are better quality programs with better-trained educators and access that is more equitable for all children and families. One example is the approach in place in Norway, which may be viewed as the system that

best achieves the expectations of a supply-side ECEC model. It is based on a holistic approach to care and learning, and respect for the value of childhood in and of itself. Delivery can be by either private or public sector organizations, but both have to meet the same standards. Core to the program is a legal entitlement to a place in the program, and a public financing model that includes 80% public grants and 20% parental fees. With this approach, the focus of the government is on three goals, including:

- Ensuring equity and high quality in all childcare settings;
- Strengthening the kindergarten as an arena for learning and development; and
- Making sure that all children have the opportunity to participate actively in a safe and inclusive environment.

The cost of this approach is about 1.7% of Norway's mainland GDP.⁴⁰

From a public health perspective, when developed, any approach should encompass the concept of *proportionate universality* such that ECEC services are available to all, while providing additional support to those who are most in need. *Proportionate universality* is a concept developed as a means of reducing the social gradient in health; it is based on providing universal action, but with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage.⁴¹ It has been further described in a 2011 document developed by the Human Early Learning Partnership of UBC.⁴² Application of this approach would provide all Canadians access to quality early childhood education and care at an affordable price, while providing additional support for those at the lower end of the social-economic spectrum who need it most. Such an approach could closely model that which is currently available in Quebec or Norway.

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Appendix 1

Quality ECEC and Public Health

Child Development

- Participation in quality ECEC programs fosters the cognitive development of children and language acquisition, which are indicators of successful child development.¹² It increases the child's capacity to learn and provides social and learning experiences that supplement the child's home environment. Children receiving quality ECEC often have a more favourable start to primary school with positive effects that can persist over the subsequent school years as seen through higher rates of academic achievement and years of school attendance.
- Quality ECEC also helps reduce social inequalities and the gaps in school readiness for children from different social and economic backgrounds.¹² Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds may often be at greater risk of not developing the skills needed to achieve in school during the preschool years. As such, their participation in ECEC provides the opportunity to develop the necessary learning skills and could permit larger gains in their development than more advantaged children.

Women and ECEC

- The availability of affordable quality ECEC allows parents to be employed, and/or better balance work and family responsibilities.^{8,10} This is especially true for women who are still generally the primary care givers.¹⁵ Similarly, if there is a lack of available, accessible, affordable, or quality ECEC services, women usually stay home to provide childcare.¹⁵ The availability of ECEC increases women's options, and helps support them in returning to or entering the workforce.⁴⁴
- The current demand-side funding model is a barrier to employment for many low and middle-income families who do not have the funds necessary for the upfront costs of ECEC.¹⁵ A supply-side model generally will result in higher family incomes and greater economic stability.¹⁵

Poverty, Health and ECEC

- Rates of poverty have been shown to decrease for both women and their families when they have access to quality ECEC.⁴³ Such a reduction will help alleviate housing and food insecurity and translates into improvements in health. It should be noted that 16.5% of Canadian children lived in households that experiencing food insecurity in 2012.⁴⁵
- Affordable ECEC could also allow families to afford better quality housing. Poor or overcrowded housing is not favourable to learning.⁴⁶
- Poverty in childhood contributes to ill health during childhood, and children who live in poverty are more likely to have poor health over their entire life, even if they escape poverty in later life.⁴⁶

ECEC and the Economy

- Establishing ECEC centres and programs creates employment in that sector and helps to increase the economic activity in the community.¹⁵ A Canadian study demonstrated that for every \$1 dollar spent on a high quality childcare program there were \$2 dollars recovered from social and economic returns.⁴³ Other studies have shown economic returns as high as \$8 and \$17 for each dollar invested for low-income children.^{16,43} It also provides a greater return on investment than investing in remediation programs, tuition subsidies, training programs, or policing.¹⁶
- ECEC leads to improvements in school performance, children staying in school longer, better health outcomes, and decreases in poverty, which results in greater productivity during the adult years.¹⁵



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