



CARDUS SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Submitted by Andrea Mrozek, Cardus Senior Fellow

November 2020

Cardus is a not-for-profit think tank. We employ close to 30 staff and engage in family, education, and economic research, among other portfolios. Over the course of more than a decade, we've compiled peer reviewed child care research, produced papers including a recent collaborative effort called a *Positive Vision for Child Care Across Canada*,¹ and done polling of Canadians' child care preferences, among other things.

Today I'd like to comment on child care data points and then look at solutions for families both during and after the pandemic.

Child care is the care of a child, no matter who does it. Child care is not only a women's issue but also a family issue and ought to be treated as such. We have across Canada a tremendous and beautiful diversity of care options available, care that is both done and chosen by families according to their own cultures, customs, traditions and work needs.

Prior to the pandemic, Statistics Canada data tell us that most parents do find what they are looking for. Only three percent of parents cite a shortage of spaces as a reason for not using non-parental child care, and two-thirds of parents report "no difficulty" finding a child care arrangement.²

Nationally, again according to Statistics Canada, about 60 percent of children, six in ten, under six years old, are in nonparental care. Of these, about half are in child-care centres or in a preschool program.³

This means if we consider all children in Canada under the age of six—those in parental care and those in non-parental care—only 31 percent are currently in centre-based spaces or preschool.

By using public money to fund spaces, **the vast majority of children under six in Canada currently receive no benefit** from public funding for centre-based spaces.

Polls and surveys over years show parents don't prefer centre spaces for their children.⁴ The implication of this is that by using public money to fund spaces, the vast majority of children under six in Canada currently receive no benefit from public funding for centre-based spaces.

¹ "A Positive Vision for Child Care Policy Across Canada" (Cardus, January 21, 2019), <https://www.cardus.ca/research/family/reports/positive-vision-for-child-care-policy-across-canada/>.

² "Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2019," *The Daily, Statistics Canada*, no. 11 (April 10, 2019): 7.

³ "Creating Equitable Child Care Policy for Canada," *Cardus* (blog), accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.cardus.ca/research/family/reports/creating-equitable-child-care-policy-for-canada/>.

⁴ Rick August, "What Child Care Do Parents Really Want? – Rick August," August 2015, <http://rickaugust.ca/what-child-care-do-parents-really-want/>.

Public funding for spaces is structurally opposed to equity for all families.

This inequity is particularly egregious in a pandemic.

At a time when mothers—both those doing waged work and those not—most needed and continue to need support in the home, money is still flowing to the spaces that sat empty because we are all sheltering in place.

The data further suggest it is not a lack of access to child care spaces that is holding mothers back from returning to waged work. In Ontario, 93% of daycares were back by the end of September, but in places such as Brampton, for example, only 20% of child care spaces were occupied. Similarly, Alberta reported 94% of day cares were operating with an enrollment rate of about 50%.⁵

This suggests factors other than the availability of child care spaces are at play when considering how and when mothers return to waged work. For example, some parents are deliberately keeping their children out of school and child care because they don't want to risk transmission to elders also living in the home.

Another question is whether funding for spaces boosts the economic recovery by increasing women's participation in the workforce. Quebec is often cited as the success story, since the advent of its "universal" provincial system correlated with women's increased labour-force participation. However, researchers Tarjei Havnes and Magne Mogstad argue that other policy changes at the federal and provincial level, implemented at the same time as the universal system, may have influenced maternal labour supply in Quebec, which was already distinct from the rest of Canada in this regard.⁶

The federal government has many options to better help families meet their diverse needs, but I will suggest just four today.

There is no national consensus on national daycare— not from moms and dads and not from academics and non-parental child care providers.

First is to start consulting more widely with diverse communities, parents, and child development experts such as Dr. Gordon Neufeld, developmental psychologist who specializes in child attachment. There is no national consensus on national daycare—not from moms and dads and not from academics and non-parental child care providers. The research and the voices I am bringing here today represent a majority of Canadians. Most Canadians want flexibility in how we care for our very youngest so families can do what works.

Second, enhance existing federal programs such as the successful Canada Child Benefit.

Third, consider changes to make maternity and parental leave more flexible.

Finally, bilateral federal-provincial agreements and particularly agreements with our First Nations should maximize freedom and flexibility so as to honour the unique heritage, culture, history and tradition of different cultures across Canada.

There is little evidence that expanded space provision and/or funding for spaces will help mothers return to waged work after the pandemic. Funding spaces is the most brittle, least creative and most expensive way to fund a minority of children's care. There is evidence of an existing ecosystem of parental and non-parental child care in Canada that is neither properly accounted for nor understood. The federal government can and should cherish and defend the beautiful choice and diversity—an intricate patchwork quilt of variety—that already exists in child care across Canada today.

⁵ <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=72885DB1ED08D-FDA1-0F7E-A7A0264D627FEBED#toc-2> and Nida Zafar, "Despite Its 'Childcare Desert' Label Brampton Daycares Are Only 20 Percent Full Because of the Pandemic," *The Pointer*, October 4, 2020, <https://thepointer.com/article/2020-10-04/despite-its-childcare-desert-label-brampton-daycares-are-only-20-percent-full-because-of-the-pandemic>.

⁶ Tarjei Havnes and Magne Mogstad, "Money for Nothing? Universal Child Care and Maternal Employment," *Journal of Public Economics* 95, no. 11 (2011): 1455–65, https://econpapers.repec.org/article/eeepubeco/v_3a95_3ay_3a2011_3ai_3a11_3ap_3a1455-1465.htm.