

Working for Change: Canada's Child Care Workforce

Prepared for the
Child Care Human Resources Sector Council

Executive Summary



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The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) welcomes the opportunity to share this significant, comprehensive, and timely report with you. *Working for Change: Canada's Child Care Workforce* was commissioned by the CCHRSC—a pan-Canadian, non-profit organization dedicated to moving forward on human resource issues in the child care sector. The study follows up on the findings of the 1998 report '*Our Child Care Workforce*' and is the only labour market update completed on the child care sector in the past six years.

The findings of the *Working for Change* report are especially relevant now, at a time when child care is high on the government agenda. As we move into a period of promised government commitment, the momentum needed to propel the child care agenda forward is building. Political will, coupled with the knowledge and experience of child care advocates, is necessary to effectively address the many challenges facing the sector and its workforce.

Child care is central to providing support to children and families, enabling parents to contribute to the economy and ensuring the learning, care, and developmental needs of children are met. The child care workforce is critical to the success of these outcomes and to the well being of a healthy and productive society. Yet low income levels; few benefits; lack of respect and recognition; and barriers to training make it difficult to recruit and retain a skilled and sustainable workforce. An investment in the workforce and its human resource issues is absolutely essential to ensure that the child care needs of all Canadians are consistently met.

A fairly compensated, well recognized workforce that is valued for its contribution to early childhood education and care is the key to ensuring quality child care. Strong and supportive public policy, together with the solutions outlined in this report, will help us move forward and take action to ensure the future of child care in Canada.

The CCHRSC would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the research team of Jane Beach, Jane Bertrand, Barry Forer, Donna Michal, and Jocelyne Tougas, whose hard work and dedication made this report a reality. To the child care workforce across Canada, our deepest respect and admiration. A special thanks to the Labour Market Update working group who provided support and guidance throughout the project. Our sincere appreciation to the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program for funding this study and for continuing to support the work of the CCHRSC.

A NOTE

ABOUT THE TERMINOLOGY

For the purposes of *Working for Change*, *early childhood education and care (ECEC)* is used as the umbrella term to describe programs that:

- support the healthy development of all children;
- provide additional supports to children with disabilities, and to those living in conditions of risk; and
- enable parents to participate in the labour force, in training and education, and in the community.

The term *child care* is used to refer to child care centres, nursery schools/preschools and family child care homes that are regulated by provincial/territorial governments. The term *child care workforce* refers to those working in the regulated child care sector, the focus of the study. *ECEC* and *the ECEC workforce* are used when referring to the broader group of services and programs that may also include child care.

As well, the term *pay* is used to refer to the earned income of both child care staff in centre-based settings and family child care providers. *Wages* is used solely for child care staff since family child care providers are generally considered independent contractors and do not have an employer.



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Canadians have come to recognize that quality child care has long-term benefits for children, families and society, and provides essential support for parents to go to work. The public also increasingly understands that the key to quality child care is a well-trained, skilled and fairly compensated workforce.

Heightened awareness of the central social and economic role of child care makes it crucial for the sector to increase and retain qualified and skilled people in the workforce. As child care moves into the spotlight in the national social policy arena, it is more important than ever to address the growing concern about a future labour market shortage.

Working for Change: Canada's Child Care Workforce is the result of the Labour Market Update (LMU) project, which examined the changes that have had an impact on the recruitment, retention and recognition challenges in the child care sector over the last 6 years. There have been considerable changes to child care regulation, funding and policy at all levels of government across Canada during this period. However, the report emphasizes that governments need comprehensive child care policies to make real progress on critical human resource issues. The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) will work with governments and its child care and labour partners to support progressive child care policies. *Working for Change* proposes eight recommendations that provide a springboard for the CCHRSC to develop a labour market strategy for the sector.

Working for Change is a follow-up to the 1998 sector study, *Our Child Care Workforce: From Recognition to Remuneration*, which marked an important step for a sector that had up to that time remained largely invisible. The sector study focused on the human resource and training issues faced by caregivers in the regulated and unregulated child care settings. The study's recommendations were designed to give the child care workforce the necessary supports to provide high quality services to children.

Updated profile

The present study builds on the report and recommendations of *Our Child Care Workforce*. *Working for Change* provides an updated profile of those who work in the regulated child care sector, their work environments, and the opportunities and challenges they face. The report focuses on staff in full-day child care centres and part-day nursery schools, and caregivers in family child care homes who are individually licensed or work with a licensed or approved agency. It does not include the unregulated child care sector. The report was commissioned by the CCHRSC, a pan-Canadian,

non-profit organization dedicated to moving forward on the human resource issues in child care. The sector council brings together child care and labour organizations, and other sector representatives to develop a confident, skilled and respected workforce valued for its contribution to ECEC.

The study was undertaken over a 15-month period beginning in February 2003 by a five-member research and consulting team under the direction of the LMU Working Group, a sub-committee of the CCHRSC. The researchers collected information and data through a literature review, an environmental scan, and field work comprising focus groups, key informant interviews, and profiles and case studies.

The report shows that in the last 6 years there have been considerable changes to child care policies, regulation and funding. There have also been changes in demographics, such as a decrease in the number of young children and the aging of the child care workforce. All of these factors affect demand for the child care and broader early childhood workforce, and wages, working conditions, training requirements and employment opportunities in the sector.

The child care workforce

In 2001, there were approximately 137,000 early childhood educators and assistants¹:

- 93,000 worked outside the home, such as in a child care centre or nursery school; approximately 60,500 of this number worked full time.
- 44,000 worked at home, with about 33,000 working full time.
- More than 96% of early childhood educators and assistants were women.
- Early childhood educators and assistants reflected the general population—both in terms of those born in Canada and those who were recent immigrants, and those who were visible minorities. Other related occupations were less representative.
- The child care workforce is aging. Early childhood educators and assistants continued to have a younger age distribution than related occupations. However, from 1991 to 2001 they were also the group of those examined in the study with the greatest increase in the proportion of workers aged 40 or older.

¹ Except where otherwise stated, the demographic and income information for the child care and child care-related workforce comes from the 2001 Census. Most of those who work in the regulated sector are included in the National Occupational Classification (NOC-S), early childhood educators and assistants. Three additional NOC-S categories that include members of the broader ECEC workforce were examined for comparison:

- babysitters, nannies and parents' helpers
- elementary school and kindergarten teachers
- elementary and secondary school teacher assistants

Income

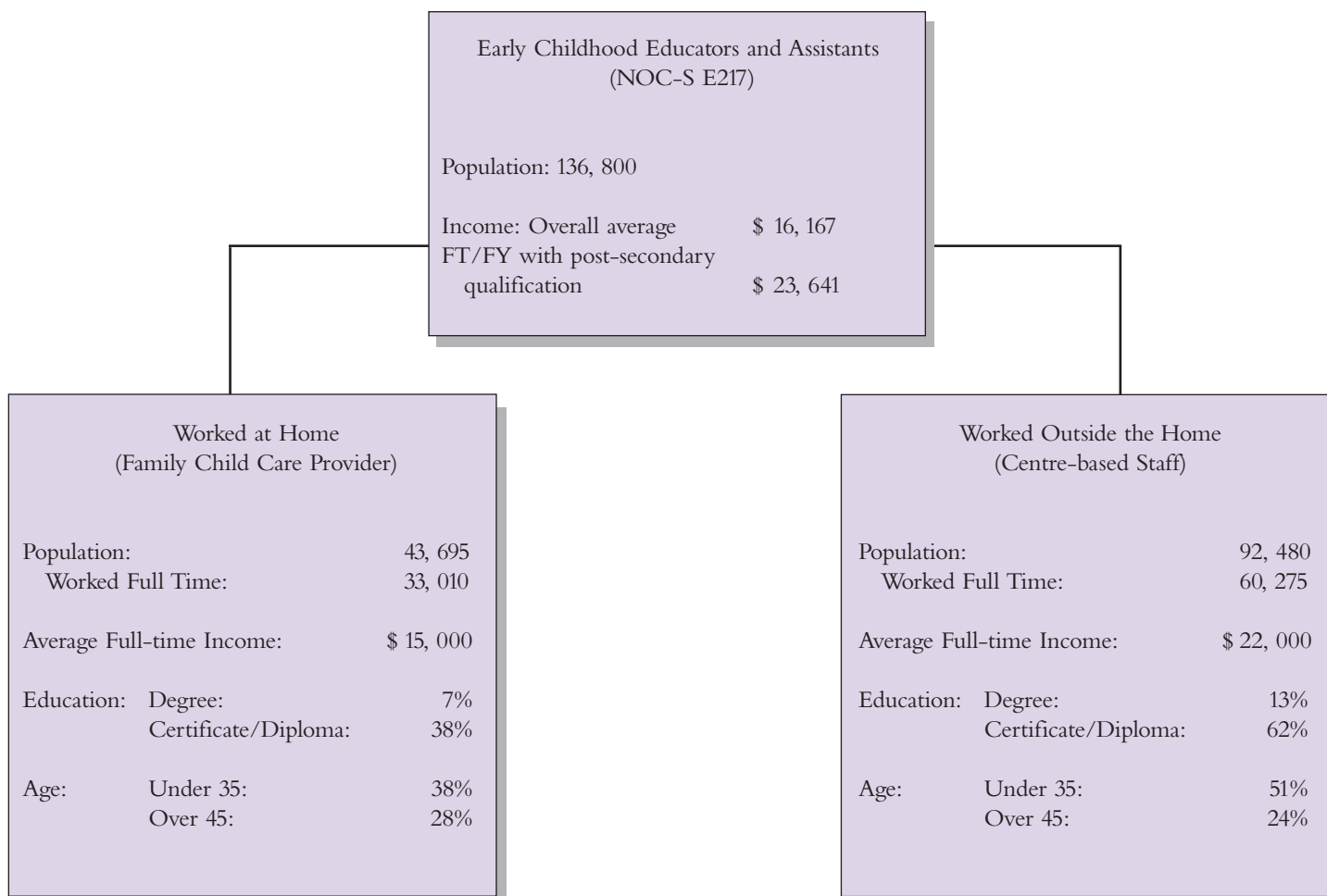
- Earned income was about half the national average for all occupations, and less than half as much as elementary school and kindergarten teachers. The overall average annual income for full- and part-time early childhood educators and assistants in 2000 was \$16,167. Full-time early childhood educators and assistants earned just over \$19,000. From 1997 to 2000, there was virtually no change in income for early childhood educators and assistants.
- Income was higher for those working outside of their own homes—just over \$21,000, compared with \$15,000 for those working at home.
- Income was higher for early childhood educators and assistants working outside the home who had a certificate or diploma: \$22,500 compared to an average of \$16,500 for those with no certificate or diploma.
- Interviews with members of the child care workforce showed that compensation can vary widely (e.g. from just above minimum wage with no benefits, to an annual salary of close to \$70,000 with full benefits and a pension plan).

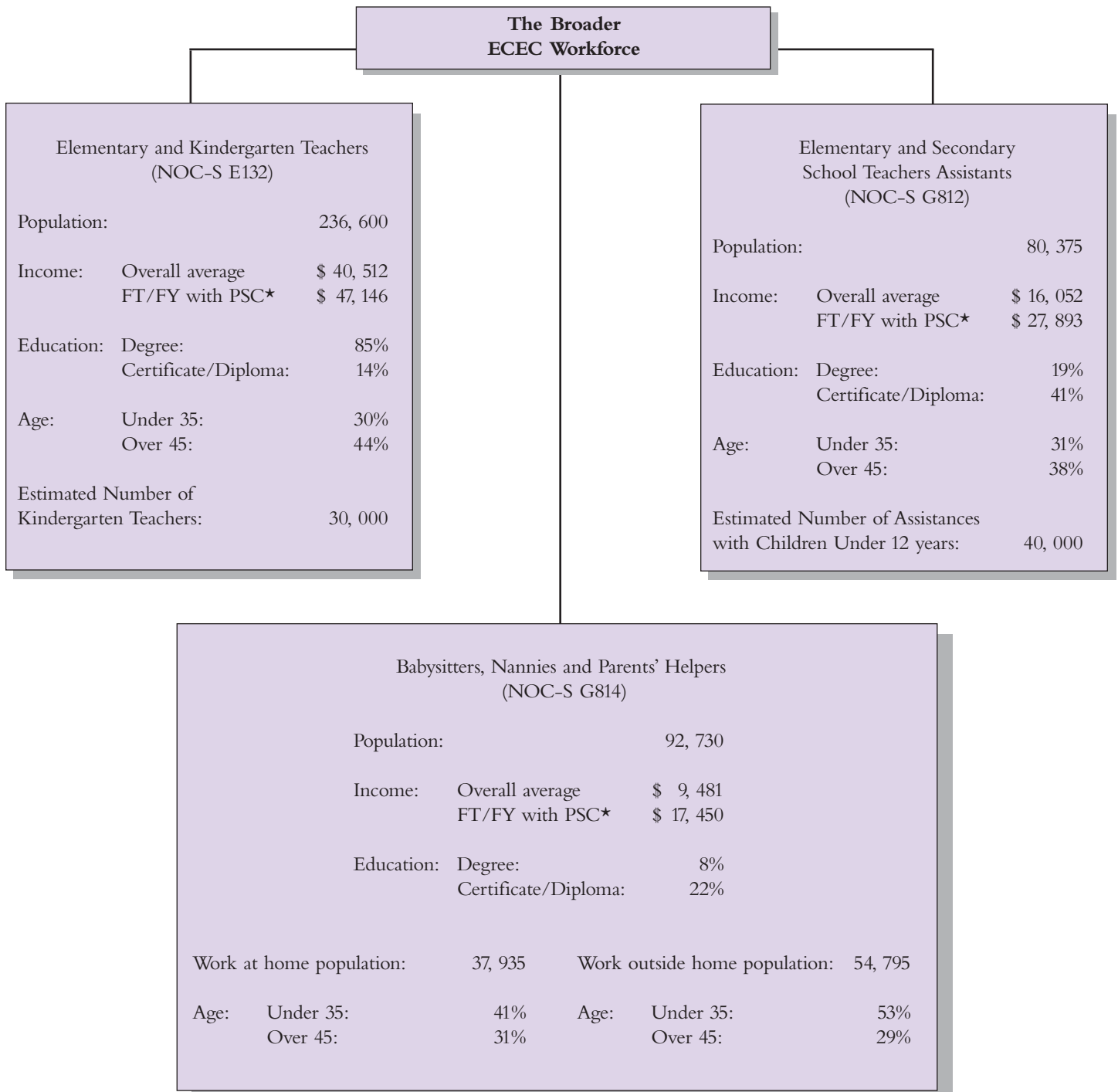
Education

- Early childhood educators and assistants have more education than the general population, but the level of education in the general population is growing at a faster rate. In 2001, 60% of early childhood educators and assistants had a post-secondary qualification (up from 54% in 1991), compared to 53% in the general working population (up from 43% in 1991).

“I think all teachers who work with young children should have an ECE background. Too many people think that specialized training is not necessary in child care. But it’s during these years that a foundation for life is built.”

ECE student





* Post secondary credential

Spaces and spending

As of 2003, there were approximately 690,000 regulated child care spaces across Canada for children aged 0 to 12—still only enough regulated spaces for a small proportion of children in Canada. There continue to be important differences in the way child care is organized and managed across the provinces and territories. Overall, government

spending on child care has risen. Canada wide, spending on regulated child care went from close to \$988 million in 1995 to \$2.6 billion in 2003. However, almost 98% of this increase came from Quebec. The province spent \$203.8 million on child care in 1995; by 2003, spending had risen to almost \$1.8 billion.

Demand for child care

The ability to predict demand for child care is an essential element of recruiting enough skilled and qualified workers to meet current and future needs for services. There are several factors that affect demand, but the two main drivers are demographics and public policy. Trends in birth rates, patterns of immigration and maternal labour force participation, as well as policy decisions by governments, all play a role in determining who will need and use child care and therefore how many members of the workforce are required.

The policy driver

The level and types of public funding, eligibility for access to programs and planning for service development determine to a large extent why parents “choose” different forms of care and education for their children. Public policy drives what programs are available and affordable, conveniently located, meet developmental needs and operate at hours suitable to parents’ work schedules. The demand for services drives the demand for a qualified and skilled workforce.

In most jurisdictions in Canada, child care programs are developed in an ad hoc manner. Policies often fluctuate according to the ideology and priorities of the government of the day. Child care is still funded largely as a support to labour force participation, despite growing awareness that the early years count and quality child care can make a big difference. Most governments do not have defined goals for child care or target levels of service. As a result, the sector has long been characterized by fragmentation and fragility.

Quebec’s approach to policy and demand

The systematic and comprehensive plan introduced by the Parti Québécois government in 1997 is the only real example in Canada of a concerted effort to put in place a child care system. The plan involved major public investment to expand and increase the availability of child care services. Government studies show that take-up has been high. Making affordable, regulated child care more widely available has influenced parental preferences toward regulated child care. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the demand for a trained child care workforce. The government has put in place additional training requirements for staff, with additional training support. As well, improved wages and working conditions, including a negotiated salary grid and pension plan, have increased recognition of the child care workforce.

Challenges

While there have been many changes since 1998, the work environment, skills and recognition challenges identified in the original sector study remain. These issues are at the heart of the sector’s recruitment and retention problems.

The work environment

In general, the child care sector is still characterized by its poor compensation relative to the skills and responsibilities required for the job. Low wages in centre-based care are associated with higher staff turnover rates and poorer quality child care. Unionization and recent government funding appear to have had a positive impact on compensation levels, but in some parts of Canada they remain below the poverty level.

Other factors affecting the workforce include:

- **Difficult working conditions**, with long hours and heavy workloads. Child care staff in full-time programs typically work a 40- to 45-hour week. Some staff receive lunch breaks only if all the children are sleeping. Family child care providers, who usually work alone for up to 10 hours a day, generally have even fewer breaks or time away from the children.
- **High levels of job insecurity**, because the lack of core funding creates instability for child care centres.
- **Limited career opportunities** within the sector, with growing opportunities in related, better paying sectors. These sectors often choose to hire ECE graduates for jobs such as teaching assistants in kindergarten classes, and to work in family resource centres and early intervention programs.
- **Health and safety concerns** from physically demanding work, poor physical environments, exposure to infectious diseases and stress.
- **The uncertain employment status** of family child care providers in agency-based models, who are considered independent contractors and therefore not eligible for maternity and parental leave benefits, Employment Insurance, health benefits and employee protections under labour legislation such as sick leave.

Skills challenges

A skilled and competent child care workforce is critical to providing high quality child care that benefits children’s early development and learning. The challenge for the sector is to increase the skills and education of the child care workforce to improve the quality of early learning and care that children experience.

Specific educational requirements for working in the sector vary among the provinces and territories. Most jurisdictions require a certain number of centre-based child care staff to have formal post-secondary early childhood qualifications, usually an ECE certificate or diploma from a community college. There are minimal requirements in all jurisdictions for caregivers in regulated family child care.

Approximately 135 post-secondary institutions with ECE programs provide the qualifications needed to work in child care. There is no Canada-wide college curriculum, but the essential core content of ECE programs is remarkably similar. While the overall number of programs has remained stable, key informants for the study indicated that in some parts of Canada the number of applicants to ECE programs is decreasing. As well, some informants reported that the skills and abilities of students coming into these programs are also declining.

Overall, focus group discussions and key informant interviews suggest that since 1998 ECE college programs have adapted curriculum content and increased the capacity of ECE graduates to work in different types of early childhood care and education and care settings, and with infants and toddlers. However, students surveyed for the LMU reported they did not feel adequately prepared to work with children with disabilities and those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as parents and professionals in related sectors.

In addition, *Working for Change* highlights another major gap: the lack of pedagogical leadership and human resource management skills. Research points to the child care manager, supervisor or director as the gatekeeper of quality. As key informants for the study repeatedly noted, the education, training, knowledge and abilities of a centre's management staff have a strong influence on the child care environment.

Lack of recognition

The job of providing child care is still viewed as having relatively low status, even though the link has been made between quality and a qualified and skilled workforce. Generally, recognition in the form of better pay and working conditions has not materialized; public views about the workforce, while increasingly positive, are still mixed; and the debate about whether child care is primarily a private or public responsibility continues.

The sector study identified professionalization, unionization and advocacy as three key strategies to increase recognition. However, few members of the workforce belong to professional or advocacy organizations, or unions. It is estimated that in 2003 less than 15,000 individuals who worked in child care had any affiliation with a child care organization, and that about 31,500 members of the child care workforce were unionized. In recent years, professional organizations, trade unions and advocacy groups have joined in several efforts to improve the working environment for the child care workforce, and to increase both their membership base and their reach within the sector and with the public.

Working for Change states that recognition is also affected by different views about the primary purpose of child care. Is the main purpose to support children's early development and learning, or labour market participation? Early childhood education and care is a sector that straddles both worlds, and regulated child care is clearly part of ECEC. Yet governments continue to view child care

primarily as a support to labour force attachment. Policies and regulations tie fee subsidies and operating grants to parental labour force participation or preparation. The study notes that other types of ECEC programs and services are supported by governments because they promote optimal development and early learning. It proposes forming alignments with related sectors such as education and social services to strengthen the child care sector's presence and status.

“A lot of people still don’t appreciate the value of teaching young children. When I tell people I teach 3- and 4-year-olds, the message I get is, “If you were smart enough you would be teaching older children.”

Preschool early childhood educator



“Child care services should respond to the social needs of families. They shouldn’t just be seen as a support for working parents, although they definitely have that function too. A child care centre is like an extended family, providing both an educational and a social environment.”

Child care supervisor

Dedication of the workforce

One of child care's greatest strengths lies in the commitment of skilled caregivers who work under so many daily challenges. Eventually, however, unresolved workforce issues take their toll.

Significantly, *Working for Change* shows that many staff in child care centres have low levels of job satisfaction. Wages remain a critical factor, but other issues also play a major role. Working conditions are high on the list, and include the large amount of time spent on custodial duties rather than the early childhood activities for which staff are trained. Other issues cited by staff are access and affordability challenges related to training and professional development, minimal employment benefits, poor leadership and lack of respect for their work.



Credit: SpecialLink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion

As well, the LMU student survey, focus groups and interviews indicate that many ECE students do not plan to work in regulated child care after they graduate, or plan to work in child care only for a short time. Many indicated they are or will be looking for jobs in the education sector or in “related” ECEC programs. Others view ECE as a stepping stone to an education degree. This finding is consistent with the National Graduate Survey, which showed that about half the graduates of full-time ECE programs who attend college full time immediately after high school are working in child care 2 years after graduating; after 5 years, about 40% are still working in the sector.

There is cause for concern when many young people who want to work with young children opt for related jobs outside of child care or do not enter the profession at all. In the meantime, the current workforce is getting older and its members will soon start to retire in significant numbers.

“I’m worried that students aren’t entering the field, but I can understand why. Child care is rewarding in many ways, but the jobs are demanding, the pay is low and there aren’t a lot of ways to advance. These things make it difficult for people to think of child care as a field they want to work in.”

Child care centre director

The underlying issues

The LMU identified five interconnected issues that affect the challenges of working in child care and the staffing crisis facing the sector. Failure to address root causes will make it difficult for the sector to increase the number of qualified staff and caregivers, and improve and sustain high quality programs in regulated child care.

Quality

Recent research confirms that the quality of children's early environments influences learning, behaviour and health throughout life. Child care staff and caregivers' daily interactions shape the quality of children's experiences. Those in the workforce with post-secondary education, particularly if it is related to ECE, are more likely to provide high quality child care. As well, the quality of the work environment for child care staff and caregivers affects program quality. Better wages, benefits, working conditions and effective organization of the work contribute positively to job performance and long-term commitment.

However, while studies indicate that many child care programs in Canada support optimal early childhood development, most offer mainly custodial services, providing physically safe environments with caring adults. Several jurisdictions have put in place measures to increase the quality of child care programs, such as observation and assessment tools, in-service training and supports, and increased or new training requirements for centre-based staff and/or family child care providers.

The uneven quality of child care is directly related to scarce funding of programs, and uncoordinated policies and standards in many jurisdictions. Quality concerns are a major reason the sector is having difficulties attracting and retaining a qualified child care workforce, including capable supervisors. In fact, there is a shortage of trained early childhood educators in many parts of Canada. In some instances, ECE graduate students are choosing not to work in regulated child care primarily because they are concerned about quality.

Job security, stability and satisfaction

Current levels and methods of child care funding in most of Canada cause job instability, and contribute to the low wages and benefits of the child care workforce. Outside of Quebec, compensation is closely linked to parent fees and government subsidy levels, the main sources of revenue for programs. There is usually considerable variation within individual provinces and territories, and often differences according to the socio-economic level of neighbourhoods. The cost to parents of child care (whether regulated or unregulated) remains high. In some large urban areas, for example, fees for an infant space in a child care centre can be as high as \$1,200 a month.

Compared to other sectors, there is high staff turnover in child care. Difficult working environments and increasing demands and expectations without the necessary training and supports affect workforce morale. There is also a perception—largely borne out by the research—that the child care career ladder is limited, and opportunities for advancement have not kept pace with the workforce’s increasing educational attainment.

“When I started at the centre, all the other staff had been here for at least 5 years. But since 2000, only four have stayed. Many are teacher aides in the school system, working with children with special needs. The work day there is shorter and there are no programming responsibilities. There are paid holidays and salaries are close to double those in child care. Other staff have gone to work at the Superstore, at a call centre and other jobs.”

Early childhood educator

Attitudes and awareness

Generally, government policy on child care does not reflect the increasing awareness of the importance of early childhood development. Moreover, there is little recognition for the knowledge and skills required to work effectively in the sector, and a lack of respect for the value of the work. Compared to other ECE programs such as kindergarten or preschool programs, many still view child care as having more of a custodial function—a “babysitting service”—than a developmental purpose.

“A little child grows moment by moment and we’re right there. The parents respect our work, but I would like to see more recognition from society and the government for the contribution we make to the lives of children and their families.”

Family child care provider



Credit: Canadian Union of Public Employees



Credit: SpecialLink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion

The relationship between early childhood development, early education and child care

Child care is a critical component of comprehensive early childhood development programs. However, the central role of child care is not often reflected in public policy or funding decisions. For example, almost all of the Early Childhood Development² (ECD) funding went to initiatives other than regulated child care. Many of these new initiatives are core funded by governments and do not rely on parent fees. They are thus able to offer better pay and benefits, and draw ECE-credentialed staff away from regulated child care. The rise in the number of new programs and initiatives that operate apart from regulated child care has increased the distance between child care workers and other ECEC workers, further fragmenting the workforce.

Inclusion

Currently, all children do not have equal access to child care. Inclusion requires access to services with appropriate supports. This underscores the need for a sufficient number of trained

staff to ensure participation of all children, including those with disabilities or other specific needs, children from low-income families, and children and families who are newcomers to Canada or live in distinct cultural communities.

“I wouldn’t want to work anywhere else. Almost every day when I arrive home at night, I feel I’ve made a difference in someone’s life. It’s rewarding to help families parent successfully.”

Centre supervisor from an inner-city child care program

In addition to dealing with these five issues, the regulated child care sector must address labour market concerns arising from its aging workforce. Many sectors face future workforce shortages as the overall workforce grows older. Steps must be taken to ensure that child care becomes a viable profession so the sector can compete with more financially secure occupations in the broader education and social service sector.



² In September 2000, Canada’s federal, provincial and territorial governments reached an Early Childhood Development (ECD) Agreement to improve and expand early childhood development programs and services across the country. Under this agreement, the federal government is providing \$2.2 billion over five years, to help provincial and territorial governments improve and expand early childhood development programs and services in four key areas: healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; parenting and family supports; early childhood development, learning and care; and community supports.

Note: The Government of Quebec has stated that while sharing the same concerns as other governments for children, it does not adhere to the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement.

Changing public policy

Of all the factors that affect the child care sector, public policy is perhaps the most important and far reaching. For decades, haphazard public policy, underfunding, fragmentation of services and the lack of regularly collected pan-Canadian data have plagued the child care sector. Even with considerable evidence-based research and advocacy efforts, little progress has been made toward a more coherent public policy framework in Canada, apart from Quebec's family policy. More recent interest in the importance of early childhood development presents opportunities to advance child care policy, but also ushers in a host of new challenges stemming from a lack of recognition of child care's fundamental role in the early years.

Four key policy areas must be addressed to provide an infrastructure that enables meaningful progress on child care human resource issues:

1. **A general policy framework that clearly recognizes the central role of child care to ECD strategies.** A regulated child care system is the most practical way to deliver widespread, publicly supported early childhood development and learning. Regulated child care has two priorities. The first is to ensure the well-being of children through programs that support cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. The second is to support labour force participation of parents.
2. **Coherent public policies across the sector to effectively manage the demand for child care and early childhood educators.** As previously noted, the demand for qualified early childhood educators is in large part dictated by the public policy directions of each province or territory. Inconsistent policies across jurisdictions and lack of planning make it difficult to predict the demand for a qualified workforce.

3. **Sufficient funding of the sector.** Quality child care requires significant investments of public dollars to maintain stable programs, make them affordable to parents, and to provide reasonable wages, benefits and working conditions for staff and caregivers.
4. **Labour market information to guide decision making.** There is no regularly collected pan-Canadian child care information, nor is there a clear distinction between those who work in different settings and varying positions within the child care sector. It is impossible to delineate those who work in child care centres, or in family child care and/or with differing age groups.

"We are at the bottom holding it all up.

If governments truly recognized this, everything would follow: the field would have better teachers with more education, and those of us who provide child care would have better pay, benefits and working conditions."

Agency-based family child care provider

Progress can be made when governments take a multifaceted approach to the public policy challenge. As noted in the study, Quebec leads the way in growth of supply and funding for regulated child care. This expansion has come about within a framework of broad family policy. The framework focuses on setting growth targets, a significant increase in public funding, creation of an infrastructure, improved wages and benefits, a government-sponsored recruitment campaign, efforts in quality improvement and increased flexibility in delivery of training. Based on the data collection, analysis and conclusions of the LMU, the following recommendations identify a framework to address human resource challenges in the regulated child care sector:

1. Promote increased pay and benefits.
2. Develop a recruitment strategy.
3. Develop a retention strategy.
4. Enhance management and leadership practices and supports.
5. Increase attachment to professional, labour and advocacy organizations.
6. Develop partnerships with the education and research community, government departments and related sectors.
7. Reframe the "child care" versus "early child development" dialogue.
8. Develop a research agenda.

The recommendations are designed to support, sustain and strengthen the child care workforce and will serve as the basis for the development of a labour market strategy for the sector.

1. Promote increased pay and benefits

The pay and benefits of child care staff and providers vary widely across Canada. However, wages remain very low in many jurisdictions compared to other occupational groups, particularly those with similar educational requirements. Those who work in the child care sector are overwhelmingly women. Their work is undervalued and they in effect subsidize the service they provide through their low pay. For the most part, child care staff have few if any monetary benefits such as pensions or short- and long-term disability plans. Family child care providers are overwhelmingly self-employed and are therefore not eligible for any employment-related benefits.

In centre-based care, improved and common wage and benefit scales would reduce job turnover caused by staff who leave for a job that pays more. In Quebec, for example, turnover rates have dropped due to improved child care staff wages and common compensation scales.

Clearly, fair wages and benefits would have a positive and powerful impact on recruitment and retention in the sector. Compensation must reflect the value of the work in order to recruit and retain qualified early childhood educators and attract capable applicants into postsecondary early childhood educators programs. Any increases to wages and benefits must come from public investment, not through increases to parent fees.

2. Develop a recruitment strategy

At a time when the child care workforce is aging, few young people are entering ECE programs and many new graduates are choosing not to work in regulated child care. The sector needs to recruit and include both young people and mature, experienced professionals. A recruitment strategy must be designed to attract:

- high school graduates and experienced members of the workforce who lack ECE credentials into post-secondary ECE programs;
- those with post-secondary qualifications related to ECE;
- ECE graduates who are working in other sectors;
- under-represented groups, including Aboriginal peoples;
- those with foreign credentials; and
- a diverse workforce that reflects the community.

3. Develop a retention strategy

The high turnover rate in child care creates instability and negatively affects the quality of child care. While wages are a major reason for high turnover rates, working conditions in child care centres also play a significant role. The job is demanding, the workload is heavy and staff experience low job satisfaction. Many child care centres are financially unstable and thus there is little infrastructure for the operation of high quality programs and little job security. The value of the work is not recognized.

A retention strategy must address:

- work environment;
- work organization and job satisfaction;
- formal training opportunities;
- access to ongoing professional development and in-service training; and
- portability and transferability of credentials.

4. Enhance management and leadership practices and supports

Positive management and leadership practices contribute to attracting skilled staff, an increased sense of teamwork, better morale, a sense of equity among staff, professional development opportunities, and well-planned, quality programs. Clear child care management and leadership roles can also offer opportunities for career development within the child care workforce.

Efforts to strengthen child care management must include outreach to recent immigrants and newcomers and reflect the cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity of the population. As well, it is necessary to enhance and support the management capacity of family child care providers, who work primarily alone and have a significant management component as part of their duties.

5. Increase attachment to professional, labour and advocacy organizations

Professionalization, unionization and advocacy are key strategies that can work together to improve wages, benefits and working conditions, and support a skilled workforce. Increasing membership in these organizations is a priority. As well, it is important to strengthen child care organizations and provide the necessary stability to ensure they are an effective part of the child care infrastructure.

Professionalization

Most of those who work in child care do not belong to a child care organization and thus have little access to supports such as collegial networking, topical and timely sector information and professional development opportunities. Child care staff who work in small centres are often isolated and interact with a limited number of colleagues, and family child care providers usually work alone. Professional affiliation is a critical support to individuals and the workforce. Unlike many established and growing professions, professional affiliation in the sector is voluntary rather than mandatory in all jurisdictions.

Advocacy

Advocacy efforts of child care organizations have contributed to keeping child care on the public agenda and raising awareness. These efforts have also highlighted the need for increased public funding and the development of a coherent child care system in Canada. Advocacy organizations continue to promote the message to policymakers and the public that all children and families should have access to quality child care and that the workforce is key to the delivery of quality child care.

6. Develop partnerships with the education and research community, government departments and related sectors

It is important to build the necessary support to establish progressive public policy, expand public investment, increase recognition and contribute to recruitment and retention. Developing partnerships with provincial/territorial directors of child care, ministries of education, community colleges, the research community and other related stakeholders and organizations will increase the CCHRSC's ability to advance human resource issues in child care.

7. Reframe the “child care” versus “early child development” dialogue

The regulated child care sector often struggles to be a central stakeholder in the development of related ECEC initiatives. Qualified staff and caregivers, particularly those with ECE credentials, are finding increased career opportunities in ECEC programs that operate apart from regulated child care. Many in the sector believe child care should be the core program for ECEC, yet most governments primarily fund child care as a support for parental labour force participation. There is currently no common understanding of the relationship between care and early education, or shared language that reflects the dual purpose of child care. Both would help to build public awareness and support for the potential of child care to meet the developmental needs of children and accommodate parental working hours.

The workforce and its leadership need to reach agreement about the purpose of the sector and the core identity of the workforce. The CCHRSC is well positioned to lead this discussion, with its membership of representatives of unions, professional organizations, advocacy groups and other stakeholders. Developing a common position on the main purpose of child care and its connection to related ECEC programs, as well as redefining and promoting the workforce, will help in two areas. The first is building support to expand public investment. The second is helping to define, coordinate and advance complementary professionalization, advocacy and unionization activities.

Unionization

Unionization has played a critical role in improving wages, benefits, training opportunities and working conditions. This is especially the case where there is a high union density in the workforce. In Quebec, where a relatively high percentage of the child care workforce is unionized, wages have increased for all of the sector's workers, whether or not they belong to unions. Unions are important vehicles for promoting the value of the child care workforce to their members, many of whom are parents with young children. Unions have also played a significant role in advancing public policy and pressuring governments to increase funding to the sector.

8. Develop a research agenda

Working for Change clearly demonstrates the gap in ongoing data collection on the workforce. Research is needed to monitor compensation, working conditions and turnover, and to build evidence for policymakers on key human resource issues in the sector. A research agenda would enable the sector to assess progress on recruitment and retention and the related impacts on quality of care.

A clearinghouse research distribution system is necessary to ensure that policymakers and the child care sector have access to new information and knowledge. As well, consistent, well-organized data collection and research on the child care workforce need to be linked with other research that affects the sector, such as information about families, the labour force and early childhood development.

Conclusion

Working for Change and its recommendations point the way ahead for the child care sector. The recommendations are relevant and responsive to both longstanding and emerging human resource challenges. They provide a path for progress.

These recommendations will serve as a foundation for developing a child care labour market strategy. By definition, a labour market strategy sets out a concrete plan to address and advance human resource issues in a sector.

The CCHRSC is well positioned to develop such a strategy for the sector. The sector council provides a sectoral structure for moving forward on human resource issues through collaborative actions with its national partners.

The labour market strategy will shape the sector council's focus and activities for the next 5 years. The strategy will define ways to improve recruitment, retention and recognition of the workforce. The goal is clear: to promote high quality child care by ensuring that Canada's child care workforce is the best it can be.



APPENDIX:

MEMBERS OF THE CHILD CARE HUMAN RESOURCES SECTOR COUNCIL

Executive Committee

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Labour Market Update Working Group

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Gyda Chud
Raymonde Leblanc
Deborah Mayer (member of the former Human
Resources Round Table)
Noreen Murphy

