

Our Child Care Workforce

FROM RECOGNITION TO REMUNERATION



MORE
THAN A
LABOUR
OF LOVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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More Than a Labour of Love

Close to 1.4 million children in Canada are in some form of paid child care or use a related early childhood service. The majority of their caregivers are talented individuals who are dedicated to their work. As early childhood education research shows, good child care providers make a major contribution to children's long-term development, and to the social and economic well-being of families and society.

Yet our society places little value on the work and skills of the more than 300,000 providers, overwhelmingly women, who care for children during their critical formative years. Caregivers receive little public support, few resources and unacceptably low wages. The important

role they play in shaping our children's social, physical, emotional and cognitive development is not recognized or respected.

Our Child Care Workforce: From Recognition to Remuneration examines the challenges facing caregivers and the impact of these issues on child care in Canada. The study proposes recommendations to deal with the complex human resource issues in this sector.

Our Child Care Workforce was funded by Human Resources Development Canada and conducted by a team of researchers for a committee of child care sector representatives. It draws on existing knowledge and research in Canada and internationally, as well as new information collected through surveys, focus groups and interviews with representatives of the broader child care community.

A Sector Like No Other

The study paints a picture of a richly diverse social sector that is vital to our society, but plagued by a lack of a coherent public policy and chronic underfunding. Child care organizations and individual caregivers share a strong commitment to providing consistent quality care, but they work in a sector characterized by fragmentation and fragility, with funding and regulatory support varying between the provinces and territories.

These difficult circumstances affect all aspects of child care—in particular its quality, availability and affordability—and are responsible for the key human resource issues facing the sector.

Unlike other Canadian social, health and education services, the costs of child care are

largely considered the private responsibility of parents. This directly ties child care providers' wages to the ability of most parents to pay and, in turn, determines to a large extent the type, quantity and quality of services available.

The Caregivers

Who are the caregivers examined in the study? They are the women who work in your neighbourhood child care centre or nursery school, or the women who provide care for children in their own homes or in the home of a child. Many work in settings regulated by provincial/territorial legislation, such as child care centres, nursery schools and family home care. The majority work in unregulated environments in their own homes or in the child's home. Caregivers have different levels of training and education. Some are self-employed, while others are employed by parents or organizations that provide child care.

Despite these variations, a competent caregiver in either home-based or centre-based environments will:

- plan a daily program which promotes positive child development;
- ensure that the physical environment and her caregiving practices promote children's health, safety and well-being;
- establish a partnership with parents that supports their responsibilities to their children;
- develop and maintain a responsive relationship with individual children and the group;
- relate to children fairly and equitably, and promote diversity to support their development within the context of family, culture and society; and
- work with other community members to support children's well-being.

CAREGIVERS AT A GLANCE, 1994-95	
Type of Care	Estimated No. of Caregivers
Unregulated Care	
Family Child Care	155,000
In the Child's Home	115,000
School-Aged Centre-based Care Not Regulated by Province	6,000
Regulated Care	
Child Care Centres and Nursery Schools	42,000
Regulated Family Child Care	15,000
Total	333,000
<small>Sources: Calculations based on data from Canadian National Child Care Survey of 1988 and Cycle 1 of the National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth of 1994-95; school-age centre-based care not regulated by the province—figures come from number of school spaces in Alberta and Quebec reported in <i>Child Care - Provinces and Territories 1995</i>, Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 1997, and assumes a staff:child ratio of 1:15. It does not include staff who may be working in school-age recreation programs.</small>	

The Caregiving Context

While child care providers are not a homogeneous group, they have shared interests and concerns arising from the complex range of issues that shape this sector. These issues provide the context for the urgent need for a child care human resource strategy.

Our Child Care Workforce notes:

► **Concerns about quality child care**

High quality child care has a positive and strong influence on early childhood development. Child care providers, organizations and researchers are concerned that many child care settings in Canada are not providing optimal environments for young children. Government regulation is important in this area, yet no province or territory provides an adequate legislative or funding framework for high quality child care.

► **Child care options limited**

Research shows that many parents prefer regulated child care settings. However, regulated child care options are limited. Parents are often forced to choose their child care based on cost and availability, instead of what best meets their family's needs.

► **Funding inadequate**

Government funding levels and eligibility criteria for subsidies to help defray the costs of regulated child care often exclude all but the lowest-income families. Families with

higher incomes find it difficult to afford the cost of regulated care without some form of assistance. Even the federal income tax Child Care Expense Deduction—a form of direct funding to parents—benefits mainly those in higher tax brackets, leaving families with middle incomes to shoulder the major child care cost burden.

► **The need for more career opportunities**

Under current government funding and policy arrangements, about 38,000 new child caregivers will be needed per year to meet the projected growth of the child population and labour force participation of parents. But increasing needs for culturally sensitive child care practices, and part-time and flexible care to meet changing work patterns, will increase this number. As well, new government policies and funding initiatives in early childhood education, and other early childhood services, such as kindergarten programs, early intervention and family support programs, will increase the total demand for caregivers.

► **Lack of coordination in education and training**

Education requirements for the child care workforce vary across Canada and depend on the type of care provided. The report identifies many gaps in education and training curricula, the lack of appropriate training programs for a broader range of early childhood services, barriers to access to education (including cost and availability), and the limited ability to transfer credits between training institutions.

► **Child care organizations strapped**

Child care organizations operate without the support of clear public policy and little

or no public funding. Revenue generated by membership fees is insufficient to sustain the work of these organizations. This is because most caregivers do not belong to child care organizations and those who do cannot afford high fees. These factors restrict the ability of child care organizations to contribute to an effective, supportive infrastructure for caregivers, even though their responsibilities for training, professional development and enhancing quality are increasing.

Change Is Critical

For the many caregivers who view child care as a career rather than a stop-gap job, and for governments, parents and others in society who are increasingly concerned about early childhood development and quality care, the need for dramatic change in this sector is crucial. This is particularly true for issues that affect the child care workforce, since the sector is so labour-intensive.

Our Child Care Workforce identifies major human resource challenges in the areas of work environment, skills and recognition for caregivers. While the task of making improvements to child care needs to be addressed in many ways by groups and individuals throughout the child care sector, there is an indispensable and key role for the public sector. Without a clear public policy and government support, the necessary changes cannot happen.

Quality Care Needs Government Support

Early childhood development researchers have identified a caregiver's skills, caring and consistent relationship with the children in her care as *the most important* elements in determining quality. It is well documented that high quality child care contributes to children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development.

This is not news to child care providers. They are deeply concerned about the level of quality child care in Canada today. As *Our Child Care Workforce* shows, child care organizations representing caregivers from centre-based and home-based settings, advocacy groups and unions have long been in the vanguard of initiatives to improve the quality of care children receive. But the study also notes that without government support and financial investment in child care, especially in critical areas related to the workforce, these initiatives cannot hope to satisfy overall quality concerns in this sector.



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Work Environment Challenges

Caregivers are the key to high quality care, but the value society places on their work is low. By far the biggest work environment challenges have to do with pay, benefit levels and working conditions.

The incomes of all caregivers—whether they work in centres, provide family child care or work in in-home settings—are low by any standard. They perform work that was unpaid “women’s work” before women entered the workforce in large numbers, and this contributes to the climate of wage discrimination child care providers face. But the greatest barrier to equitable compensation is the lack of a coordinated system of public funding, which places the burden of paying for child care on individual families.

There are government subsidies for some low-income families and some government operating funds in regulated child care, but most of the cost of child care is paid for by fees charged to parents.

► Fees high

Child care fees are high for families, especially young families with small children, whose absolute incomes have declined markedly over the past 20 years. For example, average fees for a three-year-old in regulated care in Ontario range from \$460 per month to \$753 per month, depending on the location and size of the community. Parents are often forced to choose child care options which are cheaper—and where caregivers are paid less—because that is all they can afford.

Meeting Work Environment Challenges

Government funding is essential to make quality child care affordable and accessible to Canadian families. Caregivers must have fair wages, adequate retirement and other benefits, and good working conditions so that they will be attracted to the profession and stay. In-home caregivers should be protected by employment standards and minimum wage legislation.

► Low wages subsidize child care

In 1991, a full-time caregiver with postsecondary education providing child care in the child’s home earned on average just over \$12,000 annually. Her counterpart in a child care centre earned less than \$19,000. In 1996, the net average annual self-employed income of caregivers in regulated family child care was \$8,400. By contrast, the average annual salary for kindergarten and elementary teachers with postsecondary education in 1991 was

nearly \$34,000. In effect, caregivers' low wages subsidize child care.

► ***Few benefits, many health and safety concerns***

Most providers derive a great deal of satisfaction from their work. But their benefits and working conditions leave a lot to be desired. The majority of caregivers do not receive paid benefits such as sick leave, retirement and pension plans, and medical benefits. They work long hours. Some are excluded from employment standards. They face higher than average risks of physical injuries, infectious illness and stress. These factors contribute to caregiver turnover, which has a negative impact on quality care.

Those who work in the child care sector agree about the benefits of improved skills for quality care. Increased training and education would also enable caregivers to work in related early childhood services as members of an early childhood workforce.

► ***Inconsistent requirements***

Educational requirements for caregivers in child care centres vary. No province or territory requires all caregivers in child care centres to have related postsecondary education credentials. On average, centre-based caregivers have more educational qualifications than required by government legislation.

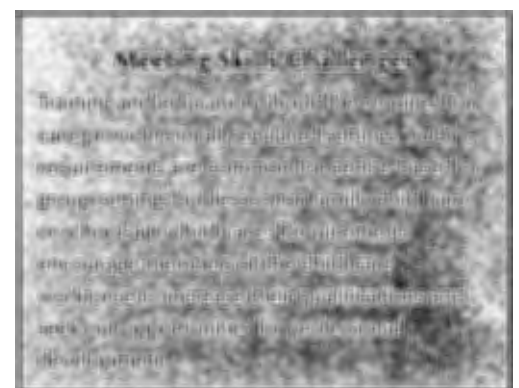
► ***Different needs for home-based child care***

Caregivers in home-based child care need and want more training and education opportunities specifically designed for them. While project initiatives and introductory and certificate training in colleges and family child care agencies are offered, they fall far short of the demand. To further complicate the issue, there has been less work done than in centre-based care

Skills Challenges

Research shows that a caregiver's skills affect quality care and child development outcomes. No matter what the child care setting, training and education, particularly in child development and early childhood education, increase caregivers' skills and competence.

The variety of settings where child care is delivered provides a special challenge when looking at ways to increase caregivers' overall skill levels through training and education. In addition, there are practical skills gained through a caregiver's work experience that need to be recognized in training and education programs.





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about what constitutes good training and education for caregivers in family child care, and how it should be delivered and supported.

► **Additional skills**

Caregivers need more skills to guide children with behaviour challenges, provide culturally sensitive care and inclusive care for children with special needs, and to work with young children in changing environments which include different work patterns and part-time and flexible child care arrangements.

► **Too many barriers**

Caregivers often find it difficult to participate in postsecondary early childhood education (ECE) programs. In many cases, they cannot transfer credits from one institution to another. There is limited recognition of credits among institutions either within or across provincial/territorial jurisdictions.

Meeting Skills Challenges

Postsecondary institutions must:

- ▷ provide coordinated training and education opportunities for the early childhood workforce,
- ▷ expand their focus from centre-based preschool care to a full range of early childhood services and family support programs,
- ▷ provide additional courses to meet the learning needs of caregivers in all child care settings,
- ▷ develop better transfer and credit procedures, and
- ▷ reduce the barriers which limit access to training for some populations.

Access to quality training opportunities continues to be an obstacle, particularly for those who live in isolated or rural communities.

► **Child care organizations do their part**

Despite scarce resources, child care organizations provide professional development and training through newsletters, journals, workshops, conferences and courses to thousands of caregivers. Closer collaboration and coordination of these efforts could increase their distribution across the workforce and improve caregivers' access to these activities.

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Recognition Challenges

The prevailing approach to child care in North America is that it is a private responsibility of families and, more specifically, the woman's responsibility within the family. Add to this the inconsistency of public policy and meagre public funding, and it becomes clearer why our society demonstrates so little respect for child care providers; why we do not regard child care providers as working in a distinct occupation requiring substantial child development knowledge and practical skills; and why the child care workforce is so poorly paid.

However, there are some signs of change. Canadians, particularly parents, are

becoming aware of the importance of early experiences in setting the life course of young children. Government and non-government initiatives to support early childhood development are growing.

Caregivers need an infrastructure to support their growth as part of an early childhood workforce and to broaden their scope beyond child care settings. Non-government child care advocacy and professional organizations and unions are vehicles that caregivers can use to give their issues more visibility.

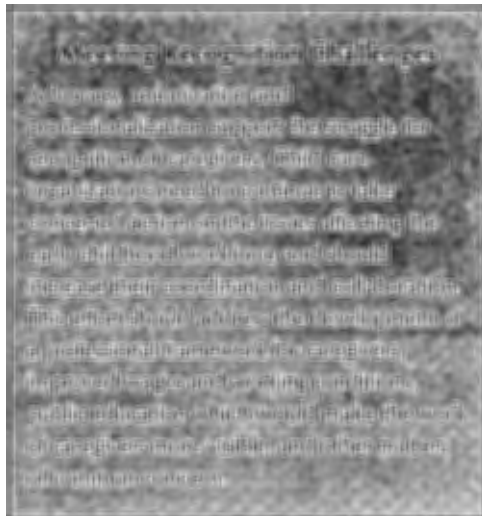
These organizations give voice to the needs and goals of their members, develop and deliver training and professional development programs, raise public awareness of the sector, undertake research projects, inform public policy and contribute to the professionalism of the field.

► *Advocating for a comprehensive system*

Advocacy organizations have focussed on securing a publicly funded, affordable child care system, improving the working environment—particularly the compensation—of caregivers and on increasing public awareness of the value of a competent workforce and early childhood services.

► *Unionizing to improve wages, working conditions and quality*

The level of unionization of caregivers remains relatively small, but it does contribute to increased recognition, improved wages, benefits and working conditions, and protections for standards of quality practice.



- supporting public policy, legislation and funding to enhance child care quality and make it accessible to all children,
- advocating for fair compensation and good working conditions for caregivers,
- continuing to build a professional framework to support the child care workforce,
- increasing the accessibility and relevance of education and training in child development and early childhood education, and
- encouraging the pursuit of a pragmatic research agenda to support public policy development in the child care sector.

► **A professional framework**

Many caregivers want a professional framework that will recognize and value both education credentials and experience, and that is inclusive of all members of the child care workforce. Many provincial/territorial and national child care organizations are active in exploring and implementing mechanisms to promote quality child care, such as codes of ethics, standards of practice, professional development opportunities, training, certification and accreditation processes.

The recommendations in the study set the stage for the child care workforce to move forward.

Moving Forward

Our Child Care Workforce is framed around strong agreement on the urgent need to improve the quality, accessibility, affordability and accountability of child care in Canada. A human resource strategy for caregivers is integral to reaching these goals. It is a key component of the overall strategy for better child care, which includes:



Recommendations

Summary of Recommendations

Child care services in Canada have been developed in an ad hoc manner. They have always been fragile and vulnerable to ever-changing fiscal and political priorities. Coherent and coordinated public policy and funding are needed to develop and sustain the high quality child care and related services that should be available to our children. Only as the promotion of quality child care moves forward on Canada's political, social and financial agenda can the human resource needs of those who work within the sector be met.

The recommendations in *Our Child Care Workforce* are many and far-reaching, because so much still needs to be done to ensure high quality, affordable, accessible child care services in Canada. These recommendations reflect an expectation of

shared authority and shared responsibility. They offer advice for governments, as well as for child care organizations, postsecondary institutions providing child care education, caregiver employers and individual members of the child care workforce. They ask for a commitment to quality child care and to the caregivers who are critical to its provision.

Public Policy, Legislation and Funding

The future of the child care workforce depends in large measure on public policy and decisions about future investments in child care. Groups and individuals in the child care sector by themselves cannot possibly address the complex issues facing this sector. They urgently need the commitment of public policy to enhance quality child care.

A commitment to affordable, accessible quality care and the value of a well-paid, competent and stable workforce.

1

Implement an integrated policy framework—with goals, targets, timetables and follow-up—and provide sufficient funding for child care and related early childhood education services.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the federal government, in collaboration with the provinces and territories and First Nations Peoples.

2

Create adequately funded government branches or departments to oversee the

coordinated development and delivery of child care and other early childhood services.

Leadership is a shared responsibility of the federal, provincial and territorial governments.

3

Direct public funding for child care training and education at the postsecondary level to public and non-profit organizations which have been approved and/or accredited to support child care training.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the provincial and territorial governments.

A commitment to child care that meets the changing needs of today's labour market.

4

Explore and appropriately fund and staff innovative models of service delivery which meet the needs and realities of all families in Canada.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the child care community, with appropriate support from provincial and territorial governments.

Infrastructure

There is no stable infrastructure to meet the current and future needs of the child care sector and address human resource issues. This reality is reflected both in government and in non-government organizations where the lack of support has resulted in a fragile, under-resourced "non-system."

A commitment to a stable infrastructure for child care and related early childhood services.

5

Explore the establishment of a Sector Council to address human resource issues in child care.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the child care community with appropriate support from the federal government.

6

Establish and sustain ongoing grant programs to voluntary child care organizations to strengthen, enhance and expand their role in developing and supporting the child care workforce.

Leadership is a shared responsibility of the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments.

7

Develop systems and processes to ensure an ethical, accountable and responsible child care workforce.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the child care community.

Wages, Benefits and Working Conditions

Caregivers are the single most important factor in ensuring the quality and availability of child care. Good wages, benefits and working conditions will attract and retain qualified child care providers and go a long

way to recognizing the value of child care as an occupation.

A commitment to equitable wages, benefit levels and working conditions.

8

Develop goals and strategies for improving wages, working conditions and benefits by:

- initiating a worthy wages campaign to highlight the issues of caregiver wages and working conditions.
- documenting variations across regions, settings and auspices.
- studying the relationship of wages and benefits to public funding.



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- investigating potential strategies, such as gender-sensitive organizing approaches, sectoral bargaining, unionization, professionalization, strengthening of training requirements and legislated pay equity.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the child care community, in partnership with labour groups, women's organizations and other equity-seeking groups.

9

Advocate for improvements to employment legislation, such as minimum wage, paid sick leave, family responsibility leave and other related benefits.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the child care community in partnership with labour groups, women's organizations and other equity-seeking groups.

10

Examine strategies to improve working conditions and address issues specific to the Live-in Caregiver Program.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the child care community in partnership with labour groups, women's organizations and other equity-seeking groups.

11

Explore and advocate for appropriate coverage for the child care workforce under employment standards, occupational health and safety legislation and other employment-related legislation.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the child care community, in partnership with labour groups, women's organizations and other equity-seeking groups.

Training and Education

The majority of postsecondary training for child care has focused on centre-based care for preschool-age children. While much of this knowledge and skill base is transferable to providing care and education for different-age children in a variety of settings, there is a need and demand for specific and specialized training in these areas. Also needed is a proactive training approach that focuses on the best practices for working with children of diverse abilities and backgrounds, and for dealing with the growing complexities and challenges of child care.

A commitment to a trained and competent workforce.

12

Assess the content, length and effectiveness of postsecondary and other training programs to ensure appropriate preparation for the child care field and related early childhood services.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of postsecondary institutions, in collaboration with the child care community and provincial/territorial governments.

13

Develop and seek consensus around setting specific training guidelines, such as the *National Guidelines for Training in Early Child*

Care and Education, for all services, including family child care and school-age child care programs.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the child care community.

14

Continue to develop and implement curricula that address gaps in training, such as family, rural and school-age child care, infant and toddler care, care for children with special needs and from diverse ethnocultural communities, family resource programs, flexible and innovative services, and the administration and management of child care services.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of postsecondary institutions and other organizations which provide training.

15

Increase program content to equip caregivers for the current social environment in areas such as verbal and written communication skills, social issues including poverty, race, family violence and gender issues, and tools to respond to the nature of the changing workforce and its impact on programming for young children.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of postsecondary institutions and other organizations which provide training.

16

Ensure that field practice experiences are an integral and well-supported component of training and education for all caregivers.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of postsecondary institutions and other organizations which provide training.

17

Establish minimum training and education requirements for all caregivers in all regulated settings and an implementation plan with targets and timetables. Requirements should include a two-year postsecondary ECE or equivalent for centre-based caregivers.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of provincial and territorial governments, in consultation with postsecondary institutions and the child care community.

A commitment to make training and education more accessible.

18

Ensure the availability and accessibility of training requirements, and opportunities for credit and non-credit professional development, continuing education, pre-service and in-service training for the child care workforce by:

- developing innovative community-based models of training,
- further studying and evaluating distance education and considering its role in the education continuum,
- continuing to develop and implement Prior Learning Assessment procedures for both postsecondary education credits and recognition for equivalency mechanisms,

- identifying strategies to increase the representation of students from diverse cultural and linguistic communities, and
- addressing financial barriers to participation in training through bursaries, grants and fee subsidies.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of postsecondary institutions, in collaboration with the child care community.

A commitment to opportunities for career mobility.

19

Advance opportunities for transferability and articulation of credits within and among institutions within the same province or territory, from other provinces or territories, and internationally.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of postsecondary institutions, in collaboration with the child care community.

20

Encourage and develop strategies to support caregiver mobility among child care settings and related early childhood services, such as career laddering and career latticing.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the child care community, in collaboration with postsecondary institutions.



Research

The work of this sector study, like other national studies of child care, demonstrates the weaknesses of data collection in almost all subjects related to child care. We need a strategy to collect data and coordinate a related research agenda for using this data effectively.

A commitment to build and sustain a coordinated, comprehensive body of research on child care in Canada.

21

Coordinate a strategy for developing a Canada-wide plan for collection and synthesis of data and information related to child care.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the federal government, using Statistics Canada expertise.

22

Ensure continued funding for child care and related research, evaluation and innovation through vehicles such as Child Care Visions,

the Child Care Initiatives Fund and other appropriate mechanisms.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the federal government.

23

Synthesize and popularize research findings for policy development, to inform practice and to promote public education.

Leadership is primarily the responsibility of the child care community, with appropriate financial support.

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