

Snapshot: A stronger child care system

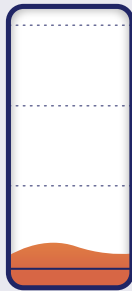
What is the challenge?

Century Initiative's 2021 [National Scorecard on Canada's Growth and Prosperity](#) found that Canada has been falling behind in its approach to early learning and child care.

Child care

Canada has lower levels of child care participation compared to other countries and does not have a national policy.

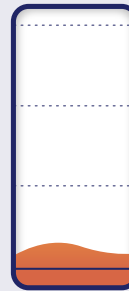
Falling behind



Public spending related to children and families

Canada is well behind comparator countries in terms of spending on children and families. There are also gaps in spending across Canada, particularly for Indigenous children and families.

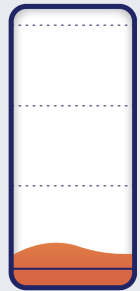
Falling behind



Child and youth well-being

Canada declined significantly in its ranking on the UNICEF report card on child and youth well-being in the last decade, well behind other comparable countries.

Falling behind



Why is this important?

Access to child care can help Canada achieve its population targets, improve the well-being of children and families, create jobs in the care sector, and support newcomer attraction and retention. Child care can have wide-ranging impacts on Canada's future prosperity, in particular on labour force participation and the economy:

- | A universal child care system could increase annual GDP by \$63 billion to \$107 billion per year.
- | Nearly half a million women in Canada who lost jobs during the pandemic in 2020 hadn't returned to work by January 2021.

Which issues must be addressed?

Getting our child care system right is one of the necessary pillars and enablers of healthy, sustainable population growth and Canada's long-term economic prosperity. To get it right, the focus must be on:



Access: Canada has regulated child care spaces for 26.9% of children aged zero to five. Many OECD countries have spaces for all children in that age group.



Affordability: There is significant variability in fees paid for child care across Canada. Fees for child care in Canada are among the highest in the OECD. Median monthly child care fees for infants range from \$181 to \$1866.



Quality: There is uneven quality across the child care sector landscape. The child care workforce, a key determinant of quality, has typically been underfunded and not well supported.

What's next?

As political debate heats up and policy, program and funding decisions get made, there is a risk that momentum will stall. To be successful, a wide consensus on the importance of strengthening the system must be maintained across parties, regions, and constituencies. Child care must be reconceptualized as part of our core public services, like health care and unemployment insurance. It must also be a key pillar in community planning efforts, just like schools, parks and public transit, accommodating needs of different communities. Engaging those who deliver child care in design will be critical to success.