



# Childcare: No longer invisible

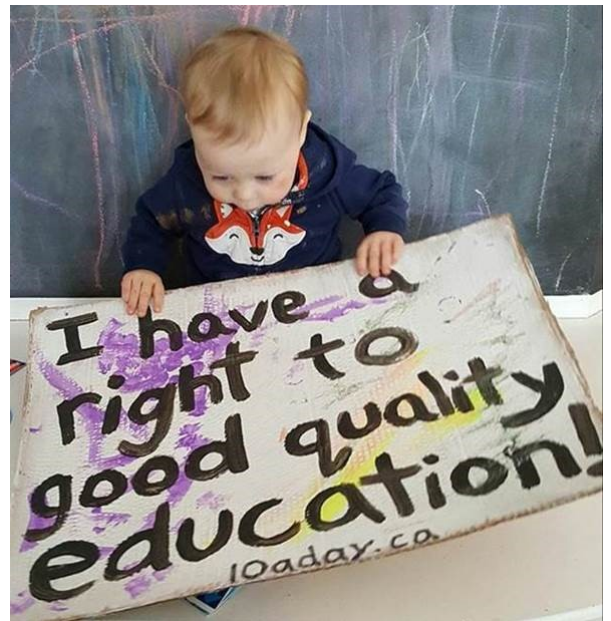
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**“Everybody depends on somebody who depends on childcare.”**

**By Samantha Ponting, HSA Communications**

The pandemic has shone a light on existing inequities in Canada, when it became very clear that some groups – such as precarious and racialized workers, women, seniors, and migrants – would be hit hardest by the health crisis and the hurting economy. Gaps in our social services and social safety net, easy to gloss over in the past, are now starkly undeniable.

When schools were closed, a new awareness emerged about the important role childcare plays in keeping our economy running – something parents knew all along.



According to Sharon Gregson, provincial spokesperson for the Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC, “While childcare in the past was considered to be invisible, or babysitting, or a service for poor children, there’s now a Canada-wide recognition from the prime minister, premiers, and medical health officers that childcare is an essential service for our economy.”

“And as we like to say, everybody depends on somebody who depends on childcare,” she said.

Childcare advocates have brought attention to the ways in which access to quality and affordable childcare connects to economic justice for women. It’s largely women who work in Canada’s care economy.

Meaningful public investments in the childcare sector that deliver improved wages and educational supports for early childhood educators (ECEs) is an important step in improving economic opportunities for women.

The Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC (CCABC) has included these demands in their community-formulated \$10/day plan, and the BC government’s [Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy](#), which delivers wage lifts for ECEs and expands educational and professional development opportunities for ECEs, is delivering on these goals.

“Women have been harder hit by this pandemic because they are more often in the caring professions, tourism, and retail,” Gregson explained. “And we know that these are also professions that employ a large number of racialized women, particularly in the caring professions of long-term care and childcare.”

"It's even more important that there be investments in those sectors to get women back to work and reverse some of the impacts on racialized communities," she said.

Low income and immigrant women have been particularly affected by changes in the labour market. According to a July 2020 report produced by the Canadian Women's Foundation, the biggest job losses from the pandemic were suffered by women earning \$14 per hour or less and by recent immigrant women, with 58 per cent and 43 per cent respectively facing layoffs or losing most of their work hours between February and April.

Women who are being pushed out of the labour market are often taking up care responsibilities at home. According to the study, women spend 1.6 times more time on unpaid work per day than men. Access to childcare can help facilitate women's access to the labour market and their economic wellbeing.

"There's no recovery without a 'shecovery' and there's no 'shecovery' without childcare," said Gregson.

Over the course of the pandemic, provinces and territories have been managing childcare issues differently. Gregson said that BC didn't have the same level of childcare mass closures as other provinces. Special funding from the province ensured that some centres stayed open, and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry didn't order their closure when elementary schools were closed, said Gregson.

"It has served parents well who wanted to continue to attend," she said.

With childcare becoming increasingly recognized by the public as a valuable service, childcare advocates across the country have come together through the Child Care Now campaign. The campaign calls on the federal government to prioritize childcare and deliver substantial funding for early learning and child care - an additional one billion dollars per year over ten years.

"When we talk about rebuilding childcare, it not going to help in the long run if we rebuild the childcare system to still have too few spaces and unaffordable fees and wages below a living wage," she said. "We need childcare to be built back in a way that doesn't depend on market forces but is actually a public investment building a public system."

"We're asking them to prioritize childcare in the way the public wants them to, and the way they have promised to. And that means investment upfront, not in 10 or 15 years," said Gregson.

She said the federal government should ensure that provinces use federal funds to lower parent fees, raise staff wages, and create more publicly-managed spaces.

"We're waiting to see if their actions keep up with their words. Talk is cheap, right?"

The Child Care Now campaign is working closely with the \$10/day campaign here in BC.

"The BC \$10/day plan is a perfect example of how federal investment in childcare can be managed successfully at the provincial level," she said.

Two and a half years ago, the province launched Childcare BC. The plan, which includes historic investments in childcare, outlines a strategy for the creation of a universal, accessible, and quality childcare program within ten years.

To date, 10,000 new licenses childcare spaces have been built or are in the progress of being built. Many families now pay \$10/day or less for childcare. And ECEs have received wage increases.

The government is expected to implement an ECE wage grid that would have educators starting at \$26/hour, up from the \$20/hour average that they are at now. And the government is creating not just more spaces, but more affordable spaces," said Gregson.

While the provincial government to date has created new licensed and publicly-operated spaces, it is still providing capital grants to for-profit providers, using public funds to support the growth of privately-owned assets. The Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC is calling on the government to end publicly funded capital

grants for privately owned, for-profit childcare and create a publicly managed childcare system with investments in public infrastructure and support for public partners.

Their plan also proposes the elimination of administratively costly means-tested parent subsidies, and instead fully implement a universal, \$10/day model.

Gregson said it is important to design a system that meets the needs of all types of families, is culturally competent, and culturally welcoming. The CCABC's \$10/day plan affirms the importance of respecting principles of Indigenous self-determination, and Indigenous authority over child and family care.

The BC government supports the Indigenous Early Learning and Childcare Framework, developed by the Government of Canada in partnership with Indigenous representatives, and has provided Indigenous Early Childhood Development Funding for culturally appropriate Indigenous early childhood development services.

*To learn more about the call for federal action on childcare, and to support the Child Care Now campaign, visit:*

[www.timeforchildcare.ca](http://www.timeforchildcare.ca)

*To support the \$10/day plan in BC, visit:*

[www.10aday.ca/take\\_action](http://www.10aday.ca/take_action).

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