

# Our Child Care Workforce

FROM RECOGNITION TO REMUNERATION



MORE  
THAN A  
LABOUR  
OF LOVE

STUDY SUMMARY



The care and education of young children is one of the largest occupations in Canada. Close to 1.4 million children use some form of paid child care. And more than 300,000 people, overwhelmingly women, care for them daily.

The child care workforce plays a vital role in our children's long-term development, and the social and economic well-being of families and society. Yet, there's little public support or recognition for caregiving as an occupation. Why is this so? And why must it change?

*Our Child Care Workforce: From Recognition to Remuneration*, is a study that looks at these questions and the challenges facing Canada's caregivers. The study was funded by Human Resources Development Canada and conducted by a team of researchers for a committee of child care sector representatives.

## A complex sector

The study notes that child care is a richly diverse but fragmented sector, governed by inconsistent regulations. The sector is chronically underfunded, and is the only social or educational service that relies heavily on user fees. Parents' ability to pay determines to a great extent the type, quantity and quality of services available, and the working environment of caregivers.

*Our Child Care Workforce* concludes that caregivers are the most important factor in determining the quality of care. Better care means improving caregiver wages and working conditions, increasing training and education, and valuing child care as an important occupation.

## Who are the caregivers?

The caregivers examined in the study work in child care centres or nursery schools, or provide care in their own homes or in a 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.

## Some facts about child care

### Low wages subsidize child care

- Caregivers are among the lowest paid workers in Canada. Child care fees for parents are high, and subsidies are inadequate. This leads many parents to choose child care options where caregivers are paid less.

### Inconsistent regulations and quality

- Child care researchers agree that caregivers are the key to quality care. Yet, government regulations and training requirements affecting

caregivers and other aspects of quality vary greatly between the provinces and territories. Fewer than 20% of caregivers work in regulated child care settings.

- None of the provincial/territorial regulations meets all the established criteria for high quality child care.
- Home-based caregivers are particularly isolated with few opportunities for networking and accessing relevant training.

### Child care options few

- There aren't nearly enough regulated child care spaces for infants and school-age children, and less regulated care is available to rural families than to urban families.
- Child care services are lacking for children with special needs, Aboriginal children and ethnocultural groups, and few services are available to meet increasing demands for more flexible, part-time care.

### Caregiving not recognized

- Long hours, higher than average workplace health risks, inadequate retirement and other benefits, and the exclusion of many caregivers from employment standards legislation indicate the low value placed on caregiving as an occupation.
- Opportunities for career advancement and mobility are few, even though more caregivers will be required to meet the increasing needs for culturally sensitive child care practices, part-time and flexible care, and government initiatives in early childhood education and related services.

## What should be done?

*Our Child Care Workforce* offers advice for governments, as well as for child care organizations, postsecondary institutions, caregiver employers and individual members of the child care workforce. It asks for a commitment to quality child care and to the caregivers who are critical to its provision.

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- Make child care affordable, accessible and high quality by:
  - ▶ ensuring that parents have a range of quality child care options at affordable costs;
  - ▶ improving the pay, benefits and working conditions of caregivers; and
  - ▶ supporting training and education for caregivers.
- Meet the needs of today's families by developing child care models that respond to changing labour market patterns.
- Provide financial assistance to child care organizations to support the work and growth of caregivers as part of an early child development workforce.
- Make training and education for all caregivers a priority and more accessible, and provide more training and education in areas such as care for children with special needs and from diverse ethnocultural communities.
- Increase opportunities for career mobility among child care and related settings, and improve the transferability of educational credits.



## How to get involved

The findings and 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 and to meet the needs of child care providers.

This brochure presents a very brief summary of the report's findings. The main report and other printed material to raise awareness of caregiver issues are available upon request.

## For more information

To obtain a complimentary copy of *Our Child Care Workforce: From Recognition to Remuneration*, or other related print material, please complete the form below.

### Item

- Main Report (175 pages)
- Executive Summary
- Summary Brochure
- Flyer for parents: *How Important Is Your Child's Caregiver?*
- Our Child Care Workforce* poster

### No. of copies

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#### Mail to:

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More information is also available from the following Web sites:  
[www.cbnet.ns.ca/~specialink](http://www.cbnet.ns.ca/~specialink), [www.cfc-efc.ca](http://www.cfc-efc.ca), [www.childcarecanada.org](http://www.childcarecanada.org)

