

Where Does Your Centre-Based Child Care Dollar Go?

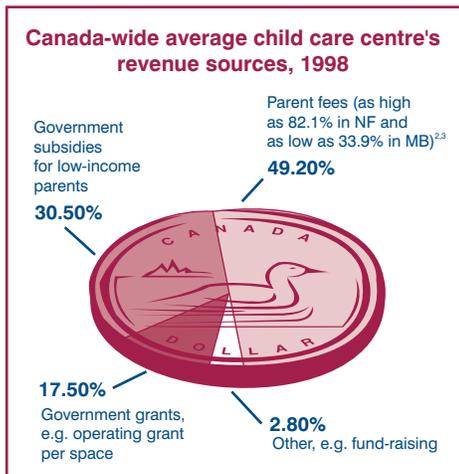
Quality child care is expensive unless you live in Quebec.¹ Where do your dollars go? Quality child care is strongly linked to wages and working conditions of child care practitioners. The higher the education and training of the person to whom you entrust your child, the better the child care. The more recognition your child's provider gets, the more that respect translates into quality care. People who are recognized and rewarded for their work tend to be more satisfied and to stay in their jobs. This benefits all children. Here are answers to questions about financing of child care.

Child care centre staff wages compared with other occupations

A child care practitioner is responsible for the health, safety and development of young children and continually makes decisions that affect children's well-being. An average, 86% of Canadian child care teachers (in charge of a group of children and often supervises an assistant) have a community college certificate or diploma. A parking lot attendant has a job with no formal educational requirements, minimal decision-making and is responsible for the safety of inanimate objects.

The Problem

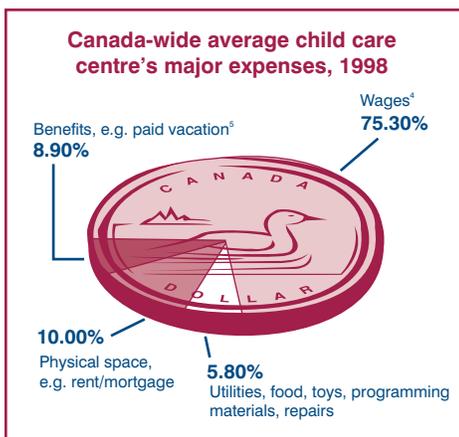
- Child care centres across Canada (except in Quebec) rely heavily on parent fees and government low-income subsidies for revenue. Centres keep their fees as low as possible so parents can afford them and so the centre's spaces are filled. A centre with empty spaces can quickly be unable to cover its overhead and be forced to close.
- Affordable parent fees are only possible if staff salaries are low. However, low salaries drive trained, experienced child care providers out of the field into occupations where they can obtain higher wages and better benefits, and make it difficult to attract and retain skilled and knowledgeable people to care for children.⁷ Thus, many children have unstable relationships with their child care providers. Because continuity is so important for children's well-being, this is a major concern.



Profession/ Occupation	Before-tax Income
Licensed child care practitioner	\$22,717
Licensed practical nurse (always supervised)	\$29,497
Parking lot attendant	\$21,038

You can help!

- Respect and show appreciation to your child's provider.
- Actively participate in your child's program.
- Let elected representatives know that: you support quality child care; you want child care practitioners to be adequately compensated; and you want child care to be affordable for parents.



Making ends meet

- The before-tax annual income of teaching staff in three provinces in 1998 was below Statistics Canada's low income cut-off that is widely used as a measure of poverty.
- 18% of teaching staff working full-time in a centre report having a second job to meet their living expenses.

Benefits reported available to child care teachers, 1998

Benefit	Average %
Paid coffee break	66%
Paid sick days	74%
Short-term disability insurance paid for at least in part by the centre	39%
Paid lunch break ⁶	37%
Retirement/pension plan	25%

Notes

1. The Quebec government introduced a \$5 a day program in 1997. Parents pay a *maximum* of \$5/day for licensed care versus \$29/day in Ontario.
2. Variation in proportion of revenue from parent fees reflects the level of government subsidies and/or grants available in a particular province or territory. For example, in 1998 the average Manitoba centre received 40.4% of its revenue from government fee subsidies and 21.6% from provincial government operating grants.
3. Centres in most European countries are funded mostly from annual government operating grants, which makes them much less dependent upon parent fees.
4. The high proportion of the budget directed to wages reflects the labour-intensive nature of caring for young children.
5. Most of the funds allocated to benefits are used to provide benefits that are mandatory under labour legislation.
6. Most teachers are working while eating lunch, supervising and assisting children.
7. Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Goelman, H., LaGrange, A., and Tougas, J. (2000). *You Bet I Care! A Canada-Wide Study on Wages, Working Conditions and Practices in Child Care Centres*. Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph.