



**Manitoba Child Care
Association**

Improving Early Learning and Child Care

Briefing Paper to the Government of Manitoba, June 2016



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Early Learning and Child Care in Manitoba

Quality child care has a positive impact on how children learn, supports families, benefits communities, reduces poverty, is key to women's equality, and contributes to a strong economy. Economists describe the impact that the child care sector has on regional economies as "multipliers". The multipliers range across North America in value from 1.6 to 3.25 depending on the region being considered¹.

There are 111,000 children 0-12 years with employed mothers in Manitoba (2014 rounded estimate) and 33,561 licensed child care spaces (March 30, 2015). Workforce participation of mothers of 0-2 year olds is 64.8%; 74.0% for 3-5 year olds; 83.1% for 6-15 year olds.² As of December 31, 2015, there were 12,070 children on the Online Child Care Registry waiting list, including 673 children not yet born.³ Licensed child care is in very high demand in Manitoba.

The Canadian Child Care Federation has identified the following crucial elements of quality early learning and child care:

- Leadership at the program level
- Collaborative relationships with families
- Indoor and outdoor physical and learning environments that promote health, safety, and development
- A purposeful program that promotes children's development
- An early learning and care environment that supports the Rights of the Child
- A supported, stable, well compensated workforce, trained in early childhood education
- Professional administrative practices
- Effective system infrastructure

MCCA urges government leaders to maintain and enhance Manitoba's reputation as a leader in early learning and child care by expanding and strengthening services by developing policy that addresses these principles:

1. Licensed child care must be available and accessible to families when required.
2. Child care must be affordable.
3. There must be adequate, stable, and predictable operating funds for licensed centres and homes.
4. Care must be of high quality and include learning to foster healthy child development.
5. A comprehensive human resource development strategy that includes training and fair compensation is essential.
6. Includes experienced and skilled administration and governance.

¹ For the multipliers for a rural region in Manitoba, see: Wehner, Kelly, & Prentice, 2008. For all of Canada, the multiplier is 2.34 – see: Centre for Spatial Economics, 2009. Establishing the multiplier (long term and short term) of early childhood education and care programmes for specific regions includes analyses of the programme costs, programme benefits, kindergarten to grade 12 educational savings, participant earnings, smoking health, post-secondary school attendance, criminal justice system savings, welfare expenditure savings, etc.

² Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada, Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2014

³ Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Online Registry

Overview of Early Learning and Child Care in Manitoba

Legislation: The *Community Child Care Standards Act* sets out minimum requirements to protect the health, safety and well-being of children that attend licensed child care.

Key standards that ensure a minimum level of care and learning for children include:

Staff qualifications
Supervision: Staff to Child Ratio's and Group Size
Physical Space: Indoors and outdoors
Daily Program
Equipment and Furnishing
Health & Well Being
Nutrition
Record Keeping

Number of children in Manitoba 0-12 years⁴: 184,500

Preschool children (0-5 years) 86,000

School Age children (6-12 years) 98,500

Child Care Facilities and Spaces Licensed by the Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Program, March 30, 2015

Child care centres: 681 (30,465 spaces)

Child care homes: 430 (3,096 spaces)

Total number of licensed facilities: 1,111

Total licensed spaces: 33,561

Percentage of children for whom there is a regulated space:

Preschool children: 26.1%

School Age children 11.3%

Number of unique children province wide on the Online Child Care Registry as of December 30, 2015: 12,070

Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care, Department of Family Services, is responsible for funding, licensing, and developing policy for licensed child care.

⁴ Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey based on 2011 Census population counts.

Moving Forward on Key Issues

Child care is an essential public service for modern families, and demand for spaces continues to exceed supply in most areas of Manitoba. The child care program was established in 1974, and many initiatives to enhance quality, increase spaces, and support the child care workforce are already in place and should be continued. In 2015, the Manitoba Commission on Early Learning and Child Care sought public, community, and stakeholder input into the best strategy to address the spaces shortage in Manitoba. The options presented reflect previously collected studies, consultations, focus group discussion with Manitobans, a review of relevant research, and an analysis of approaches to early learning and child care (ELCC) across Canada and internationally. It is not necessary for a new government to reinvent the wheel to identify the best ways to improve ELCC in Manitoba. The Commission report is available at http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/childcare_news/index.html

Priority areas for improving child care in Manitoba include:

1. **Access:** The shortage of licensed child care is a big problem for parents. With 12,000+ individual names on the online child care registry, parents can face multi-year wait times to access licensed child care. Without child care, parent(s) are unable to seek employment, may miss a return to work, school or job training. Parents need child care that is safe, warm and nurturing, promotes learning, is affordable, reliable, within commuting distance by foot, bus, or car, and within the child's school catchment area. Around half of child care centres are currently co-located in a school or on school property. Home child care may be the best option in communities where child care wait lists are short.

How to improve access:

- Develop a strong plan, complete with benchmarks, timelines, funding, and development assistance to improve access to licensed child care spaces in all areas of Manitoba, including urban, rural, remote, and on reserve and in a reasonable time frame.
 - Improve data collection through the online child care registry and use the information to guide the licensing and funding of new spaces by location and according to parental preference for type of service – full or part time, hours of service, centre based or home based.
 - Increase the capital and community funding to make it easier and faster to establish new not for profit child care centres, preferably co-located in schools or on school property.
2. **Affordability:** Manitoba excels at public policy on child care affordability. Since 1974, Manitoba has had a maximum standardized fee that licensed child care centres and family child care homes can charge if they receive a government operating grant. 95%

of child care centres in Manitoba are not for profit and volunteers, usually parents whose children attend the centre, provide the governance. The absence of an owner expecting a return on investment keeps fees as affordable as possible for parents. For context, a full time preschool fee is \$451.00 a month in Manitoba. In cities with high proportion of privately owned child care, preschool fees range from \$750.00 in Surrey, BC to \$1,033 in Toronto, Ont. ⁵

3. How to improve:

- Revise subsidy eligibility levels so lower income families pay less
- Eliminate the \$2.00 per day additional fee not eligible for subsidy as recommended by the Commission on Early Learning and Child Care.

4. **Child care programs require adequate, stable and predictable funding.** Funds generated from the maximum standardized parent fees and the provincial operating grants must stretch to cover the basic expenses for staff, children’s curriculum, administration, occupancy. A majority of child care centres must engage in regular fundraising activities to boost revenue. Operating expenses vary from centre to centre, especially for occupancy. For example, some centres get free rent while others pay market rent for commercial space.

How to improve:

- An annual increase to the unit funding for eligible licensed early learning centres and the operating grant to home child care providers is required so facilities can meet parent expectations for quality care and learning, and pay for operating expenses. The annual increase can be achieved by increasing the maximum standardized fee and indexing subsidy so lower and middle income parents qualify for a subsidy, or by increasing the government operating grant.
- Provide additional categorical funding for line items higher than average such as rent, maintenance of owned premises, new fire or health requirements, capital construction for new facilities or renovations, higher operating costs in northern and remote locations, a high population of at risk children and families, etc.

Quality of Care and Learning:

Doherty (1999) states that the “*best regulations in the world are useless unless monitored by people with Early Childhood Care and Education training and experience...*”

(Toward a Best Practices Framework for Licensing Child Care in Canada.) The quality of care and early learning provided will be only as good as the skills of the caregiver.

Minimum education for an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) classification is a two year

⁵ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2015

diploma, or an approved degree. Regulations require 2/3 of staff in a child care centre be an ECE II or III. Fifty percent of staff working in school age programs or nursery school must be an ECE II or III. However, there is a long standing shortage of ECE's and around 30% of full and part time child care centres in Manitoba are unable to recruit the ECEs required by the Community Child Care Standards Act.

Licensed home child care providers require a minimum of an approved 40 hour course and first aid training. Out of 430 home child care providers, 68 are classified at the ECE II or III level and may charge the same maximum parent fee as child care centres to recognize their enhanced education. Home child care providers may decline to take the government operating grant and are then free to charge whatever parent fee the market will bear.

How to improve:

- Commit to a quality early learning and child care system by making an educated and experienced child care workforce a priority for all licensed facilities.
 - Enhance the initiatives that have been successful in graduating more Early Childhood Educators including workplace training, tuition support, and use the information from recent public consultations on the child care workforce as the basis for new strategies to address recruitment and retention issues.
 - Require a minimum of 24 hours per year of professional development for all child care providers, and allow 3 days of closure annually for in-service learning.
 - Increase and improve access to full and part time province wide ECE training at the diploma and degree levels.
5. **Recruitment and retention:** Child care has a long standing reputation as a poorly paying sector where it is difficult to earn a decent standard of living independent of spouse or family. Low compensation contributes to the exit rates of ECEs leaving child care for brighter pastures and to the high turnover of home child care providers. In 2013, 30% of centres and nursery schools were unable to recruit trained staff required by the Community Child Care Standards Act. Manitoba research, based on education and skill requirements, confirms ECEs employed in early learning centres earn wages 20-25% below market. Since 2007, MCCA has provided a research based Market Competitive Salary Guideline Scale for Early Learning and Child Care Programs along with a recommendation for enhanced funding to support fair wages for ECEs based on education and experience. <http://mcca.org/child-care-workforce/>

How to improve:

- Strengthen the child care workforce to ensure 100% compliance with current child care legislation for trained staff.

- Introduce and fund a province wide market competitive salary scale based on education, responsibilities, and years of service. The provincial salary scale must be competitive with the salary ranges and benefits for employees in similar occupations, especially school divisions which regularly hire ECEs for their early childhood programs, and can afford to pay higher wages.
- Improve retention by ensuring the remuneration of centre employees and home child care providers fairly reflect their education, experience, and responsibilities.
- The regulated daily parent fee and operating grant should generate an income for home child care providers that is fair for the hours of service they provide.
- The funding model should be reviewed to ensure home child care providers that are ECEs earn a before tax income similar to the before tax income of an ECE with similar responsibilities employed in a centre.
- Develop the comprehensive workforce strategy recommended by the Commission on Early Learning and Child Care.

6. **Modernize the child care system.** The child care model in Manitoba is in need of an overhaul to address access, improve care and learning, professionalize the workforce, strengthen governance and administration. We need system redesign to ensure strong, skilled, centralized governance and administration, while also maintaining autonomy for home child care operators to be self-employed, and provincial leadership to ensure collaborative relationships between child care and other partner departments such as health and education.

How to improve:

- Strengthen the infrastructure and governance necessary to plan, establish, support and operate early learning and child care facilities
- Work with the child care community and board members to identify a cost and time effective method of providing resource, guidance, training, and support to the board of directors of child care centres.
- Use the transfer of funds from the federal government to improve child care.
- Support an over-arching federal policy that will benefit all Canadian families and children.

7. **Use existing research and evidence to move forward on early learning and child care.** The highly respected child care experts who lead the Commission on Early Learning and Child Care consulted with Manitobans on child care. They concluded “*the availability of child care is essential to healthy child development, literacy, women’s*

equality, social integration of newcomers, job creation, economic strategies, poverty reduction, family support, early intervention. Everyone agrees that access to child care is a priority.”

How to improve:

- Establish a Ministers Advisory Committee on Early Learning and Child Care, inclusive of inter-sectoral stakeholders, similar to the previous Regulatory Review Committee, to discuss the Commission report and identify an action plan to improve access, affordability, workforce, quality of care and learning, funding, and modernize the system.