

PUBLIC HEALTH MATTERS

Early Childhood Education and Care

Canada needs a federal government that is committed to sustained investment in public health across the country. The Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century calls on the next federal government to invest in strategies and programs that support strong healthy people in Canada regardless of their economic and social status.

A higher standard for Canadian children

Early childhood is a critical time in a child's development and yet Canada has no national program or overall approach to early childhood education and care (ECEC). While over 70% of Canadian mothers (of whom almost 13% are single parents) are in the paid labour force, there are only enough regulated childcare spaces for just over 20% of young children.

Similarly, childcare is expensive with an average cost in Canada of \$685 per month and a high of about \$1,300 per month in Ontario. The exception is Québec where the average cost of their subsidized early childhood care system is approximately \$174 per month. The cost of childcare is especially difficult for those at the lower end of the social gradient and single-parent households, which are disproportionately led by females.

It's time for Canada to do better.

Call to action

Early childhood is the most important phase of life during which the quality of future health and well-being is determined. Every child deserves the best start possible in life. The Coalition is calling on the next Government of Canada to commit to a universal, publicly-funded ECEC plan that provides access to quality ECEC services to those who need it, at a cost they can afford.

Why it matters

Without high-quality ECEC, [many children start school without the basic skills they need to succeed](#). Youth in high-risk neighbourhoods are more likely to drop out of school – 22% vs the average 15%, which continues the cycle of poverty.

Every dollar spent on [early child development saves \\$9](#) on future spending on health and social issues... a return on investment of 800%.

Children who receive effective ECEC – either through kindergarten, pre-kindergarten, or licensed childcare programs – develop [better cognitive abilities, and math and reading skills](#). The improved educational outcomes, in turn, boost their earnings later in life.

A Higher Standard for All Canadians

At only 0.25% of gross domestic product (GDP), Canada's public support for young children, their families and ECEC is the [weakest among the world's richest countries](#). The recommended Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standard is 1% of GDP.

[Canada ranks 37 out of 39](#) OECD nations in public expenditures on early childcare.

Quebec's subsidized childcare program has provided an [economic benefit to Quebec's population](#), increasing Quebec's GDP by 1.7%. For every dollar spent on early childhood programs and care, the provincial government harvests \$1.05 in provincial income and the federal government gets 44 cents for zero investment in the program.

Indigenous approaches to child health and wellness are equally important.

Questions for the candidates

1. Do you support the establishment of a universal, publicly-funded early childhood education and care plan?
2. What specific steps will your party take to make universal, publicly-funded, high-quality, accessible, licensed early childhood education and care available?
3. If elected, will your party work in collaboration with the provinces and territories to implement a national early childhood education and care plan?
4. What steps will your party take to increase spending on early childhood education and care to at least 1% of GDP by 2025 to give Canadian children the best start in life?

Resource

- [CCPH21 Position Statement: Early Childhood Education and Care](#)
- [Conference Board of Canada: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care](#)

About the Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century

The Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century (CCPH21) is a national network of 21 non-profit organizations, professional associations, health charities and research organizations that share the common goal to improve and sustain the health of Canadians. CCPH21 advocates for public policy to ensure that adequate public health functions are in place and information is made available to protect and promote health, and prevent disease and injury. CCPH21 aims to help all stakeholders work together for the future of public health by generating ideas and potential policy directions for discussion among both the public and decision-makers.