



NEW BRUNSWICK
CHILD CARE COALITION

COALITION DES SERVICES
DE GARDE À L'ENFANCE
DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK

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CARING ABOUT SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The **New Brunswick Child Care Coalition** appreciates the opportunity to present to the self-sufficiency task force. We will demonstrate that programs helping to balance work and family responsibilities, such as quality early learning child care programs, are essential ingredients to a self-sufficient New Brunswick.

The New Brunswick Child Care Coalition (NBCCC) is a bilingual membership-based organization that includes both organizational and individual members from across the province. Our organization promotes high quality, universally accessible, non-profit, publicly funded child care, with well-trained and well-remunerated staff, for all New Brunswick families who want or need it.

Relating to several of the employability and population growth challenges raised in the task force's discussion papers, we offer the following evidence that ***early learning and child care is part of the strategic infrastructure required to ensure New Brunswick's competitiveness and productivity. It supports the employability of parents while at the same time helping to provide children with the foundations for lifelong health, learning and skill development.***

Early Learning and Child Care will Enhance Productivity Growth in New Brunswick

Enhancing productivity growth in New Brunswick requires a skilled labour force. The evidence shows that high quality, affordable and accessible early learning and child care programs support the labour force attachment, skills-training and lifelong learning, particularly for women. Early learning and child care also promotes the development of a highly skilled labour force in the future.

In New Brunswick, over three quarters of women with young children are in the paid labour force. Yet, the "patchwork" of services available means that there are only enough regulated early learning and child care spaces for 14% of children under twelve

years of age. This gap in access contributes to work/life conflicts that are costly to businesses in time lost due to work absences. The Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) estimates the cost at \$2.7 billion in lost productivity for Canada as a whole.

In New Brunswick many of the regulated early learning and child care spaces that do exist are not affordable. The two biggest costs faced by families raising children are child care fees and shelter. Further, research on quality consistently points to the need to train and appropriately compensate the child care workforce. However, study after study points to the low wages and minimal benefits earned by this predominantly female workforce.

New Brunswick's productivity relies on working parents with young children. According to Statistics Canada, 48% of the province's total labour force is comprised of parents with children at home¹. As outlined in the first discussion paper published by the Task Force, that reliance is only increasing because of the widely predicted shortages of skilled workers.

When New Brunswick families do not have access to quality early learning and child care programs, our labour force and our employability suffer. With women now the majority in virtually all university programs, decreased labour force attachment among mothers exacerbates **skilled worker shortages**. Parents must not only decrease their *immediate* labour force attachment when there are no other viable early learning and child care options; their *future* employability is affected when they miss education, professional development and advancement opportunities.

Economists estimate that if all mothers with children under the age of 6 were to leave the labour force, employment in Canada would shrink by about 7.5%. In the long run, this would cost the Canadian economy upwards of \$83 billion per year (Cleveland and Krashinsky) – about 8 times the cost of a universal child care program.

It is estimated that mothers exiting the labour force would cost the New Brunswick economy \$1.66 billion per year.

Like schools and libraries, early learning and child care programs help to build places in which citizens want to live and work, and thus supports **labour force mobility**. It helps provide a welcome to new residents from both outside and within the province, and supports their participation in their new community. When early learning and child care is not adequately supported in all regions, families may be reluctant to make otherwise desirable moves, or alternatively, will seek transfers when it otherwise would have made sense to stay.

¹ Profiling Canada's Families, a publication of The Vanier Institute of the Family.

Early learning and child care is also very relevant to **older workers**. Sometimes grandparents provide care. Yet, as the Canadian population ages, and workers stay in the labour force longer, there is likely to be even greater need for publicly supported, community based early learning and child care services.

Early Learning and Child Care provides children with the foundation for lifelong health, learning and skill development - all related to their future employability

The evidence supporting public investment through program spending to develop an early learning and child care system is clear and compelling:

- The early years from birth to age six set the foundation for school readiness (literacy), lifelong learning, behaviour and health.
- All children benefit from quality early learning and child care, not just targeted groups of children, and all parents can use information and support to help them raise healthy, well-adjusted and resilient human beings.

Public support for early learning and child care is therefore an investment in our future and helps ensure **future employability** of the New Brunswick labour force.

Clearly parents do everything they can to provide their children with a healthy, enriching start to life. Without supportive early learning and child care policy, they make do. Mothers forgo paid work while their children are young, even those who would prefer to be in the labour force. Spouses work opposite shifts. Others do double duty and work from home. Still others call on relatives or patch together a variety of informal care arrangements.

What makes the case for universal, publicly-supported, quality accessible early learning and child care so compelling, and so relevant to the issue of employability, is that it **meets the needs of children and parents**. This explains why multiple studies show that benefits of a universal early learning and child care system outweigh the costs by a factor of **2 to 1**, not including additional benefits for children at-risk.

Subsidized childcare led to more mothers taking on paid work outside the home. Since the program's introduction, the proportion of working mothers in two-parent families increased in Quebec by about 21 percent, more than double the increase in the rest of Canada. Moreover, most of the new work is full-time. This increase brings many benefits, such as raising the Quebec economy's productive capacity and promoting the careers of women who might otherwise have only sporadic attachment to the labour force. It also generates more tax revenue; as a rough calculation we estimate new federal and provincial taxes offset about 40 percent of the cost of the program.

As published in CD Howe Institute study
What can we learn from Quebec's Universal Childcare program?

To build the early learning and child care system, the New Brunswick Child Care Coalition recommends the following focused investment strategy:

1. Increase sustained, long-term provincial funding dedicated to early learning and child care programs. These funds must be specifically dedicated to improving and expanding early learning and child care services, based commitments to advance quality, inclusion and affordability.
2. Develop a strong policy framework. This policy framework should include stipulations to 1) identify communities where child care programs are needed; 2) invest in these communities to create child care programs; 3) fund these programs to ensure quality and to make them affordable to parents.
3. Establish measurable targets and timelines. This will ensure that over time the funds invested meet the established policy goals of creating quality, inclusive and affordable early learning and child care programs for children and their families throughout the province.

In order to capture the numerous benefits of public child care investments, **including the employability benefits described above**, the provincial government needs to increase its public investment substantially beyond its current investment and sustain this funding over the long term. This public funding must be accompanied by a focused investment strategy – that is, by public policy and accountability requirements for community service providers that will advance a range of quality, inclusive, affordable, community-based child care services across New Brunswick.