



Creating Equitable Child Care Policy for Alberta

A Cardus Policy Brief

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NEW PROVINCIAL CHILD CARE DATA

Child care policies should be equitable for all families, regardless of the type of care they choose. Yet child care policy in Canada primarily directs funding towards centre-based care. The recent Statistics Canada [Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2019](#) and follow up analysis [Early Learning and Child Care for Children aged 0 to 5 years: A Provincial/Territorial Portrait](#) show that parents use a variety of arrangements, and the majority of parents receive no benefit when provinces fund only centre-based care. Alberta should take a neutral approach that respects the diverse arrangements parents make for their children.

Alberta already respects the diverse needs of parents through the Child Care Subsidy, in which parents using a variety of forms of care are eligible.

However, the \$25 per day [Early Learning and Child Care](#) (ELCC) pilot project is not neutral. The project budgeted approximately \$136 million over three years to fund 7,276 spaces. The majority of Alberta's children will receive no benefit from this program. In fact, most children in Alberta do not currently use centre-based care.

PRINCIPLES OF EQUITABLE CHILD CARE POLICY: DIVERSITY AND NEUTRALITY

Diversity: Parents Rely on Diverse Care Arrangements

Child care is the care of a child regardless of who provides the care. Parents rely on diverse care options for their children, and public policy should recognize and support the choices parents make for their family.

In Alberta, about 54 percent of children under six years old are in non-parental care. Of these, about 51 percent are in child-care centres or in a preschool program. This means that when we consider all children in Alberta under the age of six—those in parental care and those not—only about 27 percent are currently in centre-based care or preschool.¹ A majority of children under six in the province receive no benefit from public funding for centre-based spaces.

Type of child care arrangement among those in non-parental care, household population aged zero to five years, Alberta

Type of Care Among Those in Non-parent Care	
Daycare centre/pre-school	50.6
Relative other than parent	31.9
Non-relative in child's home	9.7*
Family child care home	20.8
Before- or after-school program	5*
Other arrangement	-

*Stat Can urges use with caution

Note: Respondents selected all that applied resulting in a sum exceeding 100%

Source: Statistics Canada, [Table 42-10-0005-01 Type of child care arrangement, household population aged 0 to 5 years](#)

1 Calculations by author based on Stat Can [Table 42-10-0004-01](#) & [Table 42-10-0005-01](#)

Neutrality: Policy-Makers Must Respect Diverse Parental Needs

Alberta should opt for the neutral approach demonstrated in the Child Care Subsidy, which respects the needs and choices of parents.

Provinces fund spaces in centre-based care in response to a perceived shortage of care. According to Statistics Canada, nearly 64 percent of Alberta parents who use non-parental child care report no problem finding care. Rather than funding one form of care in response to a perceived crisis, Alberta should take a neutral, evidence-based approach and respect the diversity of options parents chose.

Parents choose care based on their needs. According to the survey, the top reasons parents who use non-parental care select the type of care they do are location (60%), the characteristics of the individual providing care (56.3%), and affordability (46.6%). Furthermore, many parents depend on in-home care or relatives, while nearly 46 percent of parents with children under six in Alberta do not currently use non-parental care.

Alberta parents who use \$25-per-day funded daycare spaces receive preferential treatment. In addition to receiving a subsidized space, they can claim the federal child care income tax deduction. About a quarter of children under six in Alberta are cared for by a stay-at-home parent who chooses to remain home with them. However, these families receive no benefits from these programs.

Top 5 reasons for using main child care arrangement, Alberta



Source: Stat Can Table 42-10-0006-01

A POSITIVE VISION

If Alberta sought maximum freedom and flexibility when negotiating bilateral agreements with the federal government, it could ensure funding would be leveraged toward equitable treatment of all families with children.

Alberta should fund children not spaces, maintaining neutrality toward the type of care children receive in the province. The \$25 per day ELCC pilot program does not maintain neutrality or parental choice because it funnels a large amount of funding into relatively few spaces in a form of care most parents do not choose.

Alberta should renew its focus on care policies that are equitable for all families, regardless of the type of care they choose.

In 2018, think tank Cardus held a series of roundtables with parents, child care operators, NGOs other think tanks, academics, researchers, and politicians from across Canada. The discussions framed a positive vision for the future of child care policy. *A Positive Vision for Child Care* report draws on a robust range of primary source material and leading academic thought, offering a diversity of solutions for federal and provincial policymakers. The paper can be accessed at cardus.ca/research/family/child-care

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