

Overview - Quebec's Child Care and Family Policy

The Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation 2006 review of Canada's early learning and child care services noted that Quebec stood apart from other Canadian jurisdiction. Quebec takes the education and care of the preschool children as seriously as the public education of their older siblings. Support for early childhood programs matches the total allocations of all the other provinces combined. Quebec now accounts for more than half the child care spaces in Canada.

In 1997, Quebec revised its family policy away from sizeable payments to parents on the birth of children, to a multi-pronged approach including a child allowance, maternity / parental leave for employed and self-employed parents, low-cost child care for preschoolers and ready access to after-school programs.

Highlights of Quebec's family policy:

\$1.6 billion supports 361,533 child care spaces (2012 target). Quebec's early childhood system has influenced:

- Quebec child poverty rates have declined 50% in the last 10 years.
- School test scores have gone from among the lowest to the highest in Canada.
- Outside Alberta, Quebec is the only province to see an increase in its birth rate
- More than one in two Quebec fathers take paid leave after the birth of their babies, compared to the 11% of fathers in the rest of the country.
- Maternal labour force participation went from the lowest to the highest in Canada
- Post secondary enrolment of women is now the highest in the country.
- Tax revenues from mothers now cover 40% of the cost of the program.

In effect the government is only spending 60 cent dollars for its child care. By comparison, Quebec's net cost for 369, 428 child care spaces equals the \$1-billion (2007) Ontario spends to subsidize 229,875 spaces. Similar to studies of health care, public funding directly to child care centres is more efficient than subsidizing parents as we do in Ontario.

Early Childhood Educators and Child Care Staff

Qualified staff now requires a three year post-secondary diploma and two out of three staff must be qualified. To build the child care system, the Quebec government launched an aggressive recruitment campaign, innovative in-service staff training, and, new funding for training institutions. Pushed by the unions, the province followed up with pensions, benefits, a substantial wage boost and a province-wide salary scale.