



Not enough spaces

There is a licensed childcare space for only one in ten Manitoba children.

The ratio of spaces to children is even worse for infants and preschoolers.

Many Manitoba children do not have the services they need, when and where they need them.

This is especially true for children:

- In rural and northern areas;
- In Aboriginal and francophone communities;
- With special needs;
- Whose parents work shift work, evenings, or extended hours;
- Who are sick.

The only way to provide better access for these children is planning and public funding. Unfortunately, current provincial funding policy is restricted to "stabilizing," rather than expanding, the current system.

Fees too high

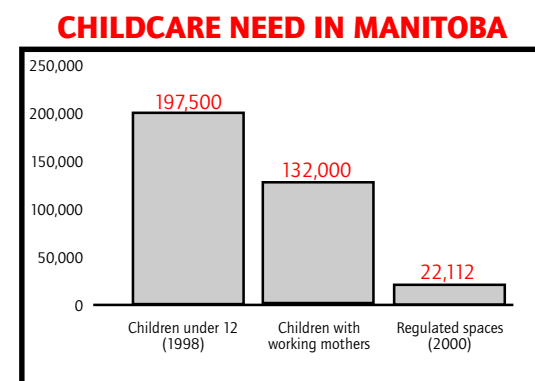


Even if there were enough childcare spaces to go around, that doesn't matter if parents can't afford them. In Manitoba, as in all provinces except Quebec and BC, childcare rates are left up to the market. As we have seen, the childcare situation in Manitoba is one of "high demand, low supply." The result is that daycare is very expensive.

For women who work in clerical or service occupations – secretaries, waitresses, cleaners – daycare can easily take up almost half of their after-tax income.

And, despite recent positive moves from the provincial government, on the fees front the news isn't so good. In June 2000, fees were increased yet again. Raising the fees that parents pay for daycare may seem like an easy and tempting solution to a complicated problem. But, to paraphrase H.L. Mencken, to every problem there is a solution that is simple, appealing – and wrong.

The reality is that the only way for the government to ensure that all children in Manitoba have equal access to childcare is through public funding. **Under a market-based system, affordability is a problem that will never go away.**



Childcare workers earn less than parking lot attendants

Manitoba's childcare workers earn low wages and face uncertain financial prospects. Not surprisingly, some are choosing to leave the profession altogether.

The loss of trained staff severely compromises the quality of care that is provided to children. At the end of this summer, according to the government's own figures, 40% of Manitoba childcare centres were operating without the required number of trained staff.

The funding increase recently announced by the government is welcome, and it will help provide a raise for childcare workers. But the structural problem will remain: **in a user-pay system, wages depend on fees, and parents can't afford to pay what childcare staff deserve to earn.**

There is only one way out of this mess: move to a public system.



What's wrong with commercial childcare?

When there is a shortage of badly-needed public services, private enterprise can jump in to fill the gap.

The problem is that commercial centres fare poorly on quality measures. For example, commercial centres spend a smaller proportion of their budget on staff than non-profits do – this works out to a salary of between \$1.50 and \$2.00 per hour less.

The evidence shows that while commercial centres represent just 10% of the total number of centres, over the past decade or so they have accounted for about two-thirds of licensing orders resulting from breaches of standards. **And, over the past thirteen years, every single childcare centre to have its licence suspended or refused was a for-profit centre.**

Manitoba has the dubious distinction of leading the nation with the highest degree of public funding for commercial centres.



These people know a good investment when they see one.

For more than a decade, the **Vancouver Board of Trade** has campaigned for public spending on childcare. They cite extensive research that "demonstrates that good early childhood development is critical to good outcomes for children." In their words, the payback for public investment in childcare is **"spectacular."**

A 1998 study by researchers Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky found that **"there is at least a 2-to-1 payback in economic benefits if we invest in our children"** in their early years.

The **National Council on Welfare** argues that "good childcare makes an enormous difference in the ability of poor families to find and keep jobs." And, they point out, "any social policy that is serious about supporting children and their families must have child care at its centre ... Many social programs support families, but childcare is the backbone of them all."

What about subsidies?

Manitoba currently directly subsidizes daycare for half of the children in regulated spaces – which works out to about 5 percent of the province's children. The rest have to rely on their parents' ability to pay.

The parents who do qualify for eligibility are only the poorest of the poor – the eligibility line for subsidies is set below the poverty line. Nearly all subsidized parents must pay \$2.40 per day per child.

When they were in opposition the NDP strongly protested the introduction of these extra fees – they now have the opportunity to rescind them.

A Real Opportunity ...

We all know that money's been tight. Social spending has been cut dramatically over the past decade. **But now Manitoba has a real opportunity to develop universal, public childcare.** This September, the federal government announced a new investment of \$2.2 billion over five years for children's services.

Now more than ever, the provincial government has the ability to build a public childcare system for every child who needs it.



Want to know more?

The Child Care Coalition of Manitoba and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba have organized a conference on the future of childcare in Manitoba, November 24-25, 2000. Childcare advocates from BC and Quebec will participate in a special community workshop to discuss how their provincial governments came to introduce progressive childcare programs. Please join us:

Saturday, November 25, 2000

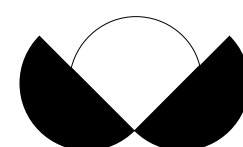
Crossways in Common, 222 Furby St. Winnipeg

1:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Free event. Please RSVP to Gary Thomlison, 453-3088



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activities, please visit our web site:
www.policyalternatives.ca/mb.

This publication is based on **A Decade of Decline: Regulated Childcare in Manitoba, 1989-1999**, by Dr. Susan Prentice. Copies of *A Decade of Decline* are available for \$5.00 from the CCPA-MB, or it can be downloaded for free from the CCPA-MB website.

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OTTAWA

Looking for a good investment? Try childcare. **Public spending on childcare is one of the best investments we can make.** Good early childhood education has huge benefits for children and their families, women's equality, and our communities.



Yet, in Manitoba, there are not enough spaces for the children who need them. Care is too expensive for many parents. In short, there just isn't enough public funding – and the quality of care suffers as a result.

For more than a decade, childcare in Manitoba was allowed to decline. Isn't it time that was reversed? To do anything else would be to be **careless** with the our future.



Manitoba entered the 1990s as a Canadian leader in childcare. We no longer have that distinction. While Quebec and British Columbia are developing publicly funded care for all children, Manitoba lags behind.

All Manitoba children should have access to the care they need, when they need it. It's time for the Manitoba government to redesign early childhood care and education as a publicly funded service for all children.

