

Child Care Deserts in Canada

David Macdonald





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4	Executive summary
7	Introduction
9	Data collection and methodology
12	Results by city
19	Island of Montreal
20	The City of Toronto
22	City of Calgary
23	City of Ottawa
24	Metro Vancouver
26	Coverage rates by community size
30	Conclusion
31	Appendix
34	Notes

Executive summary

ENSURING CANADIAN FAMILIES have access to child care is vital for achieving a range of public goals, including closing the gender wage gap in the economy, spurring economic growth, easing the burden on struggling parents and supporting healthy child development.¹ High child care fees are an obvious obstacle for cash-strapped parents, as the CCPA has documented in other reports.² But a lack of local licensed spaces will also limit the choices parents have when it comes to raising their children and re-entering the workforce.

This report attempts to map, for the first time in Canada, a complete list of licensed child care spaces across the country against the number of children in a given postal code. In doing so, a number of “child care deserts” are identified as postal codes where there are at least three children in potential competition for each licensed space.³ The concept of a “child care desert” is similar to that of a “food desert,” understood as a community without sufficient access to healthful and affordable food. Child care deserts are those parts of Canada without adequate access to child care, irrespective of fees. Both coverage rates and child care desert calculations only include licensed spaces at all points in this report.

Licensed child care coverage is highest in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.) and many of the bigger cities in Quebec. These cities have an average coverage rate of 70% or better, meaning there are at least seven spaces for every 10 children not yet in school. These cities are also in provinces that set child care fees. The lowest average coverage is found in

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and in Brampton and Kitchener, Ontario, where there is one space for every four to five children.

An estimated 776,000 children (44% of all non-school-aged children) in Canada live in child care deserts, communities that are parched for available child care. Breaking it down, less than 5% of children in Charlottetown and Quebec's bigger cities live in child care deserts (although Quebec City has 9% of its children living in child care deserts), while all of Saskatoon's postal codes have more than three children for every one licensed space, making the city one vast desert. Brampton, Ontario, Surrey, British Columbia (B.C.), and Kitchener, Ontario, don't fare much better, with 95%, 94% and 87% of their non-school-aged children, respectively, living in a child care desert. Meanwhile, there are no deserts in Victoria, B.C., despite the city's lower average coverage rate.

While readers can examine any area they wish in [our interactive map of Canada's child care deserts](#), this report focuses on selected larger centres to reveal some common trends.

A high child care coverage rate on the [Island of Montreal, Quebec](#) leaves few postal codes behind, with the best coverage in Downtown Montreal East (H3B) and the worst (8%) in Dollard-des-Ormeaux (H9G). But even in the latter community, high coverage in neighbouring postal codes likely provides parents with nearby options for child care. And, in contrast to other cities, high coverage is not limited to Montreal's downtown core.

The [City of Toronto, Ontario](#), has a high concentration of child care through the middle of the city starting at Union Station and running north along Yonge Street until Highway 401. Outside of this north-south vein, child care coverage rates tend to be significantly lower and create many child care deserts. Sparse coverage exists in most of Scarborough, York and Etobicoke, and there are far more children living in the Downsview and North York areas than there are licensed child care spaces.

As in Toronto, coverage rates in [Calgary, Alberta](#), are high downtown, then fall substantially when reaching the suburbs. But within Calgary coverage is varied: high in the city's southeast and in postal codes along the Bow River, but much lower in the northern and southwest sections.

The [City of Ottawa, Ontario](#), continues the trend of having high coverage in the downtown core along the Ottawa River. The southern portion of Kanata along March Road also has high coverage. However, in much of the rest of the city, including Orleans, Nepean and the rural areas that surround the suburbs, coverage is much lower.

[Metro Vancouver](#) in B.C. has particularly low coverage, with over half of children living in child care deserts. Only at the University of British Columbia or in the southern sections of West and North Vancouver do you find anywhere near one space per child. Almost all of the postal codes in both Surrey and Burnaby are child care deserts, despite the large number of non-school-aged children living there. Even large portions of downtown Vancouver have surprisingly low coverage.

Aggregated at the provincial/territorial level, Quebec, Yukon and P.E.I. have the highest average child care coverage rates. Saskatchewan, Nunavut, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Manitoba have the lowest average coverage rates. No matter the province, larger cities with populations over 100,000 have higher coverage rates. However, outside of big cities the coverage rates often don't differ substantially between smaller centres, small towns and rural areas.

Canadians should have access to affordable child care near where they live, no matter where they live. Our research into child care deserts shows this is not the case in far too much of the country.

Improving equitable access to child care will require addressing the price *and* the availability of licensed spaces. That is more difficult to accomplish where child care is offered in a purely market-driven way; in these scenarios it is easy to end up with child care deserts. Smart public policy will be essential to ensuring more equitable outcomes.

Introduction

THERE IS GROWING public awareness of the vital role that affordable, accessible child care can play in improving the Canadian economy as well as gender equality. Child care fees are expensive in most of Canada except where they are set by the province. The picture of the availability of spaces is less complete irrespective of the cost. This report attempts to fill that gap in our understanding.

This report examines child care coverage rates across the country to determine the proportion of non-school-age children in a given postal code compared to licensed child care spaces. The calculation of child care coverage rates, particularly at the provincial level, has a long history in the Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada reports.⁴ The recent Cleveland report examined sub-provincial coverage rates in Ontario.⁵ Cities are also concerned with child care coverage rates, with detailed mapping available in Toronto, for instance.⁶ This report examines coverage rates at various levels of geography including the Forward Sortation Area (FSA), the first three characters of a postal code, which allows for the mapping of the accessibility of spaces in a fairly detailed way (see more on the methodology below).

Public concern with waitlists and the inadequate supply of licensed child care spots is high in many parts of Canada. Indeed, few government child care announcements today do not include a promise of the number of spaces that will be created through a given new investment. This is certainly true for recent provincial budgets, as well as federal Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework agreements signed last summer with the prov-

inces and being negotiated with Indigenous groups.⁷ These announcements implicitly recognizes the lack of child care spaces. But they rarely acknowledge the wide variations in child care coverage within provinces or even within cities with large child populations.

In contrast, comparable jurisdictions have established targets based on child care coverage, not new spaces created. In 2002, all European Union member states committed to having a space for 90% of children who have turned three to when they went to school and for 33% of children who haven't turned three (the "Barcelona targets").⁸ One of the explicit goals of these targets, which had been met by seven countries by 2011,⁹ is to "remove disincentives to female labour force participation."¹⁰ Although that level of differentiation, ie. above and below age three, is possible in some provinces, notably Ontario, it isn't possible for most of the provinces and in this report all non-school aged children are aggregated together.

Coverage rates are obviously important for parents in that this information determines whether they will be able to find child care close to home, but coverage data is also important for policy-makers. This is particularly true of provinces that are starting to set lower child care fees or remove them altogether, as the previous Liberal government had planned for Ontario. Without a fuller picture of child care coverage rates, provinces risk simply creating long waiting lists in low-coverage areas as fees fall.

This paper also identifies "child care deserts"—postal codes where there are three or more children per licensed space. The term "child care desert," which is borrowed from the Center for American Progress and Child Care Aware of America,¹¹ is similar to that of a "food desert," understood as a community without sufficient access to healthful and affordable food. Child care deserts are those parts of Canada without adequate access to child care, irrespective of fees.

In the provinces where child care is provided by the market, it is market participants, and not public policy, that largely decides where new spaces are built. Those spaces may well be built in areas where coverage rates are already high and not in areas that might benefit most from more spaces. The unequal distribution within many of Canada's cities shows that policy-makers focussed on ensuring meaningful access should consider measures to provide equal access to child care close to where children actually live.

Data collection and methodology

THIS REPORT COMPILES all licensed centres and licensed homes or home care agencies in Canada that provide child care services. The child care spaces data was collected in March and April of 2018. The data was sourced largely from publicly accessible provincial websites that provide licensing information and that help parents find licensed child care. The data only includes spaces for non-school-aged children. After-school care or spaces for those in junior kindergarten, kindergarten or older grades are excluded.

The addresses of a child care centre or licensed homes are used to allocate spaces to a particular postal code. The number of licensed spaces are compared to the number of non-school-aged children from the 2016 census. It is assumed that every licensed home has four spaces for non-school-aged children, although this will vary by home. Non-school-aged children include all children who haven't yet turned five, except in Ontario where the category includes only children who haven't reached their fourth birthday. Ontario is unique in offering full-day universal junior kindergarten that covers children aged four.

The “coverage rate” in this report refers to the number of spaces per child in a given geographic area. In most cases there are more children than spaces in a postal code; for instance, if there is one space for three children, the coverage rate is 33% ($\frac{1}{3}$).

All spaces, whether part-time or full-time, are included. It is often not possible to differentiate the two depending on the province. However, part-time spaces can have very short duration of only a few hours a day or for a limited number of days a week. This is particularly true for the “nursery school” category of care in British Columbia and Alberta. The benefits of this type of coverage with respect to increased female labour force participation will be much more limited compared to full-time spaces allowing for full-time work.

“Child care deserts” are defined as any postal code where there are more than 50 non-school-aged children, but less than one space for every three children. This is consistent with how the concept has been treated in U.S. child care research,¹² and corresponds to the threshold for younger children in the EU “Barcelona targets.”¹³ The Barcelona targets are much higher for preschool children (90%), but, as noted above, it is not possible to differentiate for age in this way in all provinces. Both coverage rates and child care desert calculations only include licensed spaces at all points in this report. (For more detail on data collection and methodology, see the Appendix.)

This survey contains all publicly listed centres, homes and home agencies in Canada. This includes 13,798 centres, 2,622 individual homes and 368 home care agencies, and a total of 716,850 licensed spaces for non-school-aged children. This breaks down into 615,172 spaces in centres and 101,678 spaces in homes. This survey does not include unlicensed home care, as no comprehensive lists exist of those providers.

Lower child care coverage rates in some communities could be the result of several factors. For example, they may mean that parents are relying more heavily on unlicensed home care. Some communities may be wealthier than others, so parents may opt for a nanny or other in-home, paid provider. In some cities, parents may be more likely to stay home with children, or lean on extended family (notably grandparents) for help, thereby avoiding paying for child care altogether. Some parents in lower-income areas will find child care expensive and therefore inaccessible, which would lower coverage rates as well. All of these decisions may be either voluntary or involuntary.

Still, we must be careful not to assume causality between any of these factors and specific community coverage rates. For instance, a lower coverage rate may be due to more parents choosing to stay home with children or it may be due to more parents being forced to stay home because they can’t find a space. Low coverage per se cannot differentiate causality or voluntariness in this situation. However, the coverage rate can feed into the complex picture of child care when combined with other factors and provides

valuable information about the accessibility of licensed child care in different communities across Canada.

Lower coverage rates can be equally due to lack of planning. Larger cities like Vancouver or Toronto have the planning capacity to determine which areas are underserved and how to overcome these shortfalls. However, even these larger cities must often rely on the willingness of private operators to locate themselves in underserved areas, which they may not be willing to do. Where a market system delivers child care, governments play a passive role in the location of new spaces: they can encourage operators to locate in a particular area, but they can't force them to. In smaller cities, limited planning capacity makes even this passive role harder to play.

Results by city

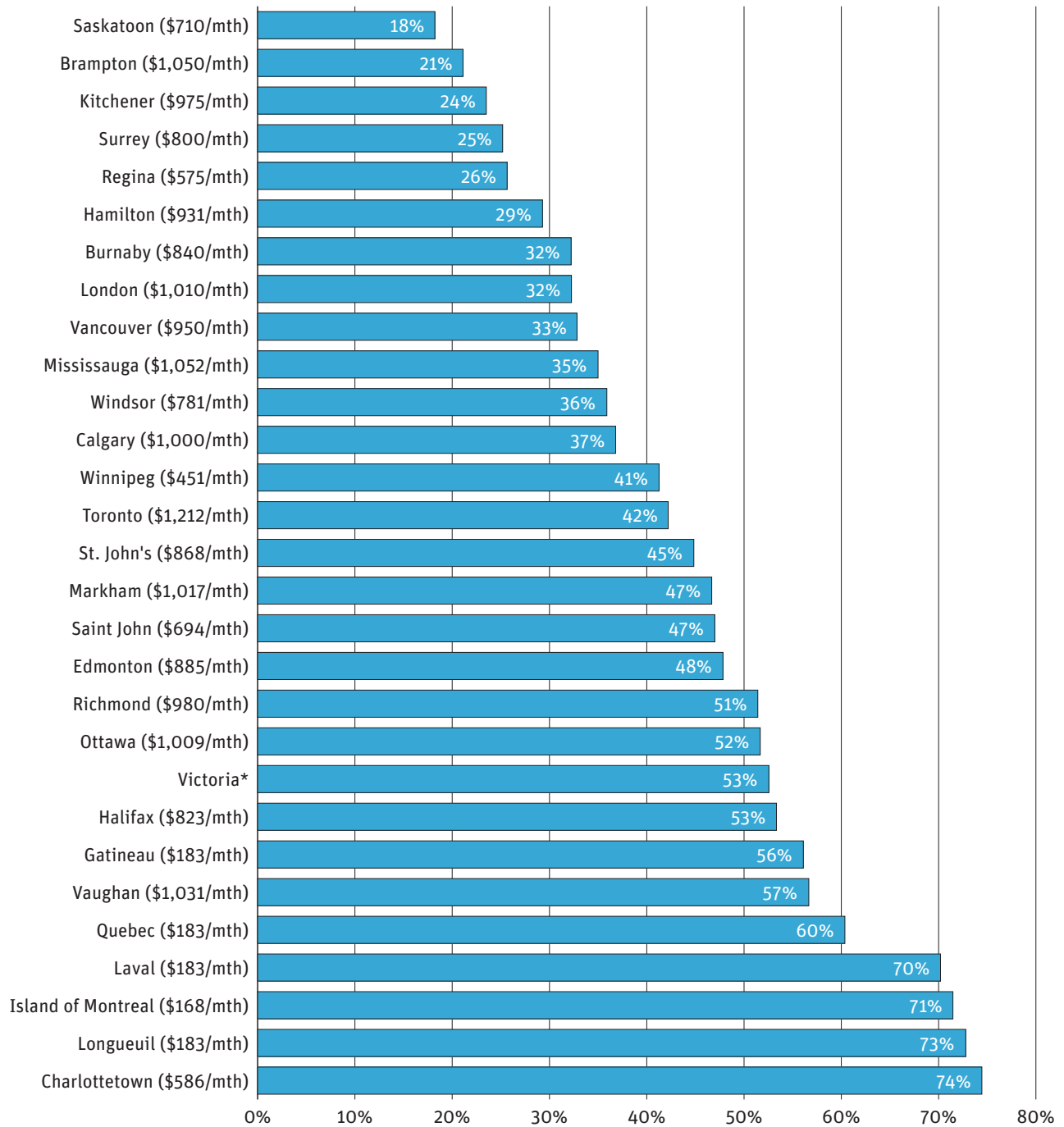
CHILD CARE FEES paid by parents vary considerably across Canada, as examined most recently in the December 2017 report, *Time Out: Child care fees in Canada, 2017*.¹⁴ Figure 1 matches up the median full-day preschool fee (2017) in each of the cities surveyed in that report with the licensed child care coverage rate for those same cities, exposing a wide range in coverage as well.

In Charlottetown and several of the large cities in and around the Island of Montreal, for example, coverage rates are very high, with a licensed space for over 70% of non-school-aged children. Meanwhile, in Saskatoon, Brampton and Kitchener there is less than one licensed child care space for every four children.

Three provinces (Quebec, Manitoba and P.E.I.) set maximum child care fees for parents and then make up the difference through transfers to providers. This is why cities in these provinces consistently have the lowest median parental fees of any Canadian city. Some of the highest coverage rates among the cities surveyed in this study were also found in these provinces. However, the relationship between set fees and better coverage isn't universal: Winnipeg falls below the halfway mark on coverage despite Manitoba setting fees and providing direct transfers to child care providers.

There are fewer similarities between cities with lower child care space coverage, though the lowest coverage tends to be in cities where fees are set by the market, not the government. Other than that, we can see the five cities with the lowest coverage are in three different provinces and fees are neither universally expensive nor affordable.

FIGURE 1 Cities by coverage rate & median preschooler fees



Source Time Out, 2017, provincial child care websites, 2016 census and author's calculations.

* Victoria was not included in the report *Time Out: Child care fees in Canada, 2017*.

For example, Regina is the cheapest city for full-day preschool care outside of the set-fee provinces while Brampton is at the higher end, but both have low coverage rates. Saskatoon and Regina are smaller cities outside the influence of larger urban areas, whereas Brampton is within the Greater Toronto Area and Kitchener is close by. Clearly more research is needed to determine key factors for low child care coverage rates in Canadian cities.

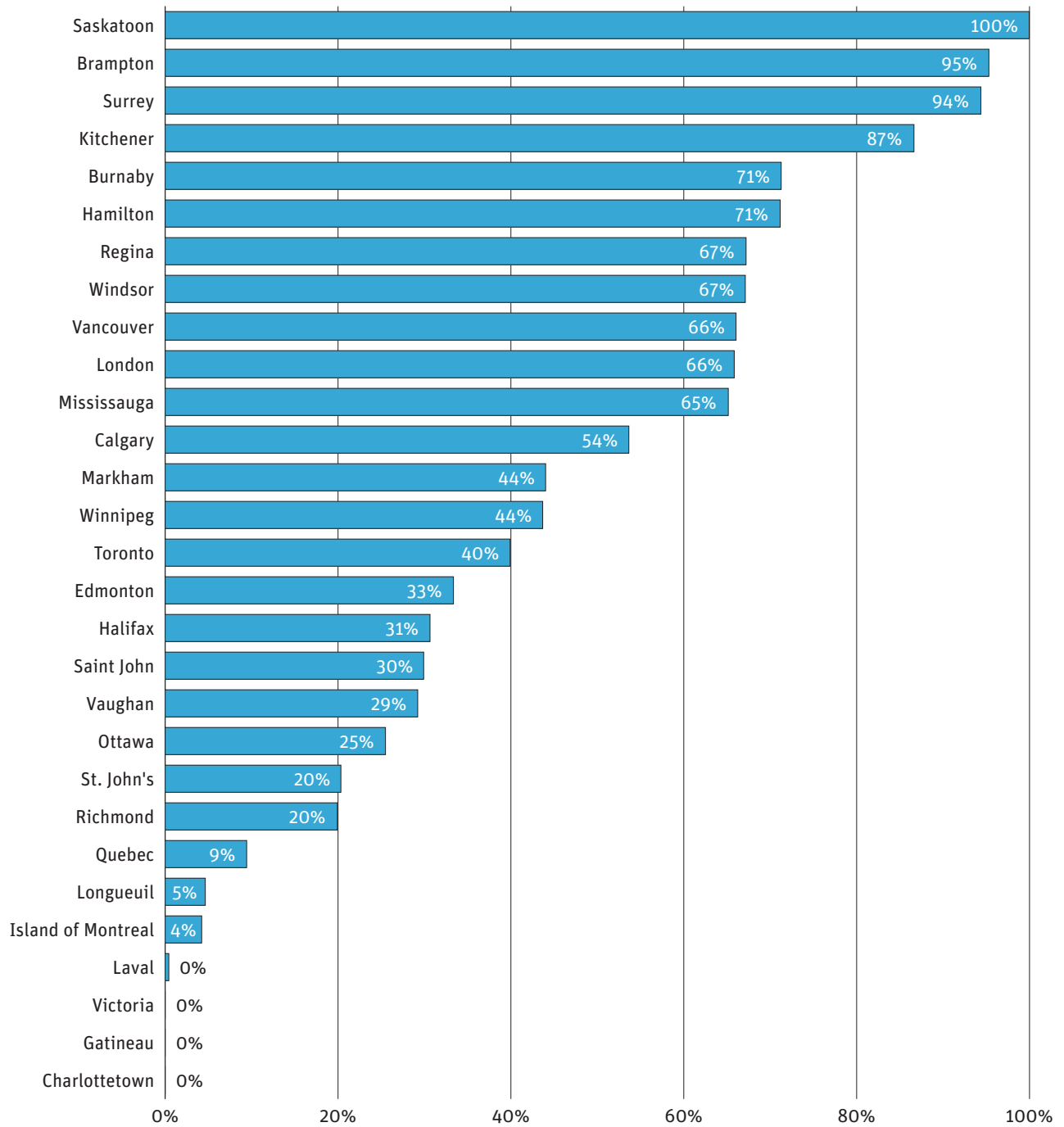
Another way of examining the coverage rate is to examine the proportion of children who live in child care deserts. In this report, a child care desert is any postal code (forward sortation area) with more than 50 non-school-aged children but less than one licensed child care spot for every three children (a coverage rate of under 33%). This highlights areas with large numbers of children but few child care spaces nearby, even if spaces may be available in other parts of the city.

When we rank cities by number of children living in a child care desert (*Figure 2*), the result is similar but not identical to *Figure 1* of average coverage rates. In Saskatoon, all children live in a child care desert, since none of the city's 11 postal codes contain any more than one licensed space for every three children. Bampton, Surrey and Kitchener don't fare much better, with almost all children living in a child care desert. With high average coverage rates, Charlottetown and the larger cities in Quebec have almost no child care deserts. Interestingly, Victoria, B.C., which ranks in the middle for average coverage, has few, if any, children living in child care deserts, which suggests a relatively even distribution of available spaces—a bonus, perhaps, of being a smaller city.

One relationship that would be expected for low coverage rates is longer wait lists, as supply is smaller compared to the need for spaces. *Figure 3* compares the child care coverage rate in each city to the proportion of centres maintaining a wait list where this information was available in the 2017 child care fee survey.

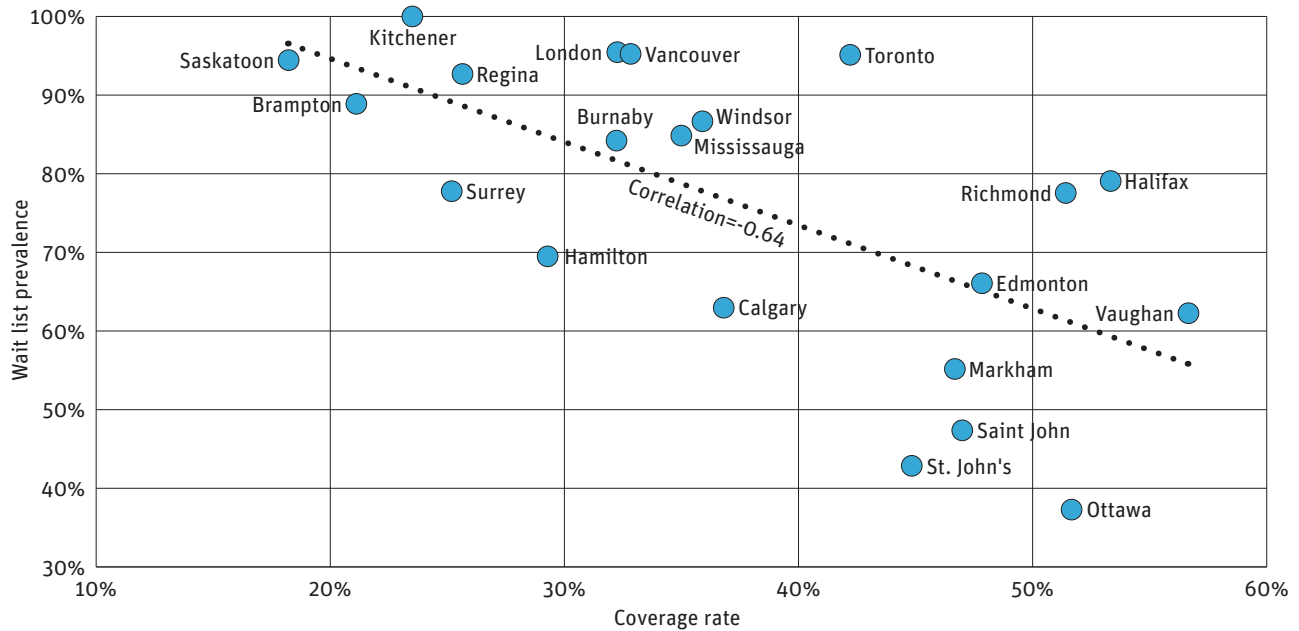
While this relationship is not perfect, there is certainly a negative correlation of -0.64 between wait lists and coverage rates (on a scale from -1 to +1). This negative relationship implies that as one factor increases the other decreases. For instance, in Saskatoon, Brampton and Kitchener, where the child care coverage rate is under 25%, nine out of 10 centres maintain a waiting list. On the other hand, Vaughan has a coverage rate of over 50%, but only six out of 10 centres maintain a waiting list. The situation in Toronto shows how this relationship, though strong, is not perfect: while the coverage rate is 42%, or twice that of Saskatoon, 95% of centres in Toronto maintain a wait list.

FIGURE 2 Proportion of children living in a child care desert



Source Provincial child care websites, 2016 census and author's calculations.

FIGURE 3 Proportions of centres with wait lists vs. spaces per child



Source Time Out, 2017, provincial child care websites, 2016 census and author's calculations.

Examining coverage at the more granular level of postal codes reveals additional interesting trends. *Table 1* highlights the highest- and lowest-coverage neighbourhoods for each of Canada's large cities. The table is restricted to larger neighbourhoods where there are at least 500 children or at least 500 spaces.

One of the predominant trends is that city centres often have coverage rates surpassing 100%. That is to say, there are more spaces in these postal codes than there are children who live there. In order for this to be the case, parents must be bringing their children in from other neighbourhoods. As employment is often found in downtown cores, it is likely that parents are commuting with children and putting them in child care closer to work.

Conversely, the lowest coverage rates are often found in suburban and rural areas within cities. This supports the pattern of parents commuting to work with young children, but it cannot tell us if they are choosing to do this for convenience or if it is a result of a lack of care spaces closer to home. It also cannot help us determine whether suburban parents are putting their children into unlicensed home care, as no comprehensive list of unlicensed spaces exists. However, there seems to be little relationship between the coverage rate and the proportion of licensed spaces located in

TABLE 1 Highest and lowest coverage by neighbourhoods by city

City Name	Province	Highest coverage	Lowest coverage
Brampton	Ont.	L6Z XXX Brampton West Central (41%)	L6R XXX Brampton Northwest (10%)
Burnaby	B.C.	V5G XXX Burnaby (Cascade-Schou / Douglas-Gilpin) (53%)	V5B XXX Burnaby (Parkcrest-Aubrey / Ardingley-Sprott) (22%)
Calgary	Alta.	T2P XXX Calgary (City Centre / Calgary Tower) (232%)	T3N XXX Calgary Northeast (5%)
Charlottetown	P.E.I.	C1A XXX Charlottetown Southeast Prince Edward Island Provincial Government (90%)	C1E XXX Charlottetown West (59%)
Edmonton	Alta.	T5J XXX Edmonton (North Downtown) (858%)	T6W XXX Edmonton (Heritage Valley) (12%)
Gatineau	Que.	J8Y XXX Hull Central (115%)	J8R XXX Gatineau Northeast (37%)
Halifax	N.S.	B3B XXX Dartmouth Northwest (326%)	B3R XXX Halifax South (16%)
Hamilton	Ont.	L8S XXX Hamilton (Westdale / Cootes Paradise / Ainslie Wood) (106%)	L8T XXX Hamilton (Sherwood / Huntington / Upper King's Forest / Lisgar / Berrisfield / Hampton Heights / Sunninghill) (3%)
Island of Montreal	Que.	H3B XXX Downtown Montreal East (2887%)	H9G XXX Dollard-des-Ormeaux Southwest (8%)
Kitchener	Ont.	N2G XXX Kitchener Central (39%)	N2N XXX Kitchener West (17%)
Laval	Que.	H7M XXX Vimont (132%)	H7Y XXX Îles-Laval (40%)
London	Ont.	N6A XXX London North (UWO) (247%)	N6E XXX London (South White Oaks / Central Westminster / East Longwoods / West Brockley) (15%)
Longueuil	Que.	J4G XXX Longueuil North (128%)	J4M XXX Longueuil East (33%)
Markham	Ont.	L3R XXX Markham Outer Southwest (116%)	L3S XXX Markham Southeast (20%)
Mississauga	Ont.	L4W XXX Mississauga (Matheson / East Rathwood) (72%)	L4Y XXX Mississauga (West Applewood / West Dixie / NW Lakeview) (13%)
Ottawa	Ont.	K2K XXX Kanata (Beaverbrook / South March) (102%)	K4P XXX Greely (0%)
Quebec	Que.	G1V XXX Sainte-Foy Northeast (231%)	G1B XXX Beauport North (12%)
Regina	Sask.	S4P XXX Regina Central (61%)	S4X XXX Regina Northwest (12%)
Richmond	B.C.	V6V XXX Richmond Northeast (100%)	V7C XXX Richmond West (31%)
Saint John	N.B.	E2K XXX Saint John North (92%)	E2J XXX Saint John East (21%)
Saskatoon	Sask.	S7N XXX Saskatoon Northeast Central (29%)	S7T XXX Saskatoon South (8%)
St. John's	N.L.	A1C XXX St. John's North Central (82%)	A1H XXX St. John's Southwest (1%)
Surrey	B.C.	V4A XXX Surrey Southwest (42%)	V3Z XXX Surrey (Morgan Heights) (7%)
Toronto	Ont.	M3B XXX Don Mills North (260%)	M1X XXX Scarborough (Upper Rouge) (9%)
Vancouver	B.C.	V5Z XXX Vancouver (East Fairview / South Cambie) (102%)	V5R XXX Vancouver (South Renfrew-Collingwood) (15%)
Vaughan	Ont.	L4K XXX Concord (160%)	L4H XXX Woodbridge North (21%)
Victoria	B.C.	V8S XXX Oak Bay South (86%)	V8V XXX Victoria South (35%)
Windsor	Ont.	N8N XXX Tecumseh Outskirts (99%)	N8P XXX Windsor (East Riverside) (3%)
Winnipeg	Man.	R3C XXX Winnipeg (Broadway / The Forks / Portage and Main) Manitoba Provincial Government (104%)	R3W XXX Winnipeg (Grassie / Pequis) (1%)

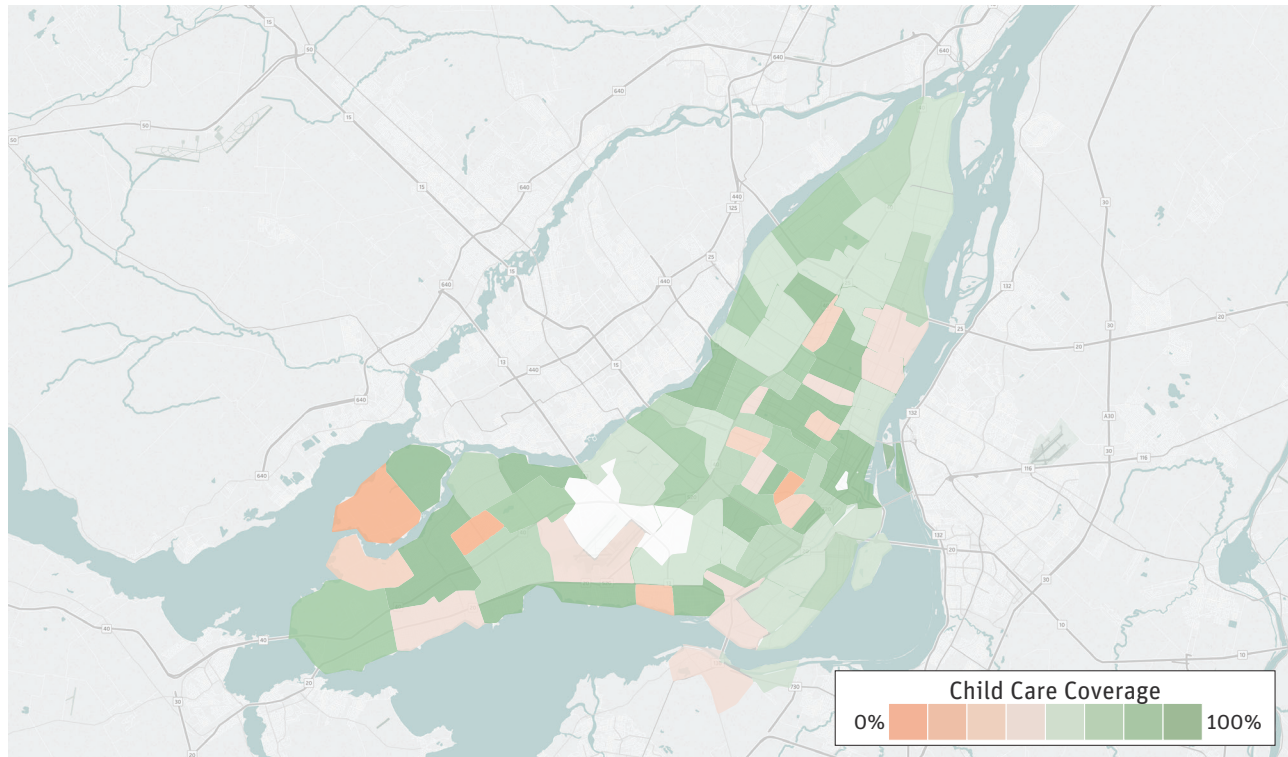
Notes Postal code inclusion is restricted to those with either more than 500 children or more than 500 spaces.

homes.¹⁵ The correlation between these variables is very weak for the postal codes in the big cities.

Population density may have an impact on the location of child care spaces. As population density decreases, it may be more difficult for child care centres and homes to find enough children to make providing child care a worthwhile endeavour. Population density and commuting patterns both encourage more spaces in downtown cores. Clearly more research is needed in this area.

Going beyond *Table 1*, it is worthwhile examining several of Canada's biggest cities in more detail. For readers interested in any other region in Canada, [see the online map of this dataset](#).

FIGURE 4 Child care coverage on the Island of Montreal



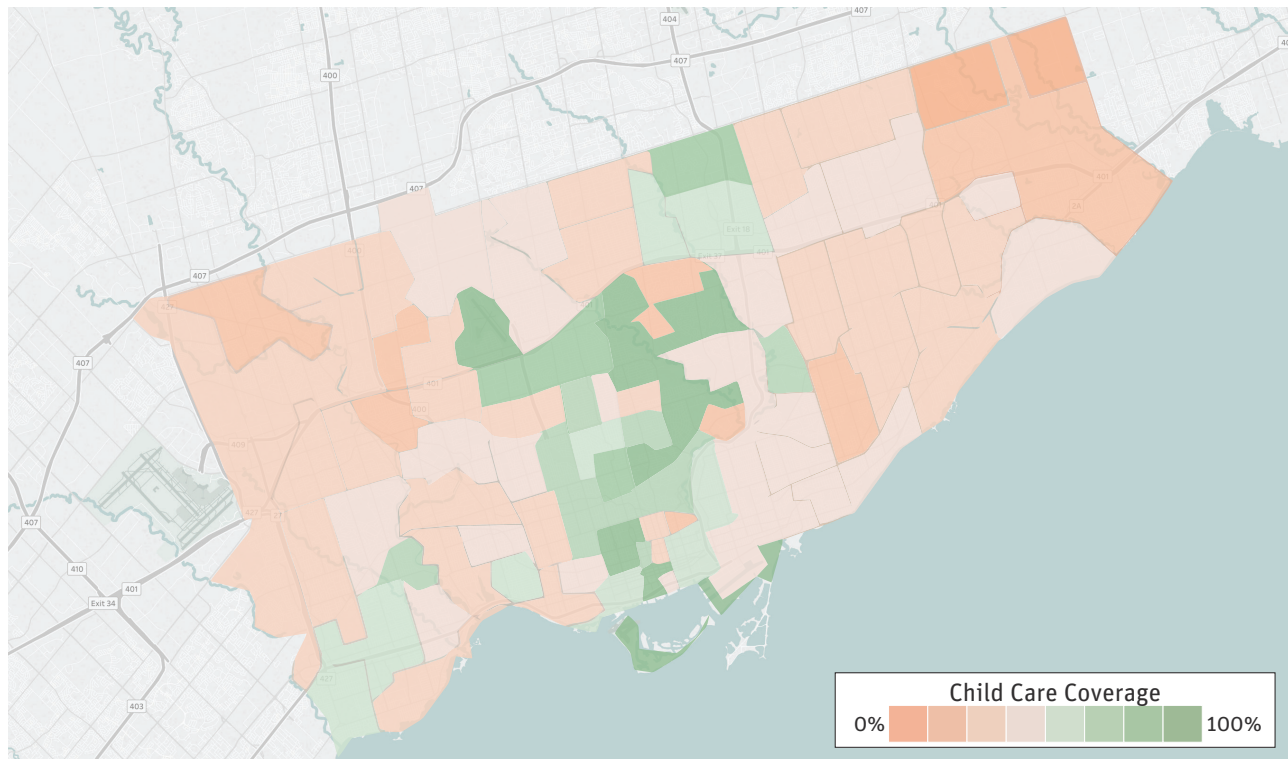
Island of Montreal

The City of Montreal is one of 15 separate municipalities on the Island of Montreal. For the sake of simplicity, all 15 separate municipalities are included in a map of the Island of Montreal as seen in *Figure 4*. The Island of Montreal has one of the highest child care coverage rates (71%) of Canada's metropolitan areas: there are 78,430 licensed spaces available for the 109,740 children who haven't turned five who live there. Only 9% of the spaces on the island are provided through licensed home care, with 91% being provided in centres.

The downtown areas of Old Montreal, the Plateau/Mont-Royal and Westmount have particularly high coverage rates (often well over 100%), which is driven by the small number of children and relatively large number of child care spaces in these postal codes.

While the commuting pattern discussed above—parents finding child care closer to their work downtown—may be partly at play here, coverage rates are high for much of the island. Of the 102 postal codes covered on the island, 80 have a coverage rate of at least 50%.

FIGURE 5 Child care coverage in the City of Toronto



The lowest coverage rates are found in the west end of the island in Senneville, Dollard-des-Ormeaux NW, Lachine West and L'île-Bizard SW. However, even in these postal codes, neighbouring areas have very high coverage rates. For instance, while the coverage rate of L'île-Bizard SW is 0%, residents there may be able to find child care spaces in neighbouring L'île-Bizard NE, where the coverage rate is 120%.

City of Toronto

At 42%, the City of Toronto's coverage rate is much lower than that of Montreal. Toronto's 109,105 children who haven't turned four yet (when they can be enrolled in full-day junior kindergarten) compete for the city's 46,050 licensed spaces for that age group.

The spaces in Toronto are not evenly distributed. Much higher coverage rates, often over 100%, are found in a vein starting downtown and reaching north through the centre of the city but ending at the 401 highway. High coverage starts at Union Station and extends northwards through the Uni-

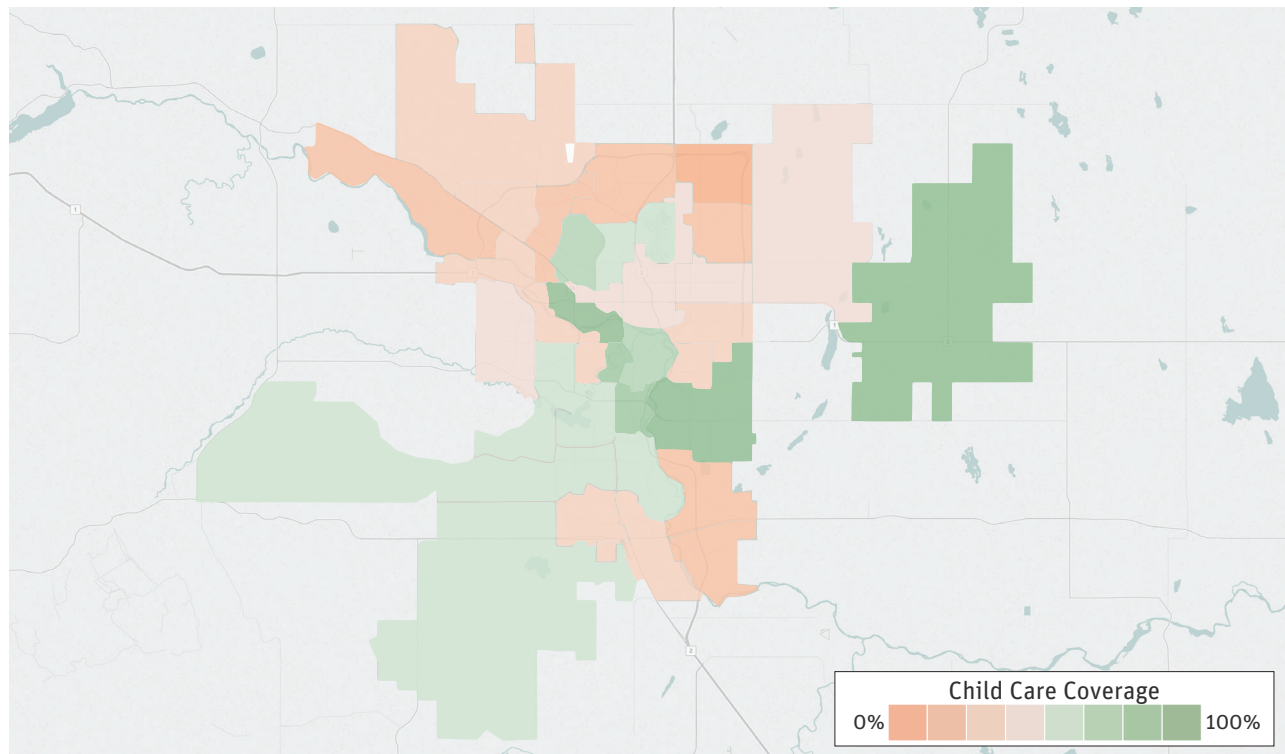
versity of Toronto, then the Annex, and reaching as far north as Lawrence Park and York Mills/Don Mills. However, those higher coverage rates in North York stop at the 401, dropping under 50% in Willowdale, for example north of the 401. The one exception to the Highway 401 coverage wall is the Downsview East/CFB Toronto area where coverage remains over 100%.

Coverage rates are commonly at or below 40% in both the east and west ends of Toronto, which includes Etobicoke, Scarborough, York and much of Downsview and North York.

Toronto much more neatly fits the pattern of having child care focused around the downtown core and much lower coverage in the suburbs, or at least those suburbs contained within the boundaries of the City of Toronto. Interestingly, Vaughan, a northern suburb of Toronto, has among the highest coverage rates (57%) of any big or capital city outside of the set-fee provinces. However, this pattern is not universal, with Mississauga, Toronto's western suburb, having among the lowest coverage rates at 37%.

Toronto workers already have one of the longest commutes in North America; adding children to the mix wouldn't make it any easier. Unfortunately, for parents living or working outside Toronto's central high-coverage zone, that is a much more likely scenario given low coverage in the city's more suburban areas.

FIGURE 6 Child care coverage in the City of Calgary



City of Calgary

Calgary has a coverage rate of 37%, which is slightly lower than Toronto and roughly half of what parents in large Quebec cities experience. Calgary's 78,385 children who haven't turned five share the city's 28,851 licensed child care spaces for non-school-aged children. Over half of Calgary's children live in the postal code with more than three children competing for every-one one space, i.e., they live in the city's child care desert.

Calgary's high coverage rates are concentrated in neighbourhoods along the Bow and Elbow rivers. The higher coverage starts in the north near the University of Calgary and follows the Bow through the city centre. Higher coverage then veers south following the Elbow River through Mission and Elbow Park, but then back over to the Bow River in the Highfield and Lynwood areas.

Neighbourhoods in the southwest of the city, including Lakeview, Braeside, Willow Park and Lake Bonavista, have somewhat lower coverage rates of around 50%. These rates are lower than what is found along the Bow and

Elbow rivers in the centre of the city. However, the southwest of the city fares much better than much of the northern or the southeastern parts of Calgary.

Areas like Cranston or Mackenzie Lake in the southwest have coverage rates of at or below 20% despite large numbers of young children living there, meaning the entire area constitutes a child care desert. A similar situation befalls much of the northern part of the city, where coverage rates of 20% stretch from Tuscany in the northeast through Saddle Ridge just east of the airport.

City of Ottawa

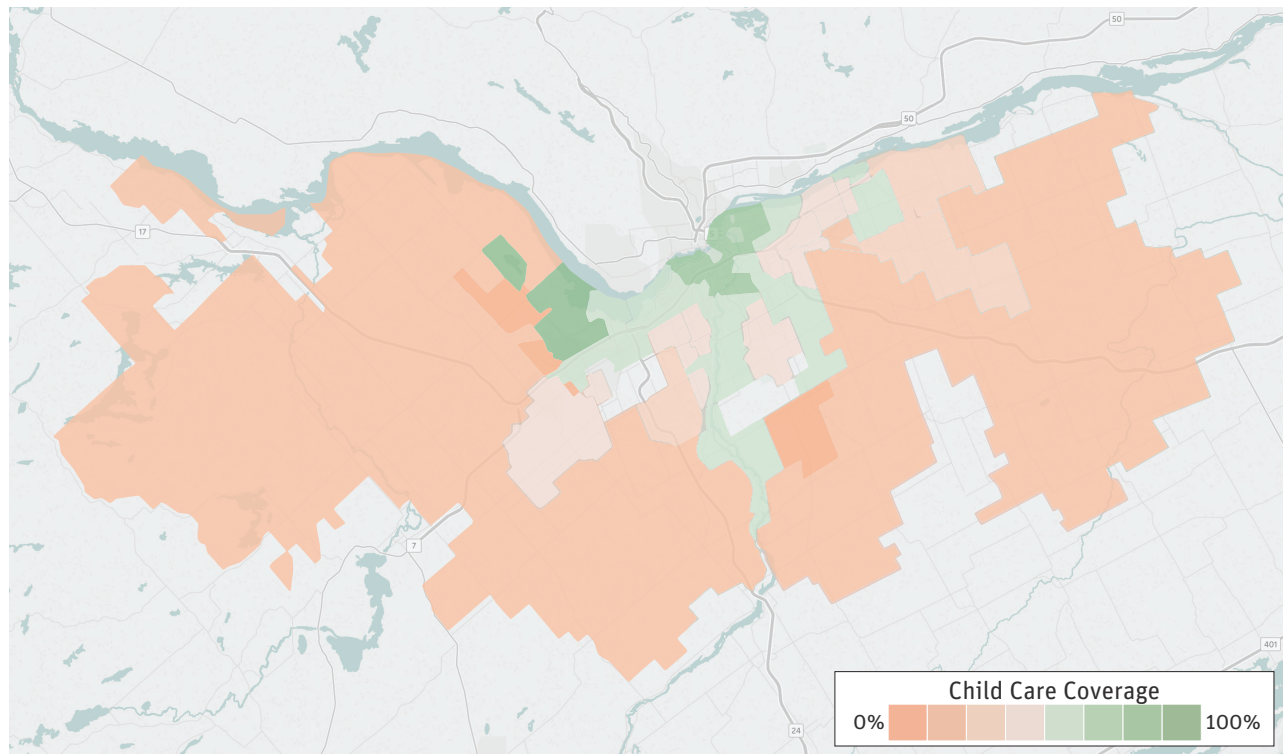
Ottawa has the fifth largest number of young children of all the cities surveyed in this report. There are 21,211 licensed spaces in the city for 41,055 non-school-aged children, yielding a coverage rate of 52%, or one space for every two children. This is higher than the coverage in Toronto or Calgary, but not quite as high as Ottawa's Quebec neighbour to the north, the City of Gatineau, where the coverage rate is 56%. A quarter of Ottawa's children live in a child care desert, as shown in the map (*Figure 7*).

As in other big cities, the best coverage is found in the downtown core that hugs the Ottawa River. However, even at their highest levels, coverage in Ottawa neighbourhoods does not substantially exceed 100%. A band of relatively higher coverage rates starts in the west of the city in Highland Park, stretching through Centretown and east through Rockcliffe Park and Overbrook. Higher coverage rates also move south from Centretown, but not much further than Clarington or Alta Vista.

An interesting second concentration of child care exists in Kanata along March Road as it intersects Highway 416, although coverage rates in the rest of Kanata, Nepean and Barrhaven tend to be lower than 50%. In the east end, coverage rates are also lower from Blackburn hamlet through Orleans, and all the way to Cumberland.

The lowest coverage rates for the city are found in the rural areas on the outskirts of the city where child care deserts are common. This includes the large postal code of KOA that surrounds the city, but also the area around Greely where there are no licensed spaces for the 435 young children that live there. The largely rural nature of these areas likely plays a role in the low coverage rates in that a dispersed child population is harder to serve closer to home.

FIGURE 7 Child care coverage in the City of Ottawa



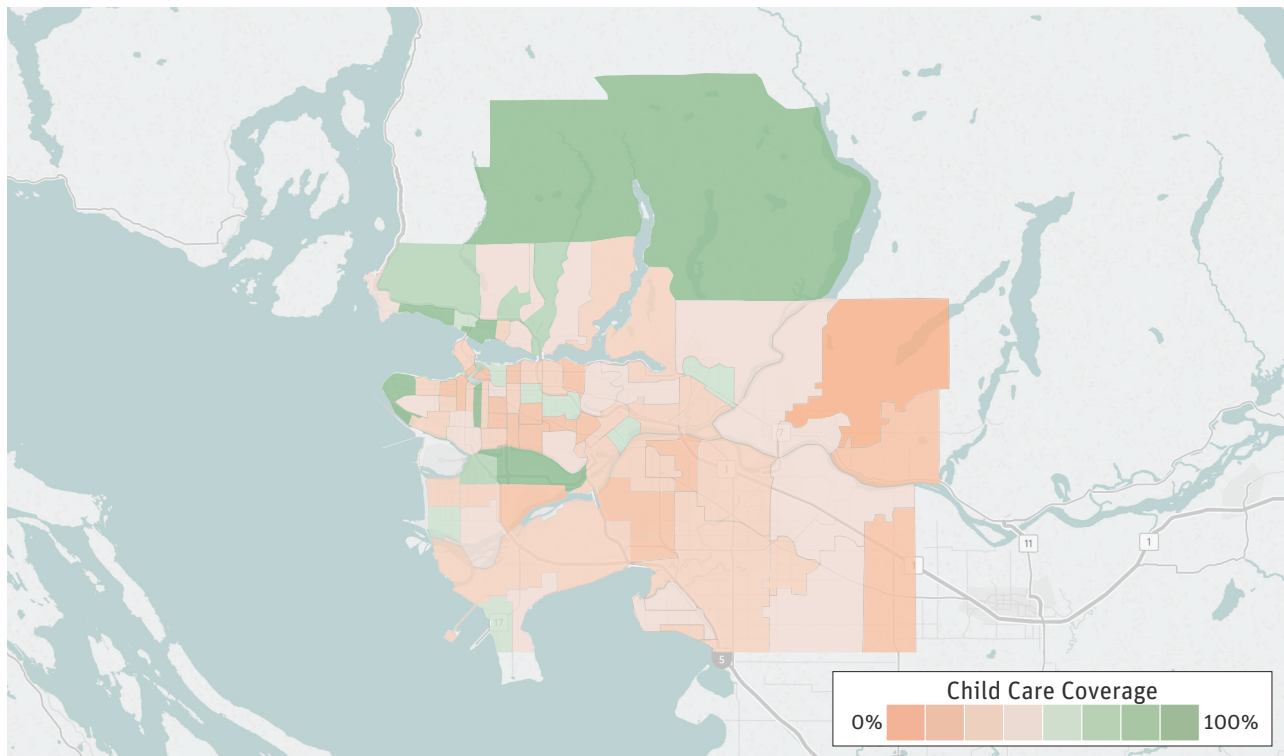
Metro Vancouver

While the individual cities in Metro Vancouver are examined separately earlier in this report, it is worth examining the entire region of Metro Vancouver covering the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). Taken as a whole, Metro Vancouver has a very low coverage rate of 35%, meaning there are three children for every licensed space. Examined slightly differently, out of Metro Vancouver's 116,000 children, 62,000 (more than half) live in a postal code that qualifies as a child care desert.

Coverage rates are particularly low in the east end of Metro Vancouver, with up to 10 children in eastern Maple Ridge and Langley vying for a single licensed space. Much of Delta, White Rock and Pitt Meadows have three to five children per licensed space.

Despite its large number of young children, Surrey has one of the lowest coverage rates (25%) of any large city in Canada. Its 29,080 children have access to only 7,325 licensed child care spaces. Almost all of the city is a child care desert, with only the southern sections nearest to White Rock having

FIGURE 8 Child care coverage in Metro Vancouver



slightly higher coverage rates of 42%, meaning there are two licensed spaces for every five children, slightly above the desert threshold.

Much of Burnaby is a child care desert. In Vancouver proper, Kitsilano, Kensington and Riley Park are all largely child care deserts. On the other hand, the University of British Columbia area fares much better, with one licensed space per child. Similar high coverage rates are found in Richmond North and the southern sections of West Vancouver and North Vancouver.

Coverage rates by community size

BEYOND BIG CITIES, the provinces have quite divergent coverage rates depending on community size, with generally lower rates in rural postal codes compared to larger centres of over 100,000 people. This report takes a closer examination of these trends using four community sizes as defined by Statistics Canada: rural areas, small towns with populations under 30,000, larger towns with between 30,000 and 99,000 people, and urban centres with over 100,000 people.

The highest provincial coverage rate is found in Quebec (59%), where there are 444,910 children (the second highest number after Ontario) who might potentially be looking for child care spaces. The coverage rate for the largest cities (with populations over 100,000 people) is notably higher at 66% than in smaller cities, towns and rural areas. As seen above, the cities in and around the Island of Montreal have higher coverage in the low 70% range, but Quebec City and Gatineau bring the city average down with their coverage rates at about 60%. Quebec's smaller cities, towns and rural areas have remarkably similar coverage rates of between 44% and 49%. Quebec has the highest rural coverage rate of any other province.

Three rural Quebec postal codes stand out. The Nunavik Inuit area and James Bay Cree communities along the east coast of James Bay contained by the postal code JOM XXX have a remarkably high coverage rate of 64%, which is better than the urban centres of Gatineau or Quebec City. That these

vast and sparsely populated communities can provide such a high coverage rate is likely unique in Canada, although it accords well with other research on the important role of child care in this region.¹⁶ Also in Quebec, the rural Mistassini (Chambord) region of postal code G0W XXX and the neighbouring rural Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean postal code of G0V have coverage rates of 69% and 68% respectively, providing child care coverage equivalent to what is found in the suburbs of Montreal.

The second highest coverage rates by province or territory are found in Yukon (57%). The higher coverage may in part be due to the more flexible licensing arrangements. Centres are licensed for total capacity and many of them provide care for both school-aged children (in after-school care) and non-school-aged children. In situations where age differentiation isn't possible, all spaces are included, likely boosting the non-school-aged space count. This territory is sparsely populated, with 79% of its 2,145 children who haven't turned five living in the capital, Whitehorse. The coverage rate in that city is 61% and Whitehorse represents the only community in the territory in the "30,000 population" category. The remainder of the territory is rural and has a lower than 39% coverage rate.

The next highest coverage rate (46%) is found in P.E.I. The only city in the province with between 30,000 and 99,000 inhabitants, Charlottetown, has a coverage rate of 74%, but only 1,855 non-school-aged children to accommodate. In fact, 63% of the young children in P.E.I. live in rural postal codes where the coverage rate is much lower at 33%. Child care coverage in P.E.I. can largely be determined by whether a family does or does not live in Charlottetown.

Nova Scotia is ranked fourth on child care coverage (41%) for its 41,995 non-school-aged children. A third of young children in the province live in the Halifax area, the only place there are more than 100,000 people. The coverage rate in Halifax is 52%. On the other hand, half of the children (48%) in Nova Scotia live in rural areas where the coverage is a much lower 34%, dragging down the average for the province.

New Brunswick comes in fifth with a coverage rate of 40%. Of all the 34,380 non-school-aged children in New Brunswick, most (58%) live in postal codes designated as rural. The child care coverage rate in New Brunswick's rural areas (31%) is the lowest of the four community sizes. The 4,755 young children in Moncton, the only city with over 100,000 inhabitants, have a 51% child care coverage rate.

British Columbia ranks sixth in Canada with a coverage rate of 37%. Although its coverage is slightly higher than in Alberta and Ontario, all three

provincial averages are very close. The range in British Columbia's coverage rates remains fairly compressed irrespective of community size, falling between 32% and 39%.

At 36%, Alberta has slightly lower child care coverage than British Columbia, although there is more variation when the coverage rate is broken down by community size. The only two cities with over 100,000 inhabitants, Calgary and Edmonton, have a combined coverage rate of 43% and they house over half of all the young children in the province. Alberta's smaller towns with populations under 100,000 (e.g., Red Deer, Fort McMurray and Lethbridge) have coverage rates of only 31%, a fair amount lower compared to what is found in the bigger cities. Rural Alberta fares even worse with a coverage rate of 24%, a little more than half the coverage parents would find in Calgary and Edmonton.

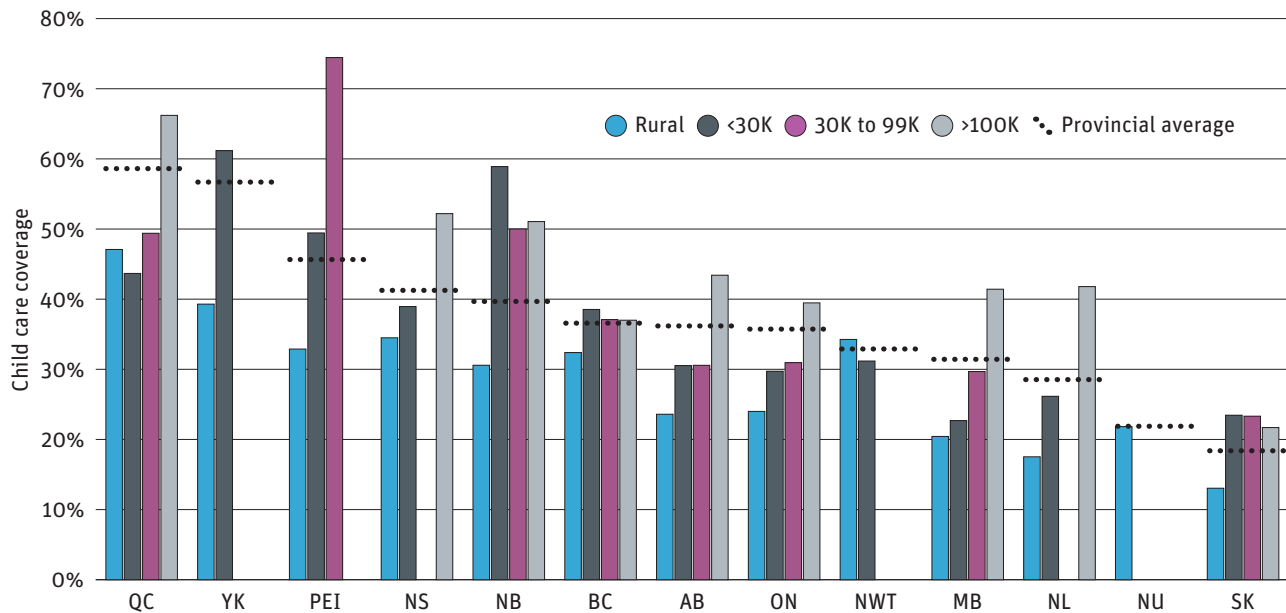
Ontario ranks eighth among the provinces and territories with a coverage rate of 36%, which is similar to rates in B.C. and Alberta. Ontario has the highest proportion of children who live in big cities, where the coverage rate is 39%. Smaller Ontario towns with under 100,000 inhabitants have a coverage rate of 30%. Rural Ontario's coverage sits lower still at 24%.

The Northwest Territories ranks ninth in Canada with a coverage rate of 33%. Yellowknife, with a coverage rate of 31%, is the only town that isn't classified as rural and half of the territory's children live there. The coverage rate is higher in the rural parts of the territory at 34%, an unusual reversal as in most other provinces or territories, coverage rates are lower in rural areas.

Manitoba is in 10th place among Canadian provinces and territories with a child care coverage rate of 31%. A gap exists between Winnipeg, the only city in the province with over 100,000 inhabitants, and the rest of the province. The coverage rate of 41% in Winnipeg is mid-range compared to other cities in Canada. Half of all young children in the province live in the Manitoba capital. A third of young Manitoban children live in rural areas where the coverage rate (20%) is half of what it is in Winnipeg. Brandon sits in the middle with a coverage rate of 30%, being the only town with 30,000 to 99,000 inhabitants. Other smaller towns like Flin Flon, Selkirk or The Pas have a coverage rate of 23% and fare little better than rural areas. In other words, in Winnipeg there are two spots for every five children, but in smaller towns and rural areas there is only one spot for every five children.

Newfoundland and Labrador is in 11th place with an average child care coverage rate of 28% and wide variations between communities of different sizes. For instance, 43% of young children in Newfoundland live in rural areas where there is little licensed child care, resulting in a coverage rate of

FIGURE 9 Provincial child care coverage by community size



only 18%. However, 39% of young children live in St. John’s, the only city with a population over 100,000 and a child care coverage rate at 42%, more than twice as high as in rural areas.

All of the postal codes in Nunavut are considered rural and the child care coverage rate for the territory is 22%. This is half the coverage rate that is found in rural Yukon and is among the lowest coverage rates in the country outside of Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan has the lowest provincial coverage rate in the country (18%). Unlike in other provinces, Saskatchewan’s larger cities with populations over 100,000, namely Regina and Saskatoon, fare little better than its smaller towns. The child care coverage rates in Regina and Saskatoon are similar to the rural areas of Nunavut and rank among the lowest of Canada’s large cities. The rural areas of Saskatchewan, where over 30,000 young children live (42% of all young children in the province), have the lowest coverage rates (13%) of any rural area in the country. In other words, in rural Saskatchewan there is one licensed child care space for every 10 children.

Conclusion

JUST AS CHILD care fees vary substantially across the country, so too does the availability of licensed child care spaces, creating the highly inequitable situation in which a person's access to child care depends largely on where they live. Indeed, the variability of child care coverage across the country is larger than the variability for child care fees. Even in provinces where fees are set by the government (Quebec, Manitoba and P.E.I.), accessibility to child care (coverage rates) often depends on the size of the community, not actual need.

As noted in earlier reports, child care fees can put a substantial burden on parents. However, the shortage of licensed spaces and the presence of long waiting lists suggest that the stress of finding a child care space can be equally challenging. Policy-makers looking to address the shortage of affordable child care spaces in Canada need to consider the extreme variability of child care coverage rates across and within different urban and rural areas when developing policy. Provincial efforts to improve child care affordability should be combined with initiatives to increase the number of licensed spaces, particularly in low coverage areas, and to ensure that new and existing spaces provide quality care.

Appendix

THE BASIC UNIT of analysis for this study is the Forward Sortation Area (FSA), the first three characters of a postal code, from which all other totals and ratios in this report are derived. FSAs do not necessarily align with municipal boundaries. When an FSA overlaps several municipal boundaries, it is included within the municipality where most of its full postal codes apply. This is relevant in particular to *Figure 1*. One result of this method is that in municipalities that abut each other, like in the Greater Toronto Area, some FSA are counted in two municipalities, although this double counting is avoided in other aggregations of the data. When an FSA contains full postal codes that sit at different community size designations, as in *Figure 9*, the FSA is considered to be in the community with the most full postal codes.

The licensed child care space counts underlying this report and the associated mapping were obtained largely from publicly accessible provincial websites that act as guides for parents or list inspections of child care facilities. *Table 2* provides a list of those sources by province. The data for New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories and Prince Edward Island were obtained directly from provincial authorities due to insufficient website data. Data were downloaded in March and April of 2018.

Space counts are based on licensed capacity, which is not necessarily the same as operational capacity. The number of spaces a site is licensed for may not be the same as the number of spaces that it actually operates. This may be due to staffing or space constraints. It may be due to children being away or to a lack of demand. If there is a difference between the two, oper-

TABLE 2 List of sources for child care spaces

Province	Source for child care spaces data
British Columbia	Fraser Region: https://www.fraserhealth.ca/health-info/health-topics/child-care/find-daycares/ Vancouver Island: https://www.healthspace.ca/Clients/VIHA/VIHA_Website.nsf/CCFL-Frameset Vancouver, Coastal: https://inspections.vcha.ca/ChildCare/Table?SortMode=FacilityName&page=2&PageSize=50000 Interior: https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/ChildCareFacilities/Pages/FindAFacility.aspx Northern: https://www.healthspace.ca/Clients/NHA/NHA_Website.nsf/ccfl-frameset Additional postal code information was obtained from: http://maps.gov.bc.ca/ess/hm/ccf/
Alberta	http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/oldfusion/ChildCareLookup.cfm
Saskatchewan	Obtained directly from provincial government
Manitoba	https://direct3.gov.mb.ca/daycare/fs/fs.nsf/welcome?OpenForm&Lang=1
Ontario	http://www.iaccess.gov.on.ca/LCCWWeb/childcare/search.xhtml
Quebec	https://geoegl.msp.gouv.qc.ca/mfa/recherche-region.php
Nova Scotia	https://nsbr-online-services.gov.ns.ca/DCSONline/ECDS/loadSearchPage.action
New Brunswick	Home Care: http://www1.gnb.ca/0000/Daycarecq/indexCDC-e.asp Centres: http://www1.gnb.ca/0000/Daycarecq/index-e.asp Centre age data was supplemented with data directly from the provincial government
Prince Edward Island	Obtained directly from provincial government
Newfoundland and Labrador	Centres: http://www.childcare.gov.nl.ca/public/ccr/childcare/?apply_table_filters=1&keyword= Homes: http://www.childcare.gov.nl.ca/public/ccr/search
Yukon	www.hss.gov.yk.ca/pdf/licensedchildcarecentres.pdf
Northwest Territories	Obtained directly from provincial government
Nunavut	http://gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/licensed_childcare_facilities_2017-18.pdf

ational capacity is almost always lower. Using licensed capacity will tend to make coverage ratios higher than they may be in reality.

All spaces whether full-time or part-time are included.

The number of children who haven't turned four in Ontario or who haven't turned five in all other provinces was obtained from the 2016 census.¹⁷ Note that the count of children is from 2016 but the count of space is from 2018. In areas where the child population is growing, this will tend to make coverage rates lower than they may be had a complete count of children been available for 2018 down to the forward sortation area level, which it wasn't.

Ontario provides free full day junior kindergarten for four-year-olds. Prior to 2014, these children would have been considered preschoolers, and if child care was required, parents would have paid a market rate for those

spaces. Ontario is the only province that includes four-year-olds as part of its public school system and as such the age range for non-school-aged children in Ontario is restricted to children who haven't turned four while for the rest of the country it remains children who are not yet five years old.

In several provinces the exact number spaces devoted to particular age groups is not prescribed. Instead, the maximum total number of spaces in a given location is set, but the breakdown by age is not. This makes differentiating between non-school-aged and school-aged children difficult. When it isn't clear how many spaces are devoted to a particular age group in a centre, for instance, if a child care centre provides care to both preschooler (non-school-aged) and after-school care (school aged), the total number of spaces is still included. This will tend to overestimate the coverage rate where this occurs.

In the home care setting, homes can choose to take various age combinations, although as the children in care become younger the number of children allowed in a given home declines. A direct survey of individual licensed homes was conducted in the large cities in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, as well as with child care agencies in Ontario, Alberta, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland as part of the 2017 child care fee survey. On average, there tends to be four non-school-aged children per home. That is what is assumed for homes in this report.

In many provinces, homes are not individually licensed, but instead are represented by home care agencies and in those cases the exact location of the homes isn't known. However, the areas of service for agencies is known, as is the number of homes or spaces, or both. In this report, home care spaces provided through an agency are distributed in proportion to the non-school-aged children in the areas served by that agency. For example, if an agency serves two areas, one with 100 children and the other with 900 children, 90% of the spaces represented by that agency will be allocated to the second area, again assuming four non-school-aged children per home.

In Alberta, some home agencies, group family child care programs and centers are regulated, but not "accredited". Irrespective of accreditation, all regulated spaces are included. If in doubt as to whether particular types of spaces are included or not (in Alberta or elsewhere), if spaces can be found in the websites specified in *Table 2*, they were included in this report and the associated maps. If those spaces cannot be found on those websites, they have not been included.

Notes

- 1** Lynell Anderson, Morna Ballantyne and Martha Friendly, “Child care for us all: Universal child care for Canadians by 2020,” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, December 2016: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/child-care-all-us>
- 2** David Macdonald and Martha Friendly, “Time Out: Child Care Fees in Canada in 2017,” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, December 2017: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/timeout>
- 3** The term “child care desert” is borrowed from the Center for American Progress and Child Care Aware of America to describe areas of the country where the supply of quality child care doesn’t meet the demand for child care.
- 4** The most recent at time of publication was Friendly, M., Larson, E., Feltham, L., Grady, B., Forer, B., Jones, M. (2018). Early childhood education and care in Canada 2016. Toronto: Child-care Resource and Research Unit.
- 5** Gordon Cleveland, Affordability for all: Making licensed child care affordable in Ontario, February 2018, pg 44–47 http://www.childcarepolicy.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/AFFORDABLE-FOR-ALL_Full-Report_Final.pdf
- 6** See City of Toronto, Child Care Growth Strategy – Phase One Implementation (2017–2019), October 6, 2017, <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/cd/bgrd/backgroundfile-107586.pdf>.
- 7** For a summary of the agreements signed as of February 2018, see Ministry of Finance, Government of Canada, Budget 2018 Equality + Growth: A strong middle class, February 27, 2018, pg 50–51. British Columbia committed to the creation of 22,000 new spaces in its February 2018 policy announcement, Child Care B.C. Caring for Kids, Lifting up Families: The path to universal child care.
- 8** Plantenga, Scheele, Peeters, Rastrigina, Piscová and Thévenon, Barcelona Targets Revisited: Compilation of briefing notes, November 25, 2013, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department C: Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs ([http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/workshop/join/2013/493037/IPOL-FEMM_AT\(2013\)493037_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/workshop/join/2013/493037/IPOL-FEMM_AT(2013)493037_EN.pdf))
- 9** These targets were evaluated at the country level with seven countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom) fully meeting them by 2011, although more countries met one of the two age related goals Ibid. pg 11.

10 Ibid. pg 11.

11 Malik and Hamm, Mapping America's Child Care Deserts, August 30th, 2017, Center for American Progress (<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/08/30/437988/mapping-americas-child-care-deserts/>)

12 Malik and Hamm, Mapping America's Child Care Deserts, August 30th, 2017, Center for American Progress (<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/08/30/437988/mapping-americas-child-care-deserts/>)

13 Janneke Plantenga, Alexandra Scheele, Jan Peeters, Olga Rastrigina, Magdalena Piscová and Oliver Thévenon, Barcelona Targets Revisited: Compilation of briefing notes, November 25, 2013, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department C: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs ([http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/workshop/join/2013/493037/IPOL-FEMM_AT\(2013\)493037_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/workshop/join/2013/493037/IPOL-FEMM_AT(2013)493037_EN.pdf))

14 David Macdonald and Martha Friendly, Time Out: Child care fees in Canada, 2017, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, December 2017.

15 The correlation between the coverage rate and the proportion of spaces in licensed home care is $r = -0.1312$ for FSAs located in the cities listed in Figure 1.

16 Jasmin Thomas, Nunavik's Labour Market and Educational Attainment Paradox, Canadian Centre for Living Standards, July 2016.

17 Canada 2016 Census, Data tables: Age (in Single Years) and Average Age (127) and Sex (3) for the Population of Canada and Forward Sortation Areas, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=109790&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2016&THEME=115&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>



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