

21 Most children receive some form of non-parental childcare

The availability, cost, and quality of non-parental childcare have been long-standing issues. To address this, the federal government committed to building a publicly funded childcare system to offer affordable, licensed childcare to families through the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan in 2021.¹ Provisions for fee reduction were a central part of the multi-pronged plan. Provinces and territories agreed to cut parent fees by 50% on average by December 2022 and reduce fees to an average of \$10 per day by 2025–26. A different agreement was signed with Quebec, where childcare spaces were already being offered below \$10 per day under its own family policy.

In 2023, the majority (56.1%) of children in Canada under the age of six were in some form of licensed or unlicensed non-parental childcare.² This is down slightly from 59.9% in 2019. Just over one-third (34.3%) of children in this age group were in a licensed childcare centre, preschool, or *centre de la petite enfance* (or CPE, the name used for non-profit early learning and child care centres in Quebec).³ This proportion was up slightly from 31.0% in 2019. The use of family childcare homes^a fell from 12.2% in 2019 to 9.0% in 2023.

In 2023, children under age six in Quebec have the highest likelihood of being in some form of non-parental childcare (75.0%).² Outside Quebec, children under six living in Yukon Territory were the most likely to be in non-parental childcare in 2023 (65.6%), followed by those in New Brunswick (60.7%). Conversely, children in Nunavut (32.2%) and Ontario (47.8%) were the least likely to be in non-parental childcare. In 2023, children were most likely to be in a daycare centre, preschool, or childcare centre (CPE) in Yukon Territory (56.7%) and Quebec (49.5%), and least likely in Nunavut (14.0%).³

Across Canada, infant spaces were the least common kind of licensed and regulated space and remain the most expensive. For example, in 2023 the median infant childcare fees (for children under age two) were the highest in Richmond (British Columbia) and Toronto (over \$900 per month), followed by Markham (Ontario) at \$818.⁴ Across all age groups, cities in Quebec offer the most affordable childcare, but other cities (St. John's, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, and Iqaluit) are following closely. Quebec has had its own family policy separate from the rest of Canada since the late 1990s, which includes affordable childcare.



Why this matters

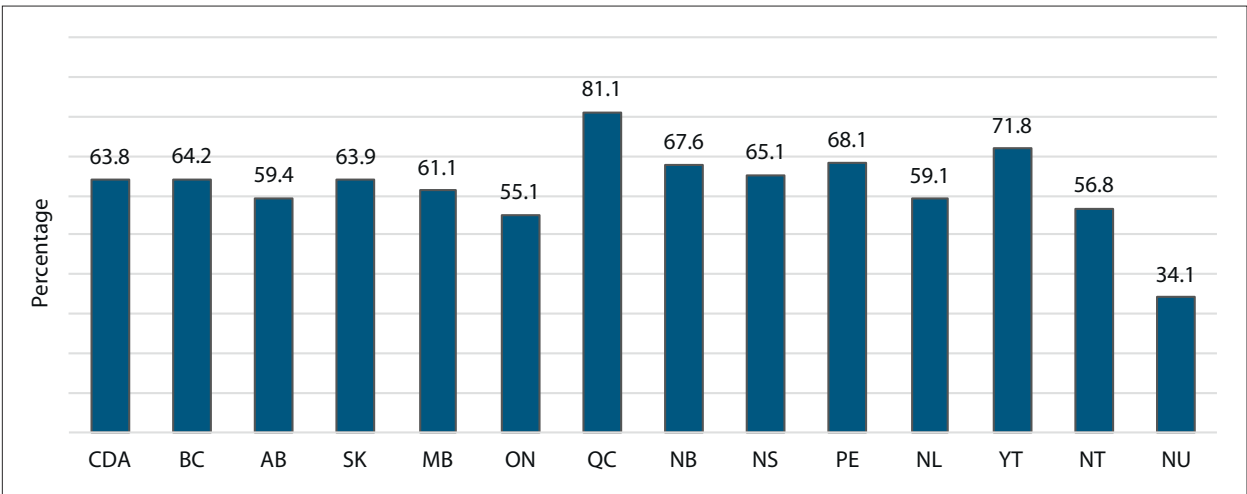
Although family still provides much of the care children in Canada receive, licensed non-parental childcare has played an important role in helping families manage their work and family responsibilities. The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan has been successful in reducing childcare costs.

Reduced fees have increased the demand for regulated childcare. Shortages of licensed spaces is an ongoing issue, with the percentage of parents who used childcare and reported having difficulty finding it increasing between 2019 (36%) and 2023 (49%).⁵ Among parents with children under age six who were not using

childcare, more than one-quarter (26%) said that their child was on a waitlist. Parents' difficulties in finding care has a negative impact on their working life, including having to change their work or study schedules (34%), work fewer hours (33%), or postpone their return to work (31%).

The quality of care is also an ongoing concern, especially when services are provided by for-profit childcare centres. For example, in 2022-23, 58.3% of commercial childcare centres in Quebec failed the educational quality evaluation prepared by the Ministry of Families, compared with a failure rate of 12.3% in non-profit centres.⁶

Percentage of children under age six who received childcare from someone other than their parent or legal guardian, Canada and provinces and territories, 2023



Source: Statistics Canada. (2023, December 5). Table 42-10-0004-01 Use of early learning and child care arrangements, children aged 0 to 5 years.²

^a This refers to care provided in a caregiver's private residence. Finding Quality Child Care. (n.d.). Types of child care. <https://findingqualitychildcare.ca/child-care-in-canada/types-of-child-care>



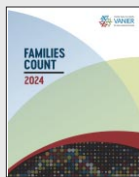
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Families Count 2024 is a publication of the Vanier Institute of the Family that provides accurate and timely information on families and family life in Canada. Written in plain language, it features chapters on diverse topics and trends that have shaped families in Canada. Its four sections (Family Structure, Family Work, Family Identity, and Family Wellbeing) are guided by the [Family Diversities and Wellbeing Framework](#).

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