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NEWS RELEASE

Canadian families need better, more affordable child care

Direct funding of child care facilities will have greatest positive impact

Montreal – The large majority of employed Canadian mothers use child care, and it is the mother's income that determines the amount families spend on nonparental care, according to a new study from the Institute for Research on Public Policy.

The study, "New Evidence about Child Care in Canada: Use Patterns, Affordability, and Quality," found that while nearly 80 percent of preschool children with employed or studying mothers receive nonparental care regularly, much of Canada's existing child care services fail to provide adequate stimulation. The authors show that outside Quebec average annual spending on child care by Canadians with preschool children is \$4,500 for all families in which the mother is employed part-time and \$6,900 for families in which the mother is employed full-time. Moreover, the cost of good quality regulated care can be \$9,000 or more.

"If the mother's earnings are low, families may decide to patch together arrangements of dubious quality, at a low cost," says author Gordon Cleveland. "In many cases, it will involve a different employment situation for the mother, part-time work, or shift work, in order to decrease the financial burden of nonparental care."

The quality of child care available to Canadians is too often inadequate to support child development. Although the vast majority of regulated care in Canada is safe, much child care does not optimally develop children's cognitive, language, behavioural, social and motor skills, according to the authors, who note that, on average, the quality of unregulated care is even lower.

"Given that mothers are in the labour force to stay, and that Canadian children are overwhelmingly in nonparental care for significant portions of each week, we need to view parental care and nonparental care as complements rather than as substitutes," says Cleveland, who calls for direct funding of child care facilities, linked to improvements in quality for children. "Right now, families cannot afford the high costs of good-quality nonparental child care. We need to make positive experiences in early learning and child care more affordable."

"New Evidence about Child Care in Canada: Use Patterns, Affordability, and Quality," by Gordon Cleveland, Barry Forer, Douglas Hyatt, Christa Japel and Michael Krashinsky can be downloaded free of charge from www.irpp.org.

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