

# 1

## A Smart Start for School and for Life



**F**amilies raising young children need all the support they can get. In Canada we are making progress. Mothers are supported with universal pre- and postnatal care. All babies are screened at birth. Newborn home visiting is widespread and family centres are found in most neighbourhoods. It is between the end of parental leave and the beginning of schooling that supports break down and public policy is confused about what to do. Ensuring that all young children enjoy the best preschool that we can devise is Canada's unfinished business. This report is intended to show where we are, what we know and what we can do to finish the job.

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### Good education cares

Ask Jacob<sup>a</sup> what he likes best, and the answer is “school.” Indeed, Jacob looks like any other 5-year-old going off to kindergarten—but his school is a little different. The Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre at Bruce Jr. Public School in east Toronto is designed to show how good public policy can affect good on-the-ground practice. Unlike his counterparts attending kindergarten in nearby schools, Jacob attends a program that combines kindergarten and child care. His is a seamless day packed with music, stories, reading and math games, crafts and outdoor play, all fuelled by a hot lunch and tasty snacks. Meanwhile, his mother, Magela, is down the hall in a colourful room filled with adult-sized easy chairs and children's play centres.

Magela, new to Canada and the mother of four boys ranging in age from 3 months to 7 years, credits the centre with her “sanity.” “At home all day with the children I was stressed and depressed. Here the children spend time doing

<sup>a</sup> Actual interview. Names changed for privacy.

<b>45%</b>	of all couples are childless
<b>1 in 2</b>	Quebec children < age 4 in preschool
<b>1 in 5</b>	Children < age 4 living in Prairie provinces attending preschool
<b>One</b>	Age when children in Sweden and Demark are entitled to preschool
<b>66%</b>	Mothers with preschool aged children who are employed
<b>1 in 4</b>	Children with vulnerabilities at school entry
<b>1 in 2</b>	Adults under 45 who don't vote
<b>\$2.62 billion</b>	Annual public costs for each cohort of school dropouts

things they love, and I have the support of other parents and the advice of the staff.”

Jacob’s classroom doesn’t look much different from a traditional kindergarten or child care setting, but behind the scenes a great deal more is happening. Teachers, early childhood educators, educational assistants and parenting staff work as a team to create a learning environment incorporating the best traditions of kindergarten, early childhood education and family supports. Children do not bounce from child care to kindergarten and back again; instead, they spend their day in a consistent environment, with the same adults, all with the same expectations. Parents leave for work feeling secure about their child’s well-being, spend time in their child’s class or drop into the family centre to spend time with their baby and to catch up with other parents and caregivers.

It’s a place where everyone in the family learns. Toddler Jonah became jealous of the attention his mother had to give baby Lucas. “Here I can relax and breastfeed the baby,” says Magela. “Jonah is too

busy with his friends and toys to mind. Marie [the family centre’s seasoned early childhood educator] advised me how to deal with his anger and I can see how much his self-esteem has improved.”

Magela’s children are among several thousand who have taken part in Toronto First Duty, a project designed to combine the three service silos—regulated child care, kindergarten and parenting supports—into a single, accessible early childhood program. The goal is to respond simultaneously to two pressing social needs: giving children the smart start they need for school and for life, while at the same time supporting parents while they work, pursue their own education or take care of other family members. The project’s initial focus was on children attending junior and senior kindergarten. In response to family needs, it now includes younger children and provides full-day, year-round programming for school-age children as well.

Since its inception in 2000, Toronto First Duty has inspired similar experiments in communities from Atlantic Canada to British Columbia, and in places as far away as Australia. Visitors to the school often remark, “I wish we could afford this.” They are told: “You can. We receive no more resources than any other school in the community. We just use them differently.” From a financial viewpoint, this is the beauty of the integrated early childhood program; instead of fragmented administrative and funding structures vying, and often paying twice, for the same children and families, the program combines staff, facilities, equipment, supplies and administration to create a financially-efficient program where parents want to send their children.

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### The child care dilemma

*How do we know what parents want?* This is a legitimate question. A cross-country series of focus groups indicated that when it comes to child care, parents get what they can, rather than what they want. “Parents engage in a social and financial calculus to determine whether one of them stays home instead of working ‘to pay for daycare,’ whether they avoid daycare costs by working opposite shifts so that one parent is always home or whether they wade through the range of possibilities—from

having grandma look after the children to placing the child on a child care waiting list immediately upon conception.”<sup>1</sup>

However they agonize, most parents opt for child care. A 2008 survey by the Canadian Council of Learning found two-thirds of parents of young children use some form of child care on a regular basis.<sup>2</sup> The growth in the use of child care is not just an urban phenomenon; it is even more pronounced in rural areas. Information from Statistics Canada from 1994–95 found that child care was used by 36.3 percent of rural children. By 2002–2003, that rate had grown to 52.4 percent.<sup>3</sup> While child care usage increased, so did the number of spaces, doubling across Canada to almost one million in 2011, with Quebec accounting for almost half the total.

But child care programs are also expensive. Except in Quebec, with its vaunted \$7-a-day cost to parents, child care elsewhere keeps getting pricier. By July 2011, the Consumer Price Index rose by 3.1 percent over 2010. The average cost of child care across the country went up by 4.3 percent, while other consumer services fell by 0.4 percent.<sup>4</sup> Use of child care centres is dependent on availability

and costs. Parents in Quebec are more likely than parents elsewhere to use child care centres for their children. Canadian parents with higher income are also most likely to enrol their children in centres.<sup>5</sup>

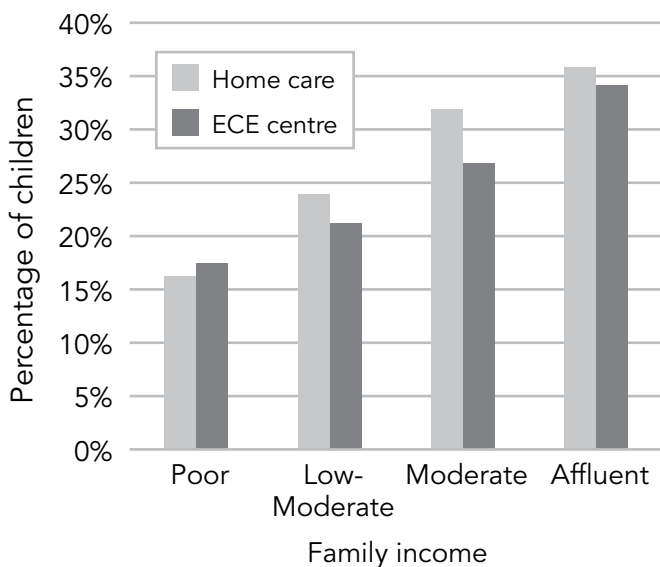
Child care numbers do not factor in the majority of 5-year-olds (99.2%) and the many 4-year-olds (48%)<sup>6</sup> who regularly attend kindergarten, or their younger siblings in preschool programs. Also not counted are children whose parents can afford to supplement their development with sports camps and music, dance and art instruction. The rest make do, observes the report from the focus groups, “displaying a tenacious resourcefulness, often patching together services and supports with limited means to pay for them. It’s like they perform quiet acts of heroism, day in and day out.”<sup>7</sup>

### The loop in the public debate

Parents use a number of different programs to cover their work hours and provide their children with opportunities to learn and socialize with others, but it is child care that gets the attention. Controversy surrounds child care. Is it good or bad for its young

FIGURE 1.1

### Percentage of children ages 0–5 years in non-parental care by family income and child care type

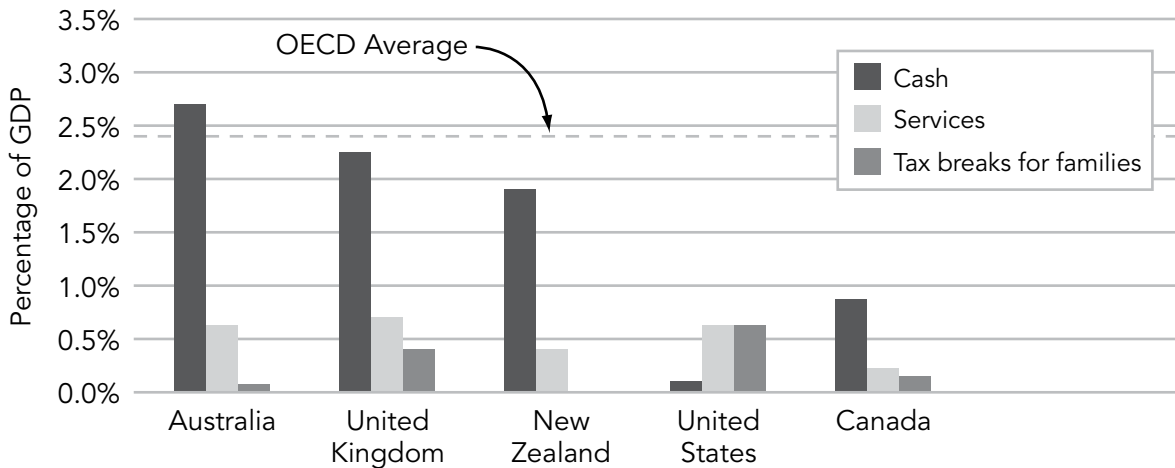


Access to, and affordability of, child-care services influence parents’ child care decisions. The availability of government-regulated child care varies across Canada, from almost one space for every two children in Quebec, to one space for every five children in the Prairie provinces.<sup>8</sup> Family income also directs parents’ child care options. The less affluent the family, the less likely their children are to attend an ECE centre.<sup>9</sup>

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada. National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. Cycle 8, 2008–2009. Special tabulation.

FIGURE 1.2

### Comparison of public spending on families in five Anglo-American countries as a percentage of GDP



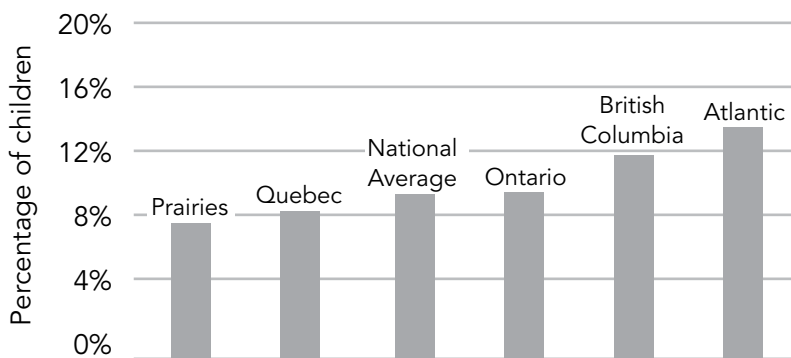
Note: Public spending shown only includes supports that are exclusively for families (e.g., child payments and allowances, parental leave benefits and child care support).

Source: OECD. (2007).

FIGURE 1.3

### Incidence of absolute poverty among children

% of children ages 0–17 who live in households that cannot buy a subsistence-level basket of goods and services in five Canadian regions, 2008



Canada spends one-quarter less on cash and family benefits than the OECD average. Payments have not kept pace with living costs, exacerbating inequality and poverty rates over the past 10 years. Canada now ranks 16th out of 22 OECD countries in terms of poverty. The poverty rate for children has remained stagnant the last two decades.<sup>10</sup> The exception is Quebec. Provincial legislation, adopted in 2004, sets a schedule for poverty reduction, backed by supplementary child health benefits and a holistic family policy, which combines parental leaves with family allowances and child care for children up to 12 years of age. High job availability from the natural resource economy accounts in part for the lower child poverty rate in the Prairie provinces.

Source: Statistics Canada in Fortin, P. (2010, September 23).

attendees? Some ask if we, as a country, can afford it, while others claim we cannot afford to be without it. But for over a million families, the quest to find and keep child care determines their socioeconomic well-being.

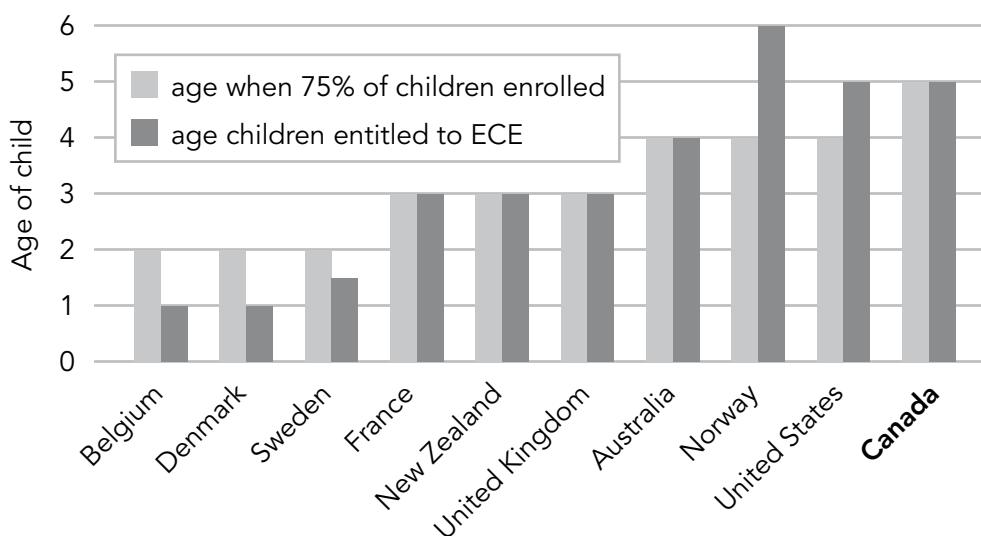
Aside from Quebec, which adopted a multi-pronged family strategy in 1998, Canadians have avoided attempts to fill out their family support policies with programs for young children. At the federal level, successive governments have been more comfortable transferring cash payments, rather than directly investing in services. The Employment Insurance fund compensates new parents at 55 percent of their salary for up to a year, while Quebec has its own more generous parental leave program.<sup>11</sup> The Canada Child Tax Benefit<sup>b,12</sup> delivers a base \$112/month to children up to 18-years-old. A \$1,200 taxable annual payment goes to all children to age 6,<sup>c,13</sup> and parents with valid receipts may claim up to \$7,000 in child

care expenses. After several aborted attempts to establish a national child care strategy, the Canada Social Transfer sends residual funds to the provinces and territories, for programming for young children. However, provinces are under no obligation to create or sustain services with the money. The clutter of programs obviously isn't sufficient when one in ten children live in poverty.<sup>14</sup>

Few issues trigger more emotion than how governments support parents to raise their preschool-aged children. Much is wrapped up in perceptions about appropriate roles for women with young children. Mothers report feeling stretched between work and home, and guilty about leaving their young children in the care of others. For those who don't feel guilty about working outside the home, the pulpit, the family values lobbyists and the parenting advice gurus can cause them to reconsider.

FIGURE 1.4

### Countries with children enrolled in ECE by age (in years)



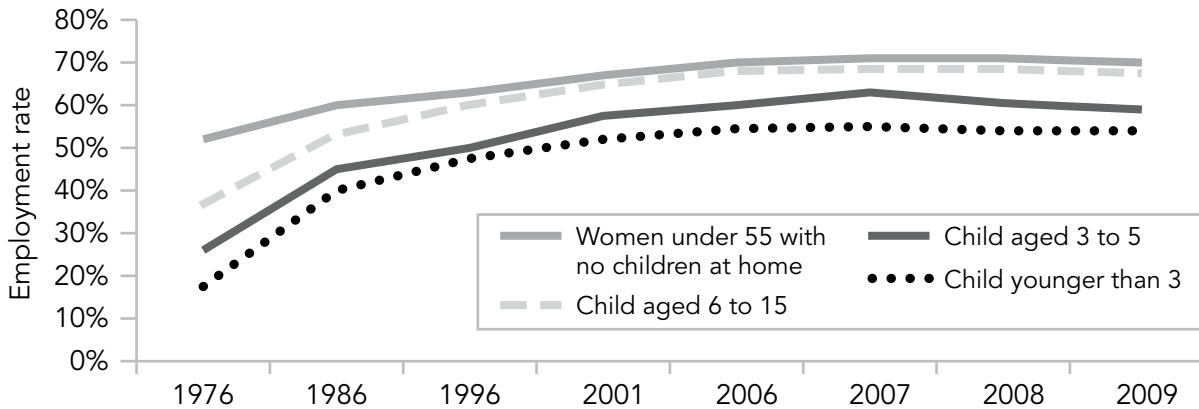
Source: Bennett, J. (2008a).

<sup>b</sup> As of 2010, the Canada Child Tax Benefit pays \$112.33 per month for each child, with a supplement of \$7.83 per month for third and subsequent children. The benefit amount is reduced when family net income is over \$40,970. Families with net incomes less than \$23,855 may also be eligible for the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCB) and the Child Disability Benefit. For a family with one child, the NCB pays \$2,088 a year (\$174.00 a month).

<sup>c</sup> The Universal Child Care Benefit delivers between \$680–\$950, after taxes, depending on family income and composition (dual earner, single earner, no earner, single parent).

FIGURE 1.5

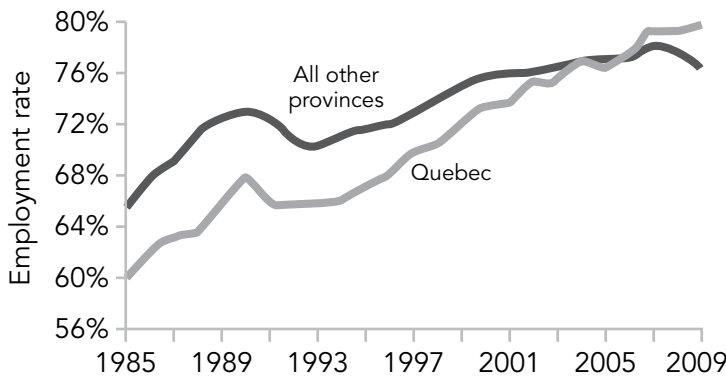
### Employment rate of women with children by age of youngest child, 1976–2009



Source: Ferrao, V. (2010).

FIGURE 1.6

### Employment rate of women aged 25–44 in Quebec and in all other provinces from 1985–2009



The number of women employed in the market economy has increased dramatically since the 1970s, particularly in Canada, rising from 54 percent in 1975 to 82 percent in 2009 for women in their prime working years (ages 25–44). Motherhood is also much less likely to alter women’s labour force participation; 73 percent of women with children younger than 16 years of age are employed, up from

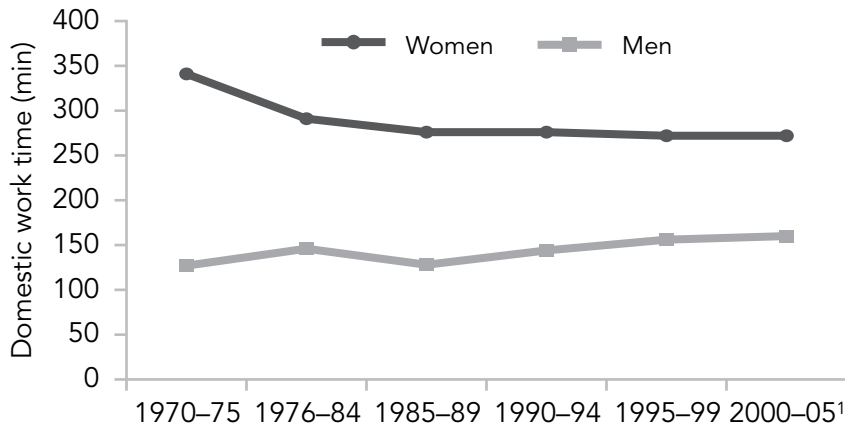
39 percent in 1976. Even women with very young children (< 3 years old) work, up from 28 percent in 1976 to 64 percent by 2009. Overall, in 2009, 66 percent of mothers with preschool children were employed, as were 78 percent of those whose youngest child was aged 6 to 15 years.<sup>15</sup>

Educational levels, labour market conditions and cultural attitudes largely determine the employment rate of women. Family supports including child care, child benefits and paid parental leaves are also influential.<sup>16</sup> Until the mid-2000s, Quebec women, particularly those with children younger than 6-years-old, were least likely to work outside the home.<sup>17</sup> That trend has been reversed; Quebec women now enjoy the highest employment rate in the country and outnumber men in higher education, including medicine and law. More mothers in the labour force also helps to explain Quebec’s declining child poverty rate—the best poverty prevention is a job. Across Canada, the poverty rate is 21 percent in one-income households, but only 4 percent if two or more people are working.<sup>18</sup>

Source: Statistics Canada in Fortin, P. (2010, September 23).

FIGURE 1.7

**Total domestic work time (minutes per day) for Canadian men and women, aged 20–59 years**



Mothers do more domestic work, but both parents prioritize time with children. A 2011 study of domestic work in 16 developed countries found a slow but steady transformation in the sharing of domestic work in male/female households.<sup>19</sup> Women are still responsible for the daily tasks of cleaning, laundry and food

preparation, while men focus on yard work and home repairs. The care of children is an interesting contrast to routine housework, says the study's co-author Oriel Sullivan. "[F]or both men and women, the time that's spent in child care has been increasing quite dramatically, contrary to many media panics about the effect that women moving into employment in large numbers would have on child development and the time children get to spend with their parents."<sup>20</sup> Progressive public employment policies, including parental leave and public child care, are associated with greater equity in the sharing of domestic tasks, the study found. In economies more governed by market forces, such as those in the U.S., the U.K., Australia and Canada, women did not enjoy the same level of equality in the workplace or at home.

(1) 2000–2005 results. Facts on Canada. Women in Canada. [www.infocan.gc.ca](http://www.infocan.gc.ca). Source: Kan, M.Y., Sullivan, O., & Gershuny, J. (2011).

Most women want to work, while many have to; if they did not work, the economy wouldn't function. A study reported in the *Ottawa Citizen* calculates that if one parent from every two-parent working family stayed home, tax revenues would drop by \$35 billion annually.<sup>21</sup> While Canadians remain ambivalent about the appropriate types and the amount of public support for families with young children, our contemporaries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—the world's richest countries—have changed the discussion from the need to mind the children of working parents, to stimulating *all* children. Driven by the massive body of research that points to the importance of the early years for future health, behaviour and learning, they have invested heavily in early childhood programs, largely by including younger children in public education. At age 1, children

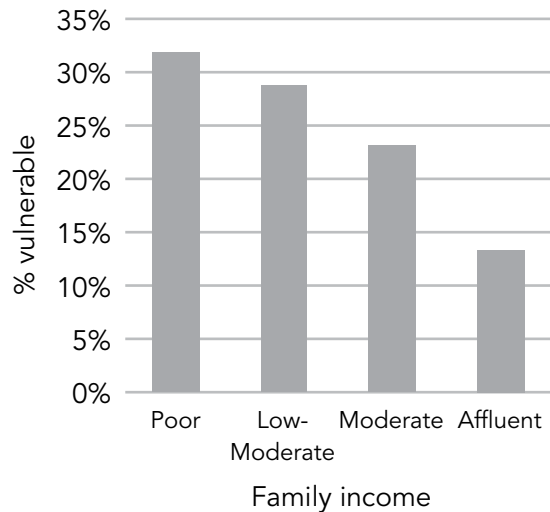
in Sweden, Denmark and Finland are entitled to a preschool program, while at age 2, children in France and Belgium regularly attend preschool. Most countries in the European Union have set a target to provide at least two years of preschool for all children.

**Starting from education's base**

As Parliament debates whether child care means forcing parents "to have other people raise their children,"<sup>22</sup> the provinces have been experimenting with public education to expand early learning opportunities. Education enjoys widespread public confidence,<sup>23</sup> and using our largely underutilized schools is smarter and less costly than creating an entirely new program from the ground up. Full-day kindergarten, which is either in place or starting up in a

FIGURE 1.8

### % Vulnerable on Early Development Instrument



Source: Janus, M. (2010).

number of provinces, makes a natural link to child care. If parental leave is extended from the current one year to 18 months, it would be relatively easy to bridge the gap between parental leave and school. Quebec has grasped this concept by enriching its parental leave and expanding educational child care for preschoolers. Full-day kindergarten begins at age 5, and school boards are required to provide out-of-school care for children up to age 12.

Creating an early childhood system linked to public education was introduced in *Early Years Study 2* (2007) and elaborated on in a 2009 Ontario report. *With Our Best Future in Mind*<sup>24</sup> envisions the transformation of elementary schools into child and family centres, welcoming infants to adolescents and operating year-round. It pleads with all concerned to break down their legislative, administrative and funding silos, and leave territorial and professional jealousies behind. The report argues that all the elements exist in the hodgepodge of child care, public health, education and family support services to create a consolidated program that can actually work for families.

### One-in-four start out disadvantaged

Yet many believe that families are managing fine without this type of program, and are concerned about who will pay for it. Not all children are managing. Most provinces determine children's readiness for school learning during kindergarten using the Early Development Instrument (EDI). Kindergarten teachers use the EDI to assess children on scales related to their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development. Country-wide data shows that more than one in four children arrive at kindergarten with vulnerabilities that make them more likely to fail in school.<sup>25</sup> Children who have trouble coping in kindergarten are less likely to graduate from high school or go on to post-secondary education. As adults they are more likely to fail in their personal relationships and have difficulties finding steady work. They are also more likely to become sick, addicted or depressed. Poverty increases children's chances of delayed development, but it is not the only factor. Most vulnerable kids do not dwell in poverty; they live in middle- and upper-income households and neighbourhoods.<sup>26</sup>

Researchers and policy makers often argue that public investment in early childhood education should be reserved for children from disadvantaged homes. The problem is that programs for poor people become poor programs. A recent study found that early learning classrooms comprised of about 60 percent of children from low-income homes were rated significantly lower in quality indicators of teaching, teacher-child interaction and provisions for learning than classrooms with fewer low-income children.<sup>27</sup>

Conversely, a British study found that children from poor families who went to preschool with middle class children did better than those who were educated in social and economic isolation.<sup>28</sup> The same result was found in a study of Georgia's universal preschool program. On reading and math tests, poor children did best in socially mixed classes.<sup>29</sup>

Poor children face a string of disadvantages that middle class children may not confront, but there is still room for concern. The learning gap between middle income children and those born to the wealthy is just as big as the gap that separates



low-income children from the middle class. Middle class children, particularly boys,<sup>30</sup> drop out of school at alarming rates and with lifelong consequences.<sup>31</sup> In addition, income does not inoculate children against learning disabilities or less than ideal home lives.

Why are so many children, even those in well-off families, facing such limited opportunities? Because, for the first time in modern history, the old are taking wealth and opportunity away from the young. “Canadians sit idly, ignoring that young families have household incomes that are little better than four decades ago; all the while housing, the primary source of wealth for Boomers today, is the primary source of debt for the Squeeze Generation,” writes Paul Kershaw of the University of British Columbia in the *Vancouver Sun*. He coined the moniker to describe this generation of families with children who are working more, caring more and getting less.<sup>32</sup> Just having children puts couples at a 40 percent risk of poverty. Lone-parents have a one in two chance of being poor.

Children make good political props; no campaign exists without a handful of healthy and diverse child models gracing its platform. Yet children are absent from public priorities. Health care, which

overwhelmingly benefits seniors, sucks up an increasing portion of social spending. Meanwhile the Boomers—the wealthiest cohort of all—clamour for tax cuts, giving away governments’ capacity to help their children and grandchildren. Social transfers traditionally used to curb the excesses of the market now exacerbate the problem. Health care pays out five times more to a senior than to a child.<sup>33</sup> Over the past three decades, the share of overall social spending on children has declined, while seniors have enjoyed continuous increases for their programs.<sup>34</sup>

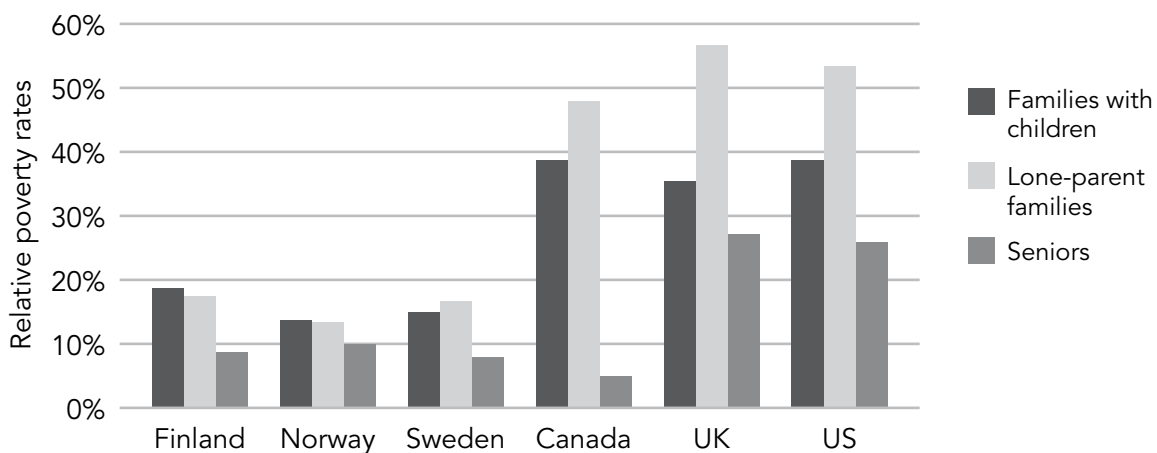
### Democracy in trouble

The night of the 2011 federal election revealed how this generational schism had spread into our democratic system. Pollster forecasts were so off the mark on the election results that they had to go back to find out why. Their analyses revealed a voting fault line: boomers voted; their adult children did not.<sup>35</sup> The older the voter, the more likely they were to turn up at the polls (60–80%) and vote Conservative. Younger voters told pollsters they liked the Liberals and NDP, but stayed home on Election Day.

When more than 50 percent of the electorate younger than 45-years-old do not vote, and only

FIGURE 1.9

### Relative poverty rates for three social risk categories



Poverty threshold = 60% of median equivalent disposable income.

Source: Commission on Social Determinants of Health. (2008). p. 85.

30 percent of those ages 18 to 25 years turn out, politicians pitch their message to and govern on behalf of older Canadians. The more absent the concerns of the young are from public discourse, the more alienated they become.

Canada's median age is 42 years and rising. The young are aging and bringing with them an apolitical culture. The Boomers are also getting older and bringing with them a huge retirement bill. The tensions between young and old can only intensify, and there will be fewer democratic outlets to address them.

If younger Canadians are to connect with the political process, it needs to address their concerns. For the cohort of people raising young children, a legislature that relieved one of their major stressors by providing affordable, educational care for their children might be worth paying attention to. The alternative is a democracy where one person in two does not see a role for themselves, which is a tenuous base for democratic survival.

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### **Making a difference**

What difference could it make to families with young children—indeed to all of us—if every child enjoyed a program like the one that exists at Bruce School or in many other exemplary communities?

Let us revisit the family profiled at the beginning of this chapter. In her short interview, the mother identifies the myriad of daily challenges that if not addressed could—not necessarily will—become long-term problems. Instead of being “stressed and depressed” at home with a new baby and a cantankerous toddler, the centre allows her to kick the isolation that mothers of new infants often experience. As a new Canadian, she found a social network at the school. Moreover, she credits the program with allowing her to relax, to breastfeed her baby and to help her toddler regulate his behaviour. Meanwhile, her older sons transitioned easily into school from kindergarten and the family centre and are doing well. Magela has daily communication with their teachers and the family often gets together over lunch or for after-school events.

This is not simply a warm-hearted story of a stay-at-home, immigrant mother. Traditionally,

the integration of new Canadians has been viewed strictly through a social justice lens. Yet fostering social equity has a very real impact on economic sustainability and growth. Canada has not been doing as well integrating new arrivals. Studies have examined the hard costs of isolation and the resulting development of immigrant enclaves.<sup>36</sup> They also explore the economic advantages of creating strong neighbourhood networks and leveraging the talents of new Canadians. For a country like Canada whose very existence depends on immigration, having the school take double-billing as a welcome wagon for new arrivals is effective programming that makes financial sense.

If the centre reduced but one incident of maternal depression, it would more than pay for itself. Depression disrupts the mother–infant relationship and increases the risk for learning, emotional and behavioural disorders in children.<sup>37</sup> Most new mothers, and up to 25 percent of new fathers, experience depressive symptoms that range from very mild to quite severe.<sup>38</sup> When detected early, studies have found positive results from expanding the mother's support network, group counselling and even classes in baby massage.<sup>39</sup> Early childhood programs provide a non-judgmental, nurturing environment for early childhood and health professionals to meet regularly with new parents and their babies and respond as needed.

Support for breastfeeding is another of the many ways that early childhood programs aid in the healthy development of young children by helping their parents. Breastfeeding not only provides optimal nutritional, immunological and emotional benefits for the growth and development of infants, but also has a protective effect on maternal mental health. Among the resources the family centre offers new parents are public health nurses trained in nursing support.

Being stressed and depressed is not restricted to new mothers, nor to financially struggling, new immigrant or lone-parents. The Squeeze Generation is looking after both young children and aging parents. They are working longer and harder, and job security is not an option.<sup>40</sup> A survey by the

Conference Board of Canada found that the most frazzled employee is the professional mother.<sup>41</sup>

Stressed-out parents are not great for their children. Stress disrupts parents' ability to manage their own conduct, leaving them with fewer resources to regulate their children's behaviour. The more harried parents are, the less likely they are able to engage positively with their children. Chronic parental stress 'drips down' on children; researchers have connected chronic parent stress to the poor academic record of their children.<sup>42</sup>

*Toronto Star* columnist Catherine Porter described her mounting tension as she waits on the subway platform at the end of each work day, willing the train to come: "[W]hile the neighbourhood school might take [daughter] Lyla for a full day, it won't take my son Noah. He's too young. He'll have to go to Lyla's old daycare, a subway stop away. Two drop-offs. Two pickups. Double stress on the subway platform. Daycare breakdance."<sup>43</sup>

Researchers have found that parents whose children attend programs that are integrated into their school are much less anxious than their neighbours whose kids are in the regular jumbled system.<sup>44</sup> Direct gains have also been documented for children. Evaluations of Sure Start in the UK,<sup>45</sup> Communities for Children in Australia<sup>46</sup> and Toronto First Duty<sup>47</sup> found children in neighbourhoods with integrated children's services showed better social development,<sup>48</sup> more positive social behaviour and greater independence/self-regulation compared with children living in similar areas without an integrated program.

Canadians must make the hard and important job of raising children a little easier. As a society, we cannot have it all. We rely on women's labour and expect families to shoulder the social and financial load for rearing the next generation. But we pay a big price when families flounder and their children get left behind. Just as health care costs are unmanageable without health promotion, cleaning up *after* children that have fallen through the cracks is equally unsustainable.

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### **Paying for inaction**

School budgets for children with special needs are increasing across Canada, yet experts and educators

still paint a bleak picture of special education.<sup>49, 50</sup> An Ontario survey shows almost 17 percent of elementary students and 19 percent of secondary students received some form of special education support in 2010—up from 11 percent and 14 percent respectively in 2001—yet many more go without help.

Twenty-three percent of elementary schools and 21 percent of secondary schools identify students who are not receiving support.<sup>51</sup> The largest increase is in the number of children suffering from behavioural challenges including aggression, Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.<sup>52</sup>

Even with expensive interventions by schools, it is often too late to change the trajectory for the numbers of 5-year-olds who are ill-prepared for kindergarten. Many will not graduate high school; one in five Canadians do not. An analysis by the Canadian Council on Learning pegs the annual public cost of one early school leaver at \$7,515 annually, a figure derived from a combination of lost tax revenue and increased spending on unemployment insurance and social assistance, and increased costs to the criminal justice system. The cost to the individual is even higher, at \$11,589 in diminished health and income. Annually, the public costs for a cohort of early school leavers total \$2.62 billion. Costs are estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars when aggregated over the expected lifetimes of each cohort of dropouts across Canada.<sup>53</sup>

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### **Turning chaos into systems**

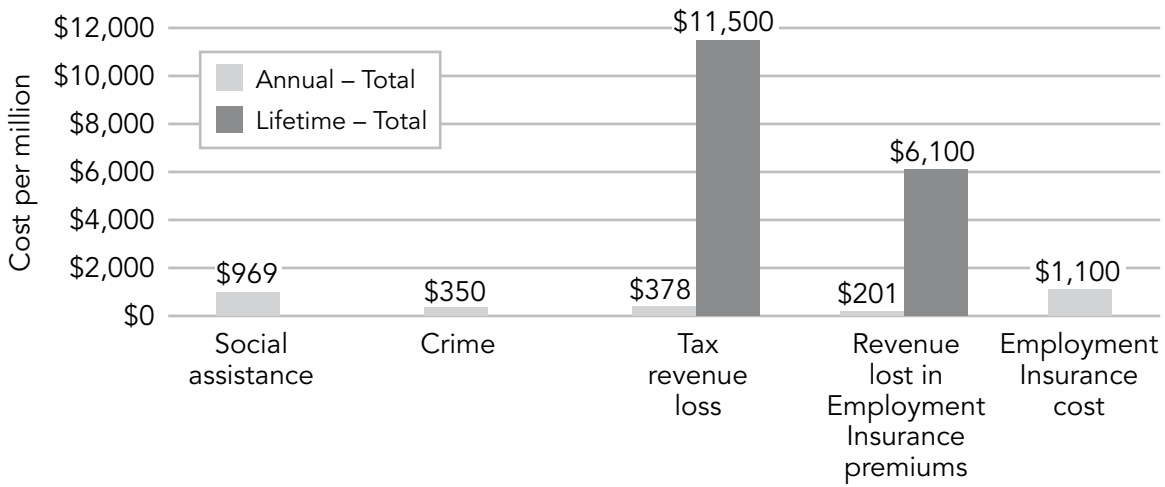
We need to turn our family policy junkyard into a human development system. By viewing the school as a family centre not only for students during the school day, but also for families during non-school hours, we can have an early childhood system that responds to the new Canadian mother and her children, as well as the expectant mother, the at-home father and dual-income professionals and their children.

What are the features of family-centred schools that welcome babies to adolescents?

- **Rooted in its community:** It is not the wealth of a neighbourhood, but its sense of neighbourliness, that makes it a good place to raise children.

FIGURE 1.10

### Public costs of high school non-completion in Canada by cohort (2008 dollars)



Source: Hankivsky, O. (2008).

Social cohesion brings a sense of individual security and belonging that trumps socioeconomic status when it comes to positive outcomes for children. Schools that are at the centre of their neighbourhood nurture social networks that extend inside and beyond the school walls. They introduce children and families to community resources, such as parks, libraries, recreation, commercial and cultural centres. They enrich the learning environment by bringing the neighbourhood into the school, whether it is the optometrist, dentist, coach, local historian or visual artist. In one school, the interest of the kindergarten class in nutrition was expanded by planting an herb garden. A keen gardener who lived across the street from the school volunteered her expertise. ‘Her’ 4-year-olds are now in grade 4 and often return the favour: “There’s no shortage of volunteers to help me rake or weed.” Children who learn the joys of volunteerism are more likely to become adults who contribute.<sup>54</sup> U.S. research indicates that schools where students feel respected, that are intensively used, and that have good community connections experience less vandalism, regardless of neighbourhood

income.<sup>55</sup> In an era of declining student enrolment, locating early childhood programs in schools helps maintain the viability of the school and, especially in small rural areas, the school can preserve the community.

- **Open to all:** Public funding means everyone gets to participate. Canada scores rather well on quality of living indexes, in part because it is a model for pluralism.<sup>56</sup> We have so far been spared the ideological fundamentalism that has brought violence and insecurity to much of the world. On a planet that is stretched between growing populations and shrinking water and food sources, our very survival as a species depends on our ability to develop and share solutions. Neighbourhood schools not only teach kids about their world, they showcase it. “Our family doesn’t hold religious observance,” one mother relates. “But I love that my 5-year-old sings ‘Dreidle, Dreidle’ and gets wide eyed over the ancient story of Hanukkah, that ‘Miriam’s mommy told us.’” In another example, a class of 4- and 5-year-olds as ethnically representative as a UN delegation makes its way down the Rideau Canal strapped into their first pair of ice skates, getting a lesson in what it means

to be Canadian. Dr. Fraser Mustard relates that puppies and kittens raised together grow up to be cats and dogs that get along; the same can be said of people. In a world undergoing a social and environmental revolution, getting along is crucial.

- **Champions a whole child approach to learning:** Early childhood education is rooted in the evidence that learning takes place best in meaningful, playful environments rich with opportunities for exploration. It recognizes that children who are ill-nurtured, rarely encouraged or unable to communicate with their peers and teachers will find it difficult to develop numeracy and literacy skills. Introducing this perspective into schools has been found to lessen the restrictive focus on cognitive skills and to smooth transitions for children from preschool to kindergarten and into the elementary grades.<sup>57</sup> Family-centred schools recognize that children do not exist apart from their families. Parents are respected for the primary role they play in their child's development and are welcomed as essential partners of the teaching team.<sup>58</sup>
- **Democratic:** Democracy demands day-to-day involvement that goes beyond electing school trustees and the parent council. When early childhood programs are integrated with schools, parents are more likely to view the school's staff as part of their social networks. Research shows parents feel more connected to the school. They take responsibility for talking to their child's educators and believe that administrators listen to and respect their viewpoints and act on their suggestions.<sup>59</sup> Parents who become active when their children are in preschool are more likely to remain active when their children reach elementary school. Parent advocates are key to family-centred schools and to their own children's success in school.
- **A strong policy and administrative framework:** Without a plan to address the fragmentation that plagues early childhood programming, public policy will continue to flounder. Only senior levels of government have the authority to merge public and private services with multiple and overlapping purposes, regulatory requirements and funding. Politicians take one look at this

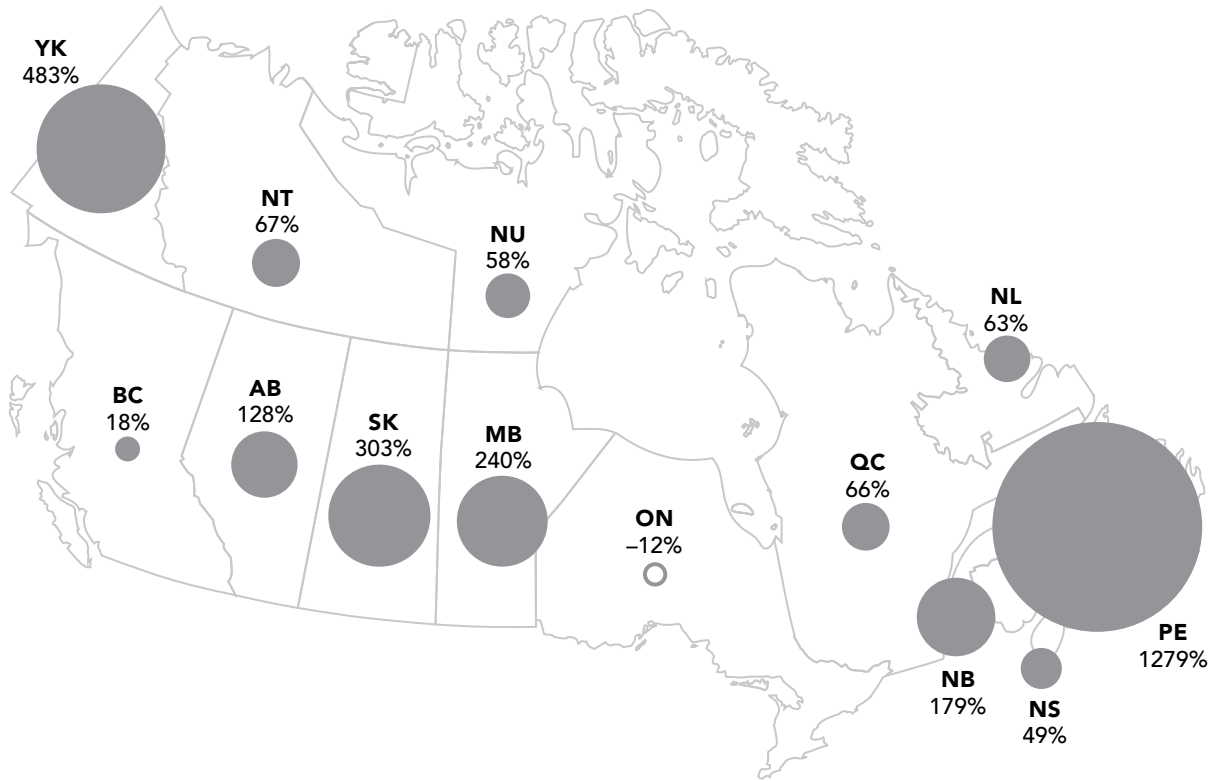
file and run. If anything, they create yet another program that they can brand as their own, wasting resources with misdirected or duplicated services—hence the alphabet soup of services parents must navigate. More recently, jurisdictions have responded by moving responsibility for child care to their education departments. Often this is as far as it goes, while on-the-ground providers are each left in their own service ghettos. Integration is tough work, but it creates a foundation for growth. Rather than playing child care against kindergarten or parenting programs, an early childhood system does not differentiate between *education* and *care*. New investments expand and improve *the system* and the life chances of children.

Our proposals for family-centred schools may be misinterpreted as denigrating the contributions of the health and child care sectors to children and families. Rather, we start from the considerable international evidence in choosing education as the base upon which to grow an early childhood system. Education is unambiguous. It is about children—all children. From this universal and well-established platform, a modern understanding that learning begins at birth and continues throughout life can be grown. There is no need to reinvent the wheel—education already comes with a strong infrastructure (financing, training, curriculum, data collection, evaluation and research).<sup>60</sup>

Parents demonstrate their trust in education by sending their children to school. Among our Anglo-American counterparts, Canada has the highest enrolment in publicly funded education.<sup>61</sup> Parent confidence is well-founded. Our public schools have produced political leaders, Supreme Court judges, recipients of the Order of Canada and cultural and scientific icons. Schools have helped to prepare children born here and abroad to participate in shaping a democracy that is pluralistic and respectful. Early childhood programming provides an opportunity to transform schools into vibrant family centres that welcome children and families before, during and after the school bell rings.

FIGURE 1.11

## Change in international immigration by provinces/territories, 2000–2010



	NL	PE	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	YK	NT	NU	CAN
2000	417	188	1,605	761	32,502	133,502	4,647	1,891	14,349	37,413	60	82	12	227,429
2010	681	2,593	2,396	2,125	53,985	118,137	15,805	7,617	32,647	44,179	350	137	19	280,671

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada. International migration components, Canada, provinces and territories, 2000 and 2010 CANSIM Table 051-0037.

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### Changing populations

Canada is home to 2,238,485 children age 5 years and younger.<sup>62</sup> They live in a country whose population is growing, aging and becoming more diverse and more urbanized.

Canada's population maintained a steady .02 percent growth into 2011, reaching 34,349,200 people.<sup>63</sup> Alberta registered the fastest increase (+0.4%), while Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories experienced slight population declines.<sup>64</sup> Children are growing up in cities. More than 80 percent of Canadians live in towns and cities but

urbanization varies by region. The populations of Ontario and British Columbia are 85 percent urban compared to 50 percent in New Brunswick or 45 percent in Prince Edward Island. The majority of urban dwellers, 65 percent, are attracted to the big five metropolitan areas: Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto and Montreal. This trend is likely to continue as young adults from rural areas continue to migrate to urban centres. However, the biggest contributor to population growth is international immigration.<sup>65</sup>

FIGURE 1.12

### Canada: Urban and rural populations

Year	Total Population	Urban Population	Rural Population	Percentage Urban	Percentage Rural
1996	28,846,758	22,461,207	6,385,551	78	22
2001	30,007,094	23,908,211	6,098,883	80	20
2006	31,612,897	25,350,743	6,262,154	80	20
2011	34,005,708	27,479,360	6,526,348	81	19

Note: The rural population for 1981 to 2006 refers to persons living outside centres with a population of 1,000 AND outside areas with 400 persons per square kilometre.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1851 to 2006. 2011 figures are estimated.

Immigration is important to all parts of Canada. Newcomers who were once drawn to Ontario are increasingly looking for opportunities in other parts of the country. Between 2000 and 2010, almost 15,000 fewer immigrants went to Ontario, while Quebec gained an additional 18,000 newcomers. The

Prairies and Maritimes noted remarkable changes. Manitoba more than doubled its immigrant population, while during this time period PEI's immigrant population increased by over 1,000 percent! Sustained immigration, along with the diversification of the origins of immigrants, contributes to our

FIGURE 1.13

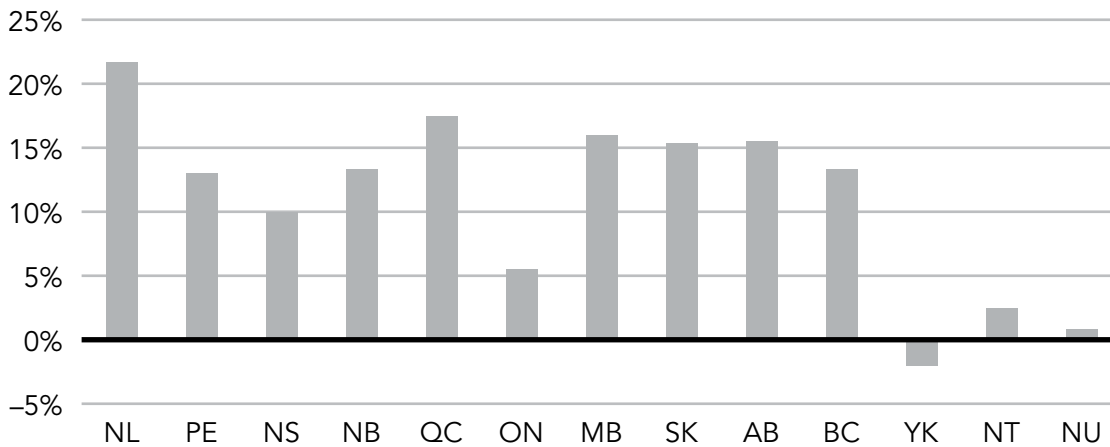
### Canada: Family structure (Census 2006, updated 2009)

	All families (2009)	Couple families (2009)	Married couples (2006)	Common-law couples (2006)	Female lone-parent (2006/9)	Male lone-parent (2006/9)
<b>All families</b>	9,315,790	7,926,210	6,105,910	1,376,870	1,146,310	243,270
Families without children	3,762,060	3,762,060	2,662,135	758,715	0	0
Families with children	5,553,720	4,164,150	3,443,775	618,150	1,146,310	243,270
1 child	2,561,790	1,710,740	1,267,625	291,255	682,025	188,790
2 children	2,098,216	1,708,306	1,497,755	234,755	327,660	72,665
3 or more children	899,650	745,040	678,405	92,140	122,605	20,320
<b>Total children</b>	<b>9,733,770</b>	<b>7,586,250</b>	<b>6,517,600</b>	<b>1,068,650</b>	<b>1,746,475</b>	<b>401,045</b>
<b>Avg number of children at home per family</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>1.4</b>

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada 2006 Census of Population; Statistics Canada, Income Statistics Division. (2009). Annual Estimates for Census Families and Individuals, 13C0016, Family Tables 3A, 3B and 3C.

FIGURE 1.14

**Percentage increases in birth and total fertility rate, 2004–2008, by province and territory**



Note: Total fertility rate is the average number of children per woman.

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada. Crude birth rate, age-specific and total fertility rates (live births), Canada, provinces and territories, Annual rate 2004 and 2008. CANSIM Table 102-4505.

ethnocultural and religious diversity. By the time Canada celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2017, roughly one in every five people could be a member of a visible minority.<sup>66</sup>

Newcomers are important to population stability. They tend to be younger than the Canadian-born population, balancing the impact of the rapidly aging baby boom generation who will turn 65 years of age over the next two decades. But even with immigration, the number of senior citizens could more than double, outnumbering children for the first time by 2032.<sup>67</sup>

**Changing families**

Children today are being born into families that are smaller and more varied, and their parents tend to be older. Most children live in families where the adults are married, but a growing number (one-third) have parents who are single or live in common-law unions. Women are waiting longer to have children. Over the last 20 years, the average age of women giving birth rose from 27 years to 29.3. In Nova Scotia, Ontario, British Columbia

and Yukon, the fertility rate of women aged 30 to 34 has surpassed that of women aged 25 to 29.<sup>68</sup> While the total fertility rate has edged up to 1.68 children per woman on average from its lowest of 1.5 in early 2000, it is far below the 1971 rate, when every woman averaged slightly over 2.1 children—the fertility rate that must be maintained to replace the population in the absence of immigration.<sup>69</sup> Only Nunavut (2.98 children per woman), the Northwest Territories (2.08) and Saskatchewan (2.05) had almost as many births as deaths in 2008. In contrast, British Columbia has the lowest fertility rate, at 1.51 children per woman.<sup>70</sup> Declining fertility is giving rise to smaller families. In families with two adults, the average number of children at home is one. The urban–rural gap is also reflected in family size. Fertility is lowest in the largest metropolitan areas and rises steadily as areas become more rural.<sup>71</sup>

Another trend is toward childless couples. More than 40 percent of married couples, and half of common-law couples, do not have any children. Perhaps the most significant change in family life arises from the marked increase in working mothers.



Canada has one of the highest rates of mothers working outside the home among OECD countries. Over 70 percent of mothers with children younger than 6 years are in the labour force, compared to 61 percent for the OECD and the European Union.<sup>72</sup> This phenomenon is changing gender and family dynamics, and has given rise to a new generation of children who are spending a large part of their early childhood in care outside the home.

Bucking many of the family trends is the Aboriginal population. In the 2006 Census, 1.17 million people identified themselves as Aboriginal, a 45 percent jump over 1996. Statistics Canada attributes the population growth to higher fertility rates and a growing number of people identifying themselves as Aboriginal. The fertility rate of Aboriginal women was 2.6 children in 2006, compared to 1.68 (2008) children among all women in Canada. The Aboriginal population is also younger: half are 24-years-old or younger, with a median age of 27, compared with 42 among non-Aboriginals. Aboriginal children also live in different family groupings, but are twice as likely to live with a lone parent or other relative as non-Aboriginal children and are more likely to be born to a teenage mother.<sup>73</sup> The Aboriginal population is also becoming urbanized. Across Canada, 54 percent of Aboriginals live in urban areas, up from 50 percent in 1996. The majority of Aboriginal people live in the territories and Prairie provinces. Winnipeg has the greatest concentration of Aboriginal people of any Canadian city. Its population is 10 percent Aboriginal, compared to Toronto or Montreal with 0.5 per cent.<sup>74</sup>

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