

Public Support for Child Care Programs in Canada



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For Survey Research



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About the Survey

The YMCA-YWCA National Survey on Child Care Policy in Canada was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research in partnership with YMCA Canada and YWCA Canada. The survey was conducted online between January 28 and February 19, 2025 with a sample of 4,004 adult Canadians. The unweighted sample included an over-representation of adults under age 45 as well as residents of smaller provinces. Survey results reported here are weighted by age, gender, region and education so as to be representative of the Canadian adult population.

Complete survey results are available on the [Environics Institute website](#).

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Overview



Executive summary

Governments in Canada have become increasingly active in supporting the delivery of child care programs. Public investment in child care advances a number of goals, including making parenting more affordable for families; promoting gender equality by facilitating the return of women to the labour market after an initial period of maternity leave; expanding early learning opportunities for young children; and increasing readiness for school.

This report explores the extent of public support for government-subsidized child care programs in Canada. It presents the results of an extensive survey of public opinion on the topic conducted in early 2025 by the Environics Institute for Survey Research in partnership with YMCA Canada and YWCA Canada.

The survey finds that, generally speaking, there is broad public support for policies that enhance the affordability and accessibility of high-quality child care programs for pre-school age children. For instance, a large majority (just over four in five) agree with the idea that “Canada should be a country where affordable and high-quality child care for young children is available to all parents who need it.” In addition, three in four Canadians say that pre-school age children in their community benefit from attending child care programs outside of the home.

The survey finds that, generally speaking, there is broad public support for policies that enhance the affordability and accessibility of high-quality child care programs for pre-school age children.

Two other findings in particular stand out. First, despite current concerns about the cost of living, support for government spending on child care rivals that for tax reductions. When asked about measures that governments could take to make life more affordable for parents with young children, increased funding for child care centres, and reducing the overall rate of income tax attract similar levels of public support. Moreover, by a large margin, Canadians – when asked to choose – would prefer the option of maintaining government subsidies for child care centres over that of withdrawing the subsidies in order to finance tax cuts.

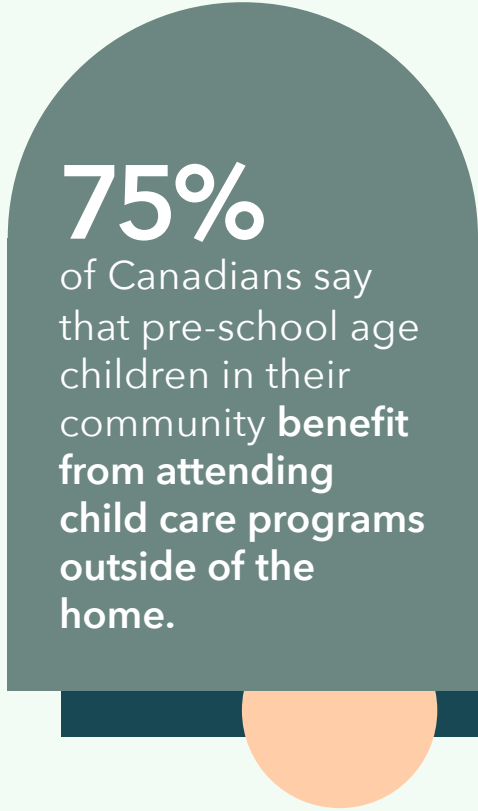


Second, public priorities for government spending are strongly related to age, with older Canadians being much more focused on the need to increase funding for health care and services for seniors, and less so on programs such as child care and education that more directly benefit younger families. As society ages, and the political weight of older-age generations in the population increases, these differences between the priorities of older and younger Canadians are an increasingly important factor shaping government decision-making.

Finally, a majority of Canadians support the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program, which provides federal funding to provinces and territories so that they can, in turn, work with providers to increase access to child care spaces for parents at an average cost of \$10 per day. While support is higher among parents with young children, a majority of those without children support the program as well. Opinions on the program are strongly related to views on the appropriate role or size of government, with those who favour larger government being more strongly supportive. It is notable, however, that even those who prefer a smaller role for government, or who have a more negative view of taxes, support the CWELCC program.

Highlights

- A large majority of Canadians (83%) agree with the idea that “Canada should be a country where affordable and high-quality child care for young children is available to all parents who need it.”
- Three in four (75%) Canadians say that pre-school age children in their community benefit from attending child care programs outside of the home.
- Asked to choose which of two statements is closest to their own opinion, 55 percent favour the idea that “governments should help parents with young children pay for the cost of child care, in order to make it more affordable for people to have children.” However, a significant minority (36%) instead sides with the opposing view, namely that “if people want to have children, they should be prepared to pay for the full costs of child care themselves.”
- According to Canadians, the most critically important reasons for providing government funding for child care programs are to ensure that mothers can return to work after they have children (48%), to make life more affordable for parents (44%), and to give children more opportunities to start learning at an early age (42%).
- The proportion of Canadians who would like to see *more* spending on child care outnumbers that who would like to see *less* spending by a margin of two-to-one. Nevertheless, the proportion preferring more spending on child care is lower than that for other programs such as health care, housing or education.
- Public priorities for government spending differ significantly by age. In two areas – health care and social services for the elderly – support for spending more is higher among older people than younger people. In three other areas – education, social services for children and youth, and child care – the reverse is the case, with support for more spending being higher among younger people.



75%
of Canadians say
that pre-school age
children in their
community **benefit**
from attending
child care programs
outside of the
home.



- Four in five Canadians say that it is important for governments to increase funding for services that support families whose children have a disability, so these children have the same opportunities as other children in Canada.
- As measures that governments can take to make life more affordable for parents with young children, increased funding for child care centres, and reducing the overall rate of income tax attract similar levels of support, with about seven in ten Canadians saying each is important.
- When asked to choose between the two, preference for keeping government funding for child care (61%) in place significantly outweighs that for giving all parents a tax break (26%).
- About one in two Canadians say that it is either very or somewhat hard for parents in their community to find affordable, high-quality child care, compared to 29 percent who say it is somewhat or very easy.
- From a list of different types of services or assistance, parents are most likely to select access to affordable child care as the one that would have made it easier to be a parent to a young child.

61%

surveyed prefer keeping government funding for child care in place

26%

would rather give all parents a tax break

- At the time of the survey in early 2025, one in two Canadians said that they had heard or read something about the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program, which provides federal funding to provinces and territories so that they can, in turn, work with providers to offer more child care spaces for parents at an average cost of \$10 per day.
- A majority of Canadians (68%) support the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program. The program is supported by majorities of both parents and those without children.

Introduction

The purpose of the YMCA-YWCA National Survey on Child Care Policy in Canada was to explore the extent of public support for government subsidized child care programs in Canada, as well as the main factors influencing that support. The survey asked about priorities for government spending; about support for the general goal of making child care programs more affordable and accessible; and about support for the recent federal government program on this area. In addition, it examined how support for government spending on child care programs compares directly to support for other measures to support parents, including tax cuts. Finally, it asked parents about their experiences raising young children, including which forms of assistance would have made parenting easier.

The survey results are presented in this report in three sections: the first covers public support for child care programs in general; the second examines support for child care programs compared with other policies; and the third reports more specifically on the public's views on the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program.



The purpose of the YMCA-YWCA National Survey on Child Care Policy in Canada was to explore the extent of public support for government subsidized child care programs in Canada, as well as the main factors influencing that support.

Part 1:

Public Support for Child Care Programs

Introduction

Canadians are broadly supportive of child care programs, with large majorities agreeing that Canada should be a country where affordable and high-quality child care is available to parents who need it, and that young children benefit from attending child care programs outside of the home.

The most important reasons for providing government funding for child care programs, according to Canadians, are to ensure that mothers can return to work after they have children, to make life more affordable for parents, and to give children more opportunities to start learning at an early age.



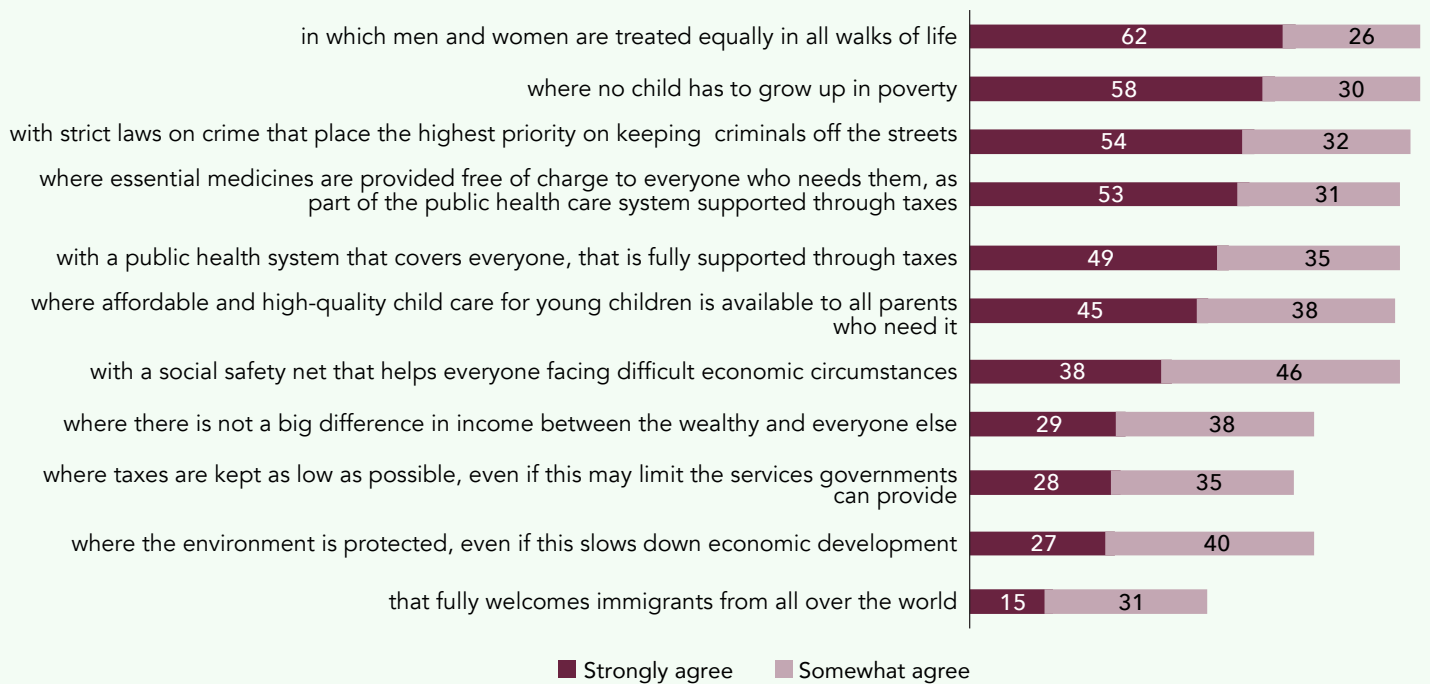
Vision of Canada

When asked about their own vision for Canada, a large majority of Canadians (83%) agree with the idea that “Canada should be a country where affordable and high-quality child care for young children is available to all parents who need it.” This includes 45 percent who strongly agree, and 38 percent who somewhat agree. Only 12 percent somewhat or strongly disagree.

Several other goals attract somewhat stronger support. At the top of the list of 11 items mentioned in the survey is gender equality – with 62 percent of Canadians strongly agreeing that Canada should be a country in which men and women are treated equally in all walks of life. Almost as many (58%) strongly agree that Canada should be a country where no child has to grow up in poverty. About one in two strongly support goals related to the provision of publicly funded health care and to keeping crime low.

Figure 1

Do you agree or disagree that Canada should be a country...



Q: We would like to ask you about your own vision for Canada. For each of the following six statements, please let us know whether you agree or disagree that it describes the kind of country you believe Canada should be.

**Each respondent were asked about 5 of 10 statements, selected at random. All respondents were asked about child care.*



Only 28 percent strongly agree that Canada should be a country where taxes are kept as low as possible, even if this may limit the services governments can provide.

Other goals do not attract as much support as affordable and high-quality child care, including goals relating to protecting the environment and welcoming immigrants. And, notably, only 28 percent strongly agree that Canada should be a country where taxes are kept as low as possible, even if this may limit the services governments can provide.

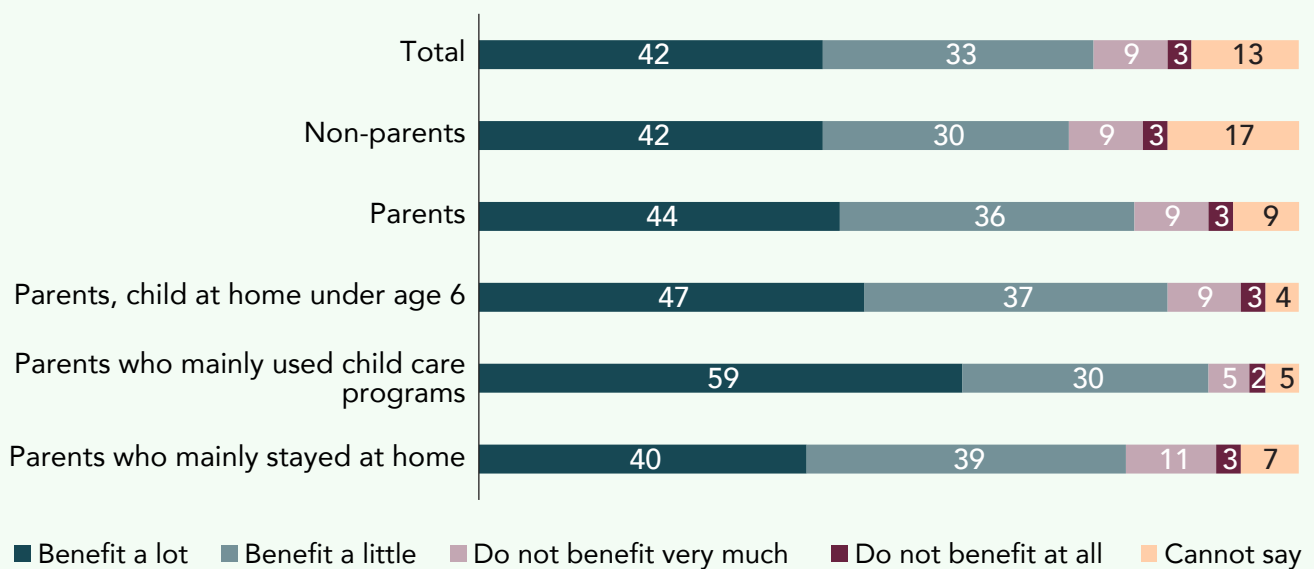
There is little difference in the extent to which both parents and those without children agree with the proposition that “Canada should be a country where affordable and high-quality child care for young children is available to all parents who need it” – 46 percent in each group strongly agree.

Benefit of child care programs

There is also widespread agreement that young children benefit from attending child care programs outside of the home. Three in four (75%) Canadians say that pre-school age children in their community benefit either a lot (42%) or a little (33%) from such programs. Only 12 percent think children do not benefit very much or at all (an additional 13% do not offer an opinion either way).

Figure 2

Do children benefit from attending child care programs outside of the home?



Q: These next questions are about child care for children in your community. In general, do you think children who are not yet old enough to start school benefit a lot, a little, not very much or not at all from attending child care programs outside of the home?

The proportion that says that young children benefit a *lot* from attending child care programs outside of the home is somewhat higher among parents with a child at home under the age of six (47%) and parents who used such programs as the main type of child care when their children were young (59%). However, large majorities of those without children and of parents who mainly stayed at home with their children when they were young also think that children benefit a lot or a little from attending child care programs.

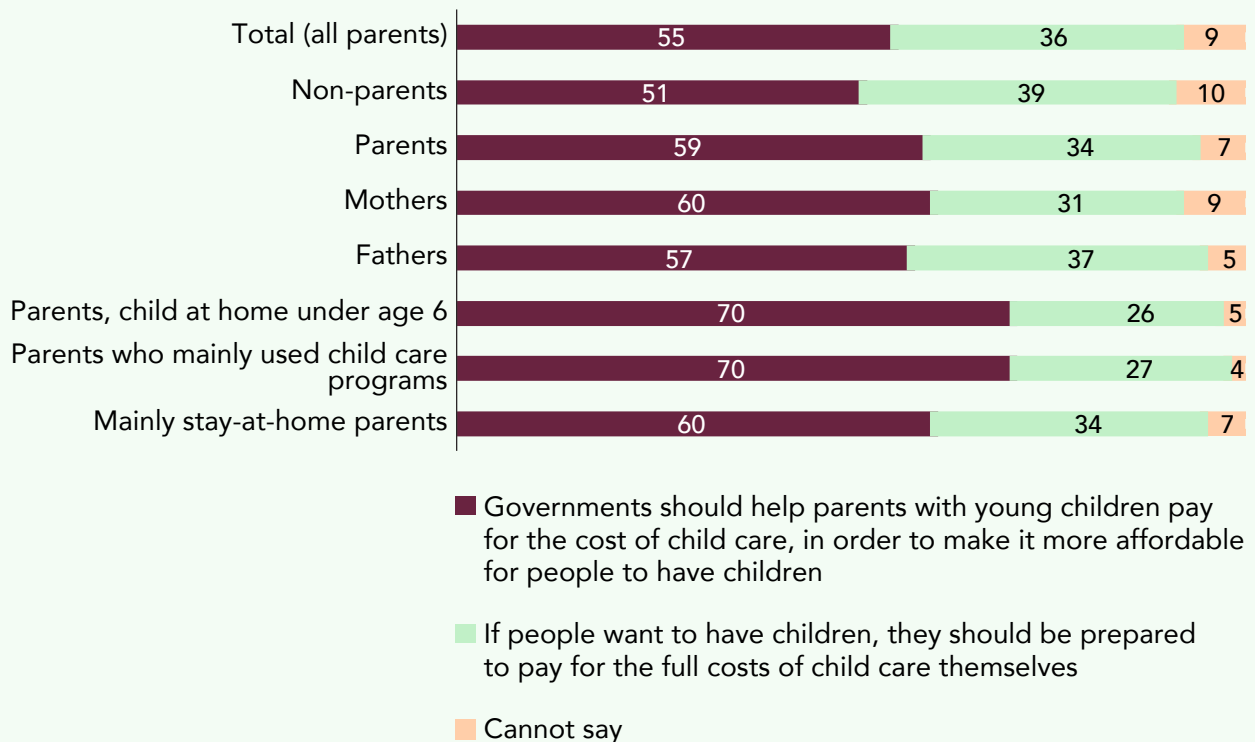
Government support for parents

Underpinning the idea that governments should fund child care programs is the more general principle that society as a whole has an interest in supporting young couples who choose to have children. A majority of Canadians support this principle, though not one-sidedly.

Asked to choose which of two statements is closest to their own opinion, 55 percent favour the idea that “governments should help parents with young children pay for the cost of child care, in order to make it more affordable for people to have children.” However, a significant minority (36%) instead sides with the opposing view, namely that “if people want to have children, they should be prepared to pay for the full costs of child care themselves.” An additional nine percent choose neither option.

Figure 3

Should governments help parents pay for the cost of child care?



Q: Which of the following two statements is closest to your opinion?



59%

of parents say that governments should help parents with young children pay for the cost of child care.

Compared to 51% of non-parents.

The proportion that feels that governments should help parents with young children pay for the cost of child care is higher in Quebec (63%) than in the rest of the country (53%). The proportion that instead feels that parents should be prepared to pay for the full costs of child care themselves is higher than average in Alberta (44%) and Saskatchewan (42%).

Opinions on this question also strongly reflect people's general orientation to the role of government in society. Among those who favour larger government with more services, the proportion saying that governments should help parents (69%) heavily outweighs the proportion saying that parents should pay for the full costs of child care themselves (27%). But, among those who favour smaller government with fewer services, only a minority agrees that governments should help parents (42%), while a majority (53%) prefers that parents pay for the full costs of child care themselves.

Opinions are less strongly related to whether or not someone has children. While parents are a little more likely than those without children to say that governments should help parents with young children pay for the cost of child care (59%, compared to 51%), both groups are more likely to favour this option than the alternative of having parents pay for the full costs of child care themselves.

There is a relationship, however, between views on the role of government in helping young parents and the interest of young adults in having children. Among those under the age of 45 who do not have children but who would like to in the future, 63 percent side with the notion that governments should help parents with young children pay for the cost of child care. Among their counterparts who would not like to have children, that proportion is lower, at 47 percent.

Reasons for child care programs and benefits

While many Canadians support government spending on child care, the reasons they might do so could vary. For instance:

- some might wish to make having children more affordable for parents;
- some might be concerned about the ability of mothers to return to work after having children;
- some might be focused on the advantages of early learning programs for young children.

It is possible for someone to agree that many, or all, of these objectives are important to some extent. For this reason, the survey asked Canadians to say whether each of six particular objectives is critically important, important but not critical, or not very important.

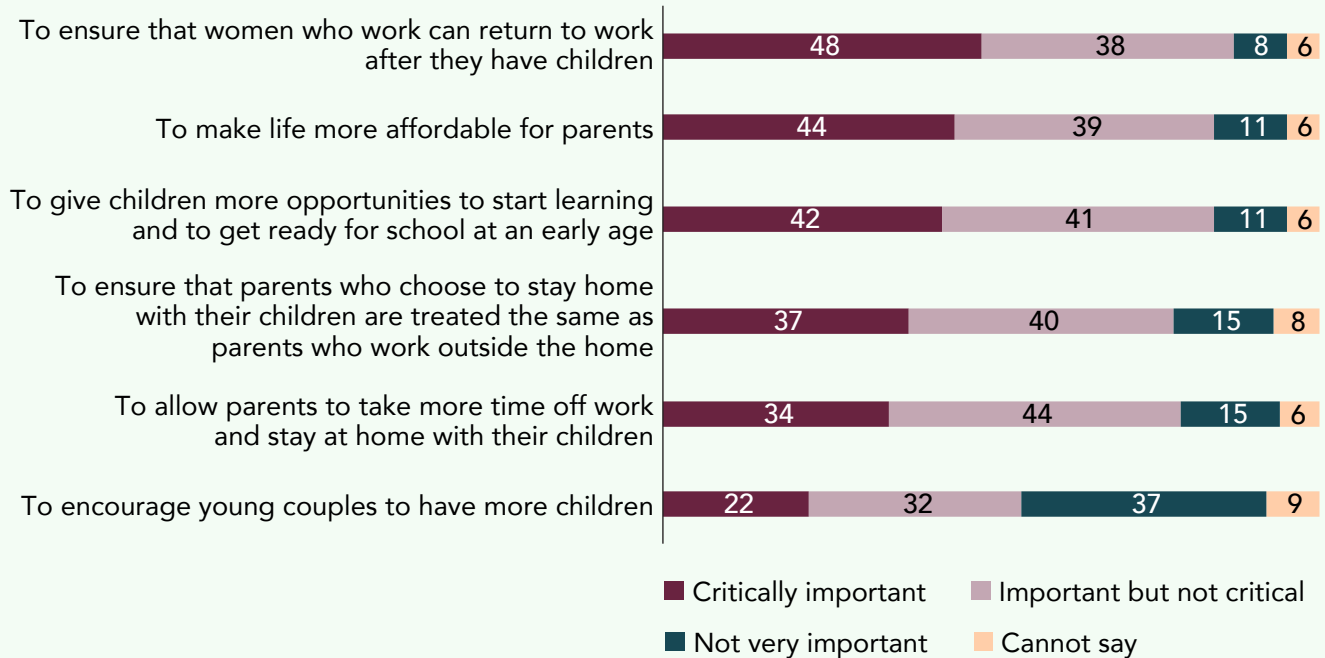
Of the six reasons mentioned, the one most likely to be seen as critically important is related to mothers and work: 48 percent say that it is critically important “to ensure that women who work can return to work after they have children.”

Two other reasons are almost as likely to be seen as critically important: to make life more affordable for parents (44%); and to give children more opportunities to start learning and to get ready for school at an early age (42%).

48 percent say that it is critically important “to ensure that women who work can return to work after they have children.”

Figure 4

Reasons why governments should provide funding for child care



Q: Here is a list of possible reasons for why governments should provide funding for child care programs and child care benefits to parents. In your own view, how important is each of the following reasons for why governments should provide this funding?

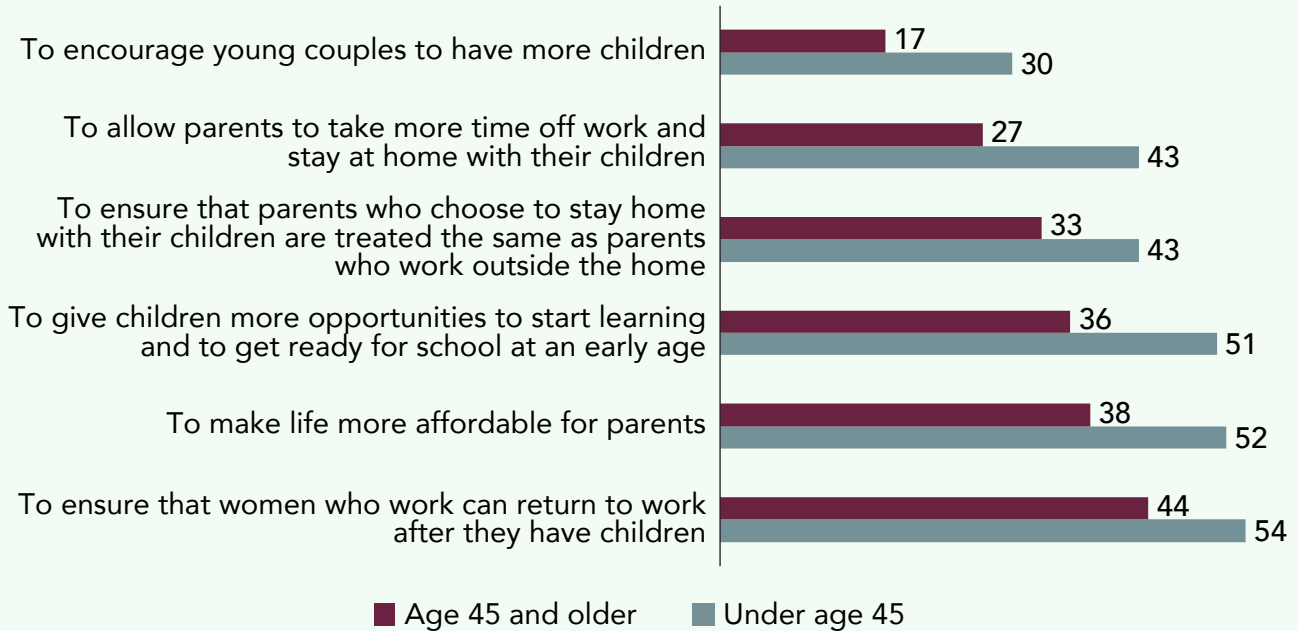
Two other reasons are somewhat less likely to be seen as critically important, though at least one in three Canadians still express this view: to ensure that parents who choose to stay home with their children are treated the same as parents who work outside the home (37%); and to allow parents to take more time off work and stay at home with their children (34%).

One reason stands out as being least likely to be seen as critically important; only 22 percent of Canadians think that it is critically important to encourage young couples to have more children. However, this reason is more likely to be seen as critically important in Quebec (35%) than in the rest of the country (19%).

Each of these reasons is generally more likely to be seen as critically important by parents, compared to those without children; and by women, compared to men. Notably, they are also more likely to be seen as critically important by younger people (under the age of 45), compared to their older counterparts (age 45 and older).

Figure 5

Reasons why governments should provide funding for child care, by age



Q: Here is a list of possible reasons for why governments should provide funding for child care programs and child care benefits to parents. In your own view, how important is each of the following reasons for why governments should provide this funding?

There is not much difference in opinion between groups about which particular objectives are the most important – with different groups in society having contrasting priorities. Rather, the pattern is that all of the objectives are more salient to some groups (notably parents, women and younger adults) than to others.

Fairness of government funding for child care

While many parents rely on child care programs to care for their children at some point in the years before their children start school, some choose to stay home with their children, or rely on other family members or friends to care of their children in the home. As a result, it is possible that some might see government funding for child care as unfair, since it only benefits those who use these services. However, most Canadians do not express this concern.

The survey finds that just over one in two Canadians (54%) side with the view that “government funding to create more affordable child care spaces is fair because it makes it easier for parents to go back to work after they have children, if they want to.” One in three (33%) take the opposing view that “government funding to create more affordable child care spaces is not fair because it only benefits parents who choose to go back to work after they have children, and not stay-at-home parents”. An additional 13 percent do not take a position either way.

Parents (57%), particularly parents with a younger child currently in the home (61%), are somewhat more likely than those without children (51%) to say that government funding for child care is fair in this sense. This proportion is also higher for parents who mainly used child care centres or nursery schools for child care when their own children were young (72%). However, even a majority of those who mainly stayed at home when their own children were young (54%) say that government funding for child care is fair, though a larger minority of this group (40%) disagree, seeing it as unfair.



54%

of Canadians say that “government funding to create more affordable child care spaces is fair because it makes it easier for parents to go back to work after they have children, if they want to.”

Part 2:

Support for Child Care Programs Compared with other Policies

Introduction

The proportion of Canadians who would like to see more spending on child care outnumbers the proportion that would like to see less by a margin of two-to-one. Nevertheless, the proportion preferring more spending on child care is lower than that for other items such as health care and services for the elderly.

Majorities favour both increasing government funding for child care centres and tax cuts as policies to make life more affordable for parents. However, when asked to choose between the two, preference for keeping government funding for child care in place significantly outweighs that for tax cuts.



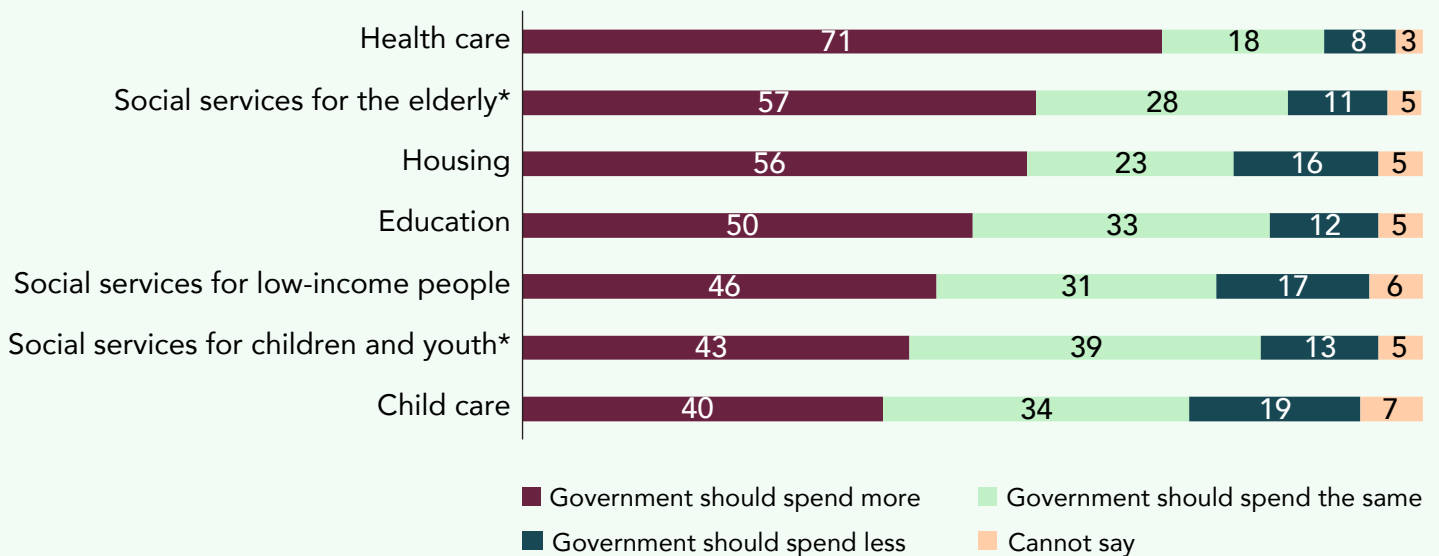
Government spending priorities

Support for child care programs in principle does not necessarily mean that these programs are the public’s highest priority – or are preferred to other types of policy (such as spending in other areas or tax cuts). The survey therefore explored how support for government spending on child care programs and benefits compares to support for other policy options.

To begin with, Canadians were asked whether governments in Canada should spend more, less or the same in a number of different areas (keeping in mind that increasing services could increase taxes).

The proportion of Canadians who would like to see more spending on childcare (40%) outnumbers the proportion that would like to see less (19%) by a margin of two-to-one. Nevertheless, the proportion preferring more spending on child care is lower than that for each of the other services mentioned.

Figure 6
Government spending priorities



Q: Keeping in mind that increasing services could increase taxes, do you think governments in Canada should spend more, less or the same on each of the following?

**Each respondent was asked either about social services for the elderly or about social services for children and youth (selected at random)*

Canadians are most likely to favour more spending on health care (71%), following by more spending on social services for the elderly (57%), on housing (56%) and on education (50%). Slightly fewer favour more spending on social services for low-income people (46%), and on social services for children and youth (43%). These are all followed by the proportion favouring more spending on child care (40%).

Age is an important factor to consider in accounting for these spending priorities, in two senses. First, areas that are most relevant for older people – health care and social services for the elderly – are at the top of the list, while those most relevant to younger adults – social services for children and youth, and child care – are at the bottom.

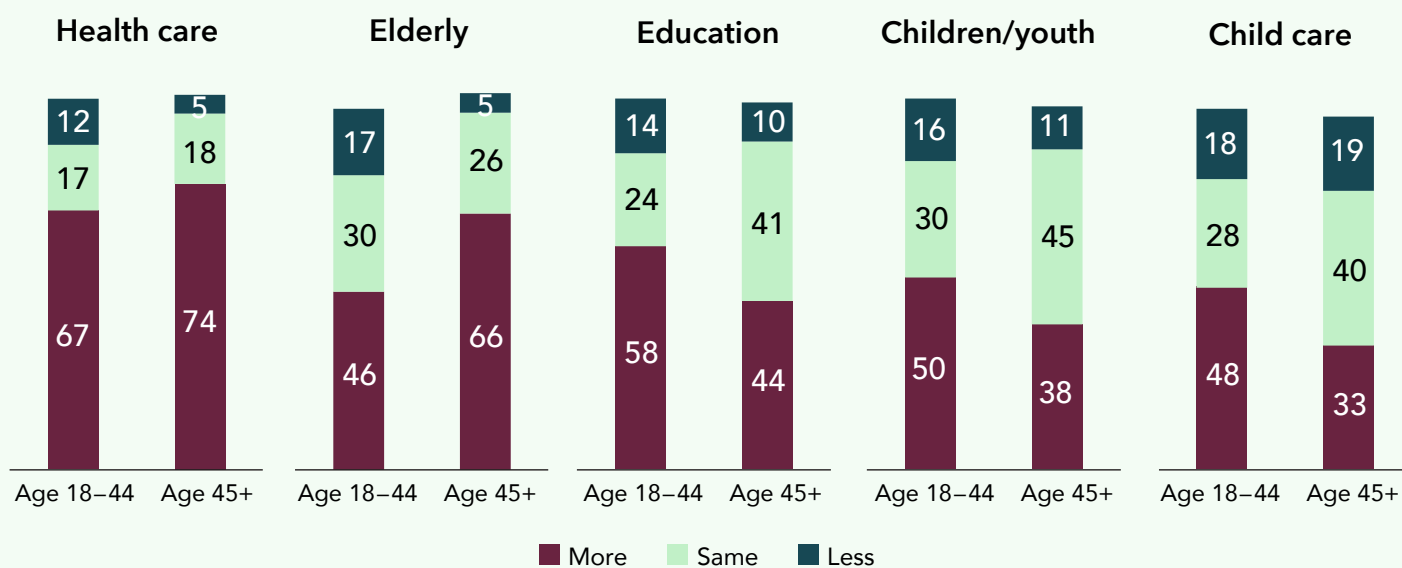


Second, in most cases, the proportion supporting more spending on each service differs significantly by age. In two areas – health care and social services for the elderly – support for spending more is higher among older people (age 45 and older) than younger people (age 18 to 44). In three other areas – education, social services for children and youth, and child care – the reverse is the case, with support for spending more being higher among younger people.

It is especially notable that older Canadians are much more likely to favour more spending on the elderly (66%) than on children and youth (38%), and much more likely to favour more spending on health care (74%) than on child care (33%).

Figure 7

Government spending priorities, by age



Q: Keeping in mind that increasing services could increase taxes, do you think governments in Canada should spend more, less or the same on each of the following?

**Each respondent was asked either about social services for the elderly or about social services for children and youth (selected at random)*

Regional differences in spending priorities are, by comparison, relatively modest. Atlantic Canadians are often the most likely to favour more spending – this is the case, for instance, for health care (80% of Atlantic Canadians favour more spending, compared to the Canadian average of 71%), social services for the elderly (67%, compared to 57%) and child care (48%, compared to 40%).

Policy options to make life more affordable for parents

With respect to the broader objective of making life more affordable for parents with young children, there are a number of different approaches that governments could take. Governments could, for instance, increase benefits paid directly to parents, lower taxes for parents, or subsidize the delivery of child care programs.

From a list of six options presented in the survey – presented as things that governments in Canada could do to make life more affordable for parents with young children – Canadians are most likely to favour the one that is tailored specifically to parents whose children have a disability:

- 80 percent say that it is very or somewhat important for governments to increase funding for services that support families whose children have a disability, so these children have the same opportunities as other children in Canada, including 42 percent who say it is very important.

The next two most popular options are:

- Increase funding for child care centres, so that they can create more child care spaces and reduce the fees that parents have to pay for child care: 73 percent say that this is very or somewhat important, including 33 percent who say it is very important.
- Reduce the overall rate of income tax, so everyone in Canada would pay a little less in taxes to the government: 71 percent say that this is very or somewhat important, including 36 percent say it is very important.

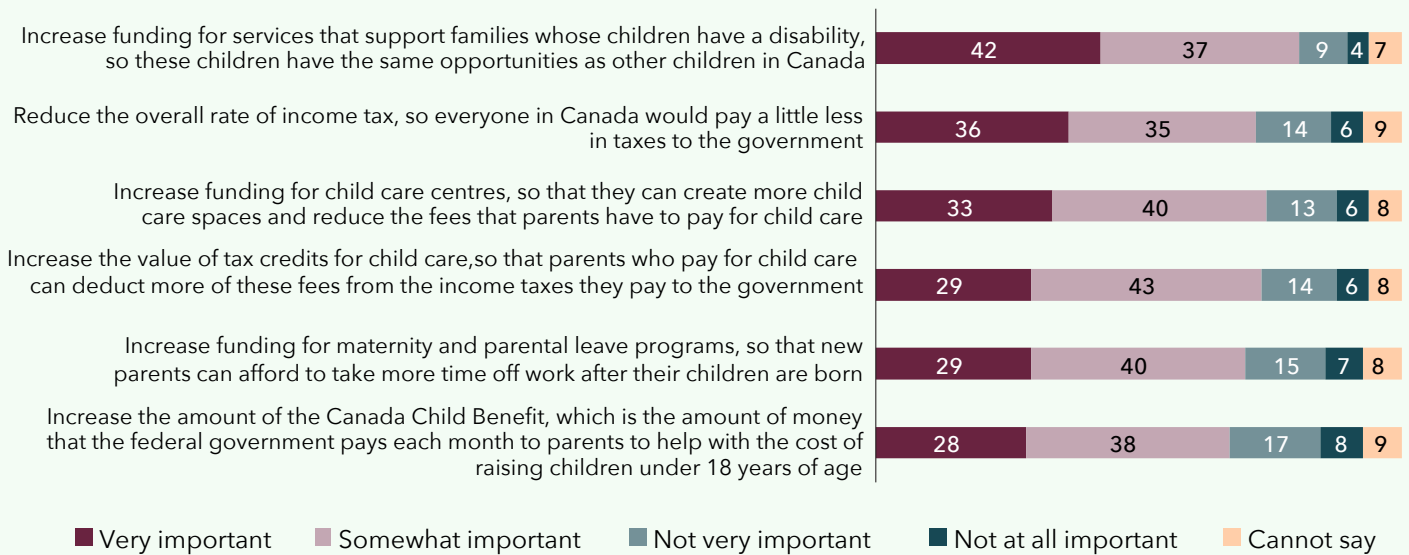


80%

say that it is very or **somewhat important** for governments to **increase funding for services that support families whose children have a disability**, so these children have the same opportunities as other children in Canada.

Figure 8

Government spending options to make life more affordable for parents



Q: This next question is about things that governments in Canada could do to make life more affordable for parents with young children. In your opinion, to make life more affordable for parents with young children, is it very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important for governments in Canada to spend money on each of the following?

The three remaining options are somewhat less strongly supported – though clear majorities still see them as at least somewhat important:

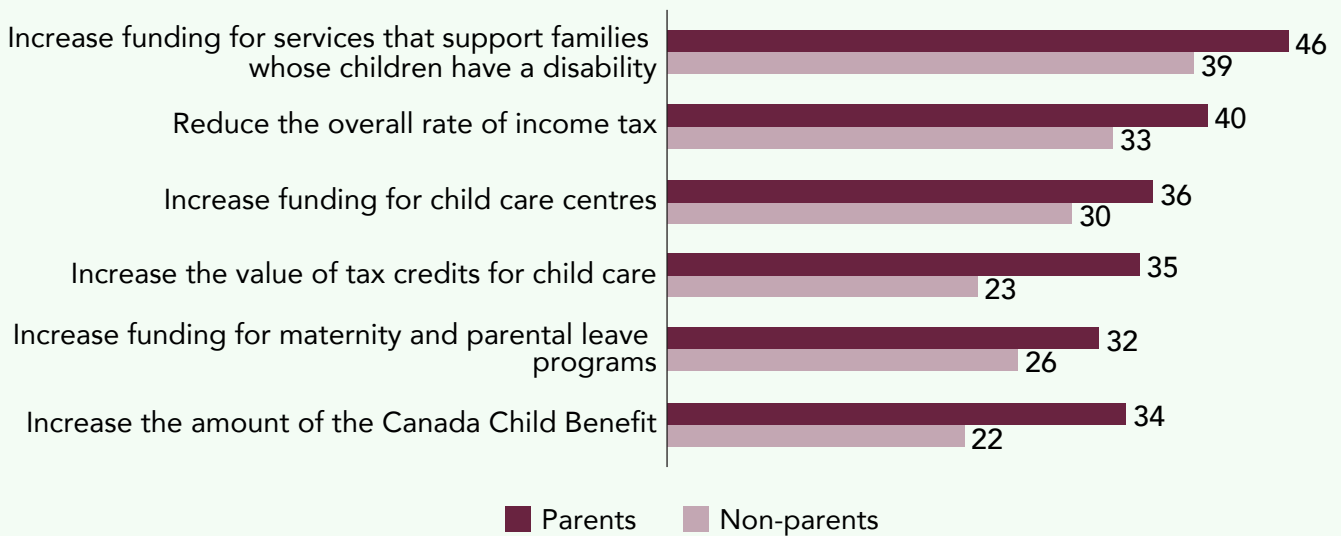
- **Increase the value of tax credits for child care** so that parents who pay for child care can deduct more of these fees from the income taxes they pay to the government: 72 percent say that this is very or somewhat important, including 29 percent who say this is very important.
- **Increase funding for maternity and parental leave programs** so that new parents can afford to take more time off work after their children are born: 70 percent say that this is very or somewhat important, including 29 percent who say this is very important.
- **Increase the amount of the Canada Child Benefit** which is the amount of money that the federal government pays each month to parents to help with the cost of raising children under 18 years of age: 67 percent say that this is very or somewhat important, including 28 percent who say this is very important.

Each of these different policy options is more likely to be seen as very important by parents, compared to those without children – and by younger parents or parents with younger children in particular.

This is not necessarily self-evident: it is possible to imagine a scenario where certain types of policies to support parents appeal more to those who can only imagine what it might be like to raise children, while others might appeal more to those with direct experience. But this is not the case: all of the policies – whether direct transfers to parents, more funding for child care centres, or lower taxes – appeal most to those who have children of their own, especially if those children are still at home.

Figure 9

Government spending options to make life more affordable for parents (parents and non-parents) – % very important



Q: This next question is about things that governments in Canada could do to make life more affordable for parents with young children. In your opinion, to make life more affordable for parents with young children, is it very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important for governments in Canada to spend money on each of the following?

Similarly, each of the six policies is more likely to be seen as very important by parents who are struggling to make ends meet than by parents with more comfortable incomes.

These findings suggest, then, that from the point of view of the public as a whole – and of parents more specifically – different policies such as more spending on child care centres, increased benefits paid directly to parents with young children, more generous tax credits for parents, or more general tax cuts are not seen to be alternatives that are in competition with one another. Each is seen by a majority as being at least somewhat important. And those who are more supportive of one of these policies tend to be more supportive of the others as well.

This point can also be illustrated by looking more closely at opinions on two of the options: increased funding for child care centres, and reducing the overall rate of income tax. These two items attract similar levels of support, with 73 percent saying that more funding for child care centres is very or somewhat important, and 71 percent saying the same of tax cuts. We can add that a majority (57%) say that both options are very or somewhat important. This compares to only 12 percent that says that tax cuts are important, but not more funding for child care centres; and 13 percent who take the opposing view, favouring only more funding for child care but not tax cuts. The pattern is the same for parents age 18 to 44, with 64 percent saying that both options are very or somewhat important.

Table 1

Combined support for two policy options: “increase funding for child care centres” and “reduce the overall rate of income tax”

Option	Total	Parents age 18 to 44
Both options are important	57%	64%
Tax cuts are important / increased funding for child care centres is not important	12%	9%
Increased funding for child care centres is important / tax cuts are not important	13%	13%
Neither option is important	7%	8%
“Cannot say” for one or both options	12%	5%

Funding for child care centres versus tax breaks

It is natural for citizens to support spending on social programs and lowering taxes at the same time, as they are not directly responsible for reconciling competing priorities. Governments, however, have to make choices within the context of finite resources.

In order to further test public priorities, the survey accordingly included a question that forced a choice: either to maintain government funding for child care centres (to lower the cost of child care for parents who use it) or eliminate this funding in favour of another competing objective. In one scenario, the other objective was giving all parents a break on their taxes, while in a second scenario, it was enabling governments to spend more on other programs (each survey participant was presented with one of the two scenarios, chosen at random).

In each scenario, preference for keeping government funding for child care in place significantly outweighs that for the other option, whether tax cuts or spending in other areas:

- **In the first scenario, 61 percent of Canadians would prefer to keep government funding for child care in place**, compared to 26 percent who would prefer to eliminate this funding and instead give all parents a tax break.
- **In the second scenario, 66 percent of Canadians would prefer to keep government funding for child care in place**, compared to 21 percent who would prefer to eliminate this funding and instead spend more on other programs.



Table 2

Keeping or eliminating government funding for child care

Scenario 1: Governments could afford to give parents a tax break		Scenario 2: Governments could spend more on other programs	
Which of the following options do you prefer?			
Keep the government funding for child care in place, to lower the cost of child care for parents who use it.	61%	Keep the government funding for child care in place, to lower the cost of child care for parents who use it.	66%
Eliminate the government funding for child care, to give all parents a break on their taxes.	26%	Eliminate the government funding for child care, so governments can spend more on other programs.	21%
Cannot say	12%	Cannot say	13%

Q: As you may know, governments in Canada currently provide funding to child care centres so that they can lower the cost that parents have to pay for child care. If this funding was eliminated, the cost that parents have to pay for child care would likely increase but governments could afford to give parents a tax break / spend more on other programs. Which of the following options do you prefer?

Note: each version was asked of 50% of the survey respondents, selected at random.

The proportion favouring keeping government funding for child care in place over a tax break for all parents is higher among parents (67%) than among those without children (56%), and is particular high for parents under the age of 45 (76%) and for parents with a child at home under the age of six (79%). But it is notable that every group identified in the survey favoured child care funding over tax cuts by a wide margin. This includes parents who did not or are not using child care centres as their main form of child care (60% of this group would choose to keep the government funding for child care, compared to 27% who would eliminate this funding in favour of a tax break).

The proportion favouring keeping government funding for child care in place over a tax break does not vary significantly across the different regions of the country.

The preference for continuing with child care funding over tax cuts is also notable when we consider the broader context of public attitudes toward government and taxes. Over the past several years, the proportion of Canadians who say that governments have a negative rather than a positive impact on most people’s lives has been growing, as has the proportion who view taxes as mostly a negative rather than as mostly a positive thing. Despite this, replacing child care funding with tax breaks for parents is the favoured option of only one in four.

It is the case that those who have more positive views of government and taxes are more likely than those with negative views to favour keeping government funding for child care in place. Nonetheless, even a majority of those who say that the impact of government is mostly negative prefers maintaining child care funding over tax breaks for parents; the same is true in the case of those who say taxes are mostly a negative thing.

Table 3

Keeping or eliminating government funding for child care, by views on government and taxes

	Keep the government funding for child care	Eliminate the government funding for child care	Cannot say
Governments have a positive impact on most people’s lives	76	17	7
Governments have a negative impact on most people’s lives	58	34	8
Taxes are mostly a positive thing*	70	22	8
Taxes are mostly a negative thing**	56	34	10

Q: As you may know, governments in Canada currently provide funding to child care centres so that they can lower the cost that parents have to pay for child care. If this funding was eliminated, the cost that parents have to pay for child care would likely increase, but governments could afford to give parents a tax break. Which of the following options do you prefer?

*because they are how we pay for the important things that make our quality of life good, such as health care, education, and road.

**because they take money out of people’s pockets and hold back economic growth and the creation of wealth.

Part 3:

Affordable and Accessible Child Care

Introduction

One in two Canadians have heard or read something about the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program. And the program is supported by majorities of both parents and those without children.

At the same time, access to affordable child care is the form of assistance mentioned most frequently as something that would have made it easier to be a parent to a young child.

Accessing child care

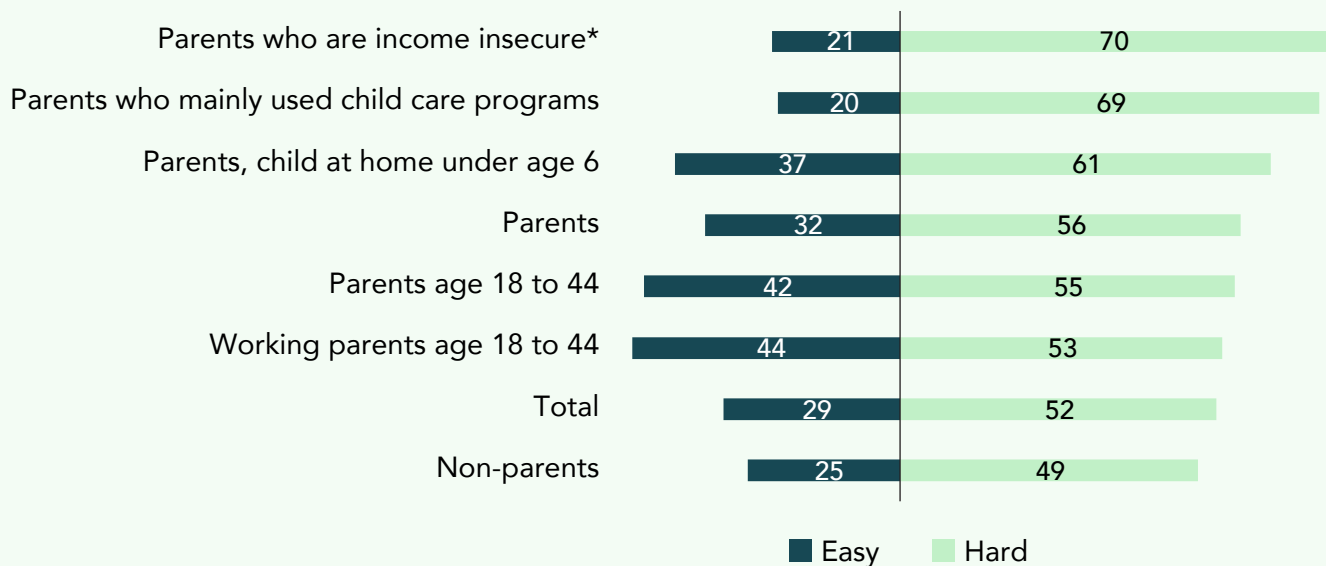
Is access to affordable and high-quality child care seen as a major problem in Canada? To explore this, the survey asked whether Canadians think it is easy or difficult for parents with young children to find the child care services they need.

Canadians are much more likely to believe it is hard than they are to believe it is easy for parents in their community to find child care for their young children that is both affordable and of high quality. This finding applies both to those who have young children of their own or who have used such child care services, and those who have less direct experience with the issue.

Among all Canadians, about one in two (52%) say that it is either very or somewhat hard for parents to find this kind of child care, compared to 29 percent who say it is somewhat or very easy (another 19% aren't sure either way).

Figure 10

Is it easy or hard to find affordable and high-quality child care in your community?



Q: How easy or hard do you think it is to find child care for children who are not yet school-age in your community that is both affordable and of high quality - very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat hard or very hard?

*Income insecure parents are those who describe their household's income as "not enough for you and you are having a hard time"

Parents (56%) are more likely than those without children (49%) to say that finding child care in their community is hard. However, parents (32%) are also a little more likely than those without children (25%) to say finding child care is easy. This is the case because parents (12%) are also much less likely than those without children (26%) to express no opinion.

Several specific groups of parents are more likely than average to say that it is hard to find child care in their community that is both affordable and of high quality. This includes parents who are income insecure (70% of whom say it is difficult), parents who mainly used child care centres or nursery schools for child care when their own children were young (69%), and parents with at least one child at home under and the age of six (61%).¹

Majorities of parents in every region say that finding child care in their community is hard, with the figure being slightly above average in Atlantic Canada (60%) and slightly below average in Quebec (52%).

Majorities of parents in every region say that finding child care in their community is hard.

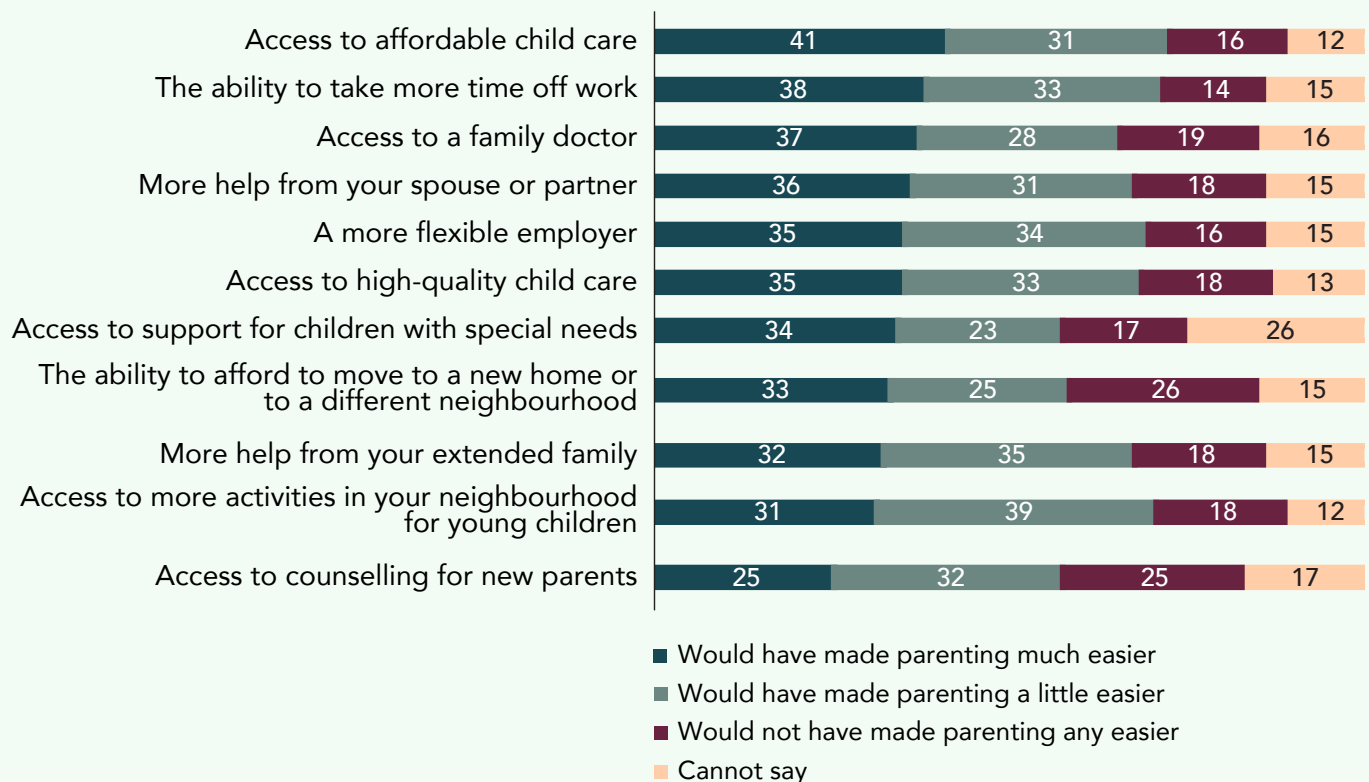


¹ In this report, income insecure parents are defined as those who describe their household's income as "not enough for you and you are having a hard time."

Making parenting easier

No matter the joys and rewards of having children, parents face many challenges, including getting enough sleep when their children are very young, juggling responsibilities at home and at work, and covering the costs that growing families face. While many of these challenges can be anticipated, just over one in three parents in Canada (35%) nevertheless say that parenting young children was harder than they expected. This compares to 30 percent who say it was about what they expected, and 19 percent who say it was easier than expected. Mothers (39%) are more likely than fathers (31%) to say that parenting young children was harder than expected. Among mothers between the ages of 18 and 44, the proportion finding it harder than expected reaches 44 percent.

Figure 11
Making parenting easier



Q: Thinking about your own experience as a parent to a young child, would the following have made parenting much easier for you personally, a little easier, or would it not have made much difference?

41%

of parents say that **access to affordable child care** would have made it much easier to be a parent to a young child.

Parents were then asked whether each of 11 different types of services or assistance would have made parenting easier for them personally. In each case, a majority of parents say that it would have been helpful to some degree – making parenting either much easier or a little easier.

Of the 11 items mentioned, parents are most likely to say that access to affordable child care would have made it easier to be a parent to a young child: 41 percent say that it would have made it much easier, and an additional 31 percent say it would have made parenting a little easier.

Several other types of assistance are seen by almost as many parents as being very helpful, including the ability to take more time off work (38%), access to a family doctor (37%), and more help from their spouse or partner (36%).

Younger parents and parents of younger children are especially likely to say that access to affordable child care would have made parenting much easier for them personally. This includes 51 percent of parents age 18 to 44 (and 54% of mothers in that age group), and 55 percent of parents with at least one child at home under the age of six. Income insecure parents (55%) are also more likely than average to say that access to affordable child care would have made parenting much easier.



The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program

Governments across Canada have been allocating more funding for child care in recent years, in recognition of both the importance of affordable and high-quality child care to parents and children, and of the difficulties that families may face in accessing these programs.

One recent initiative has been the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program, which provides federal funding to provinces and territories so that they can, in turn, work with providers to offer more child care spaces for parents at an average cost of \$10 per day.

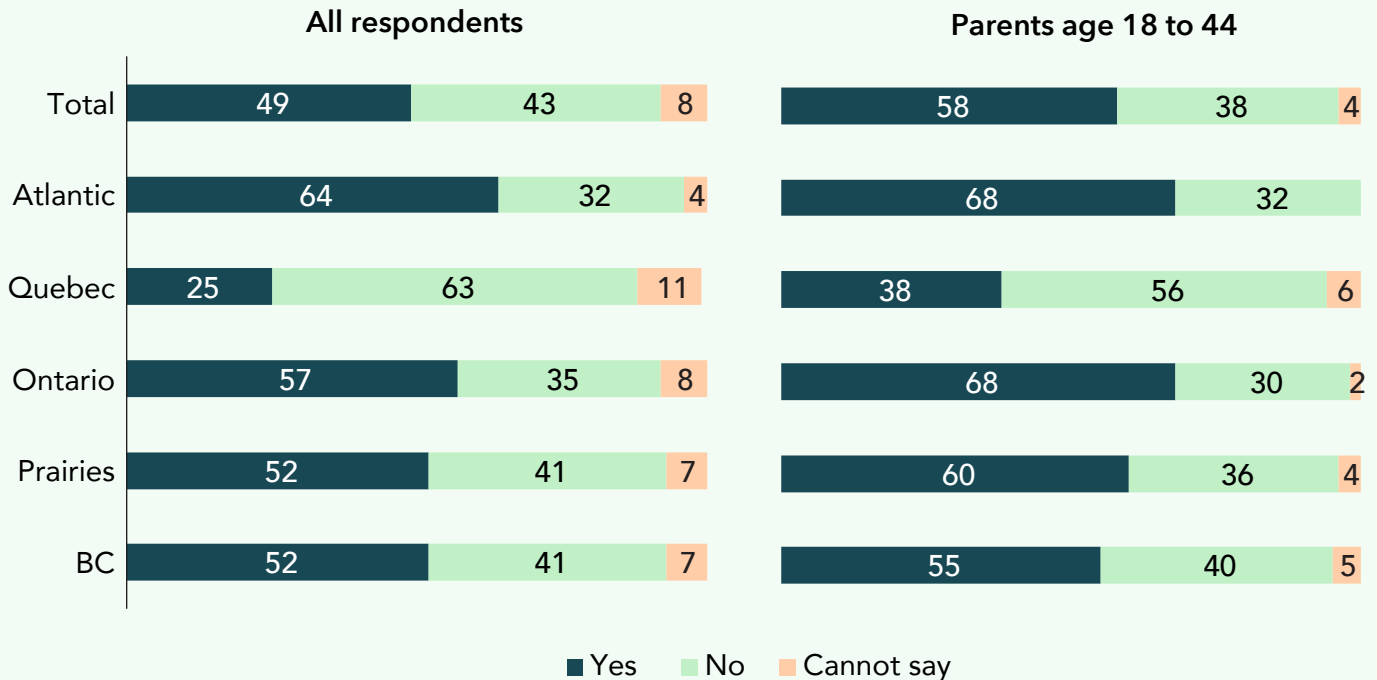
At the time of the survey in early 2025, one in two Canadians (49%) said they had heard or read something about the program, while slightly fewer (43%) had not (an additional 8% weren't sure). Among parents, the proportion who had heard of the program was higher, at 57 percent (or 58% among parents age 18 to 44). Parents with at least one child at home under the age of six were somewhat more likely to have heard of the program (61%).

The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program provides federal funding to provinces and territories so that they can, in turn, work with providers to offer more child care spaces for parents at an average cost of \$10 per day.

The provision of the new federal funding was less visible in Quebec, where for many years the province has funded its own affordable child care program. It is not surprising, therefore, that fewer Quebecers had heard of the CWELCC program: only 38 percent of Quebec parents age 18 to 44 had heard of it, compared to 64 percent of parents in other parts of the country.

Figure 12

Awareness of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program



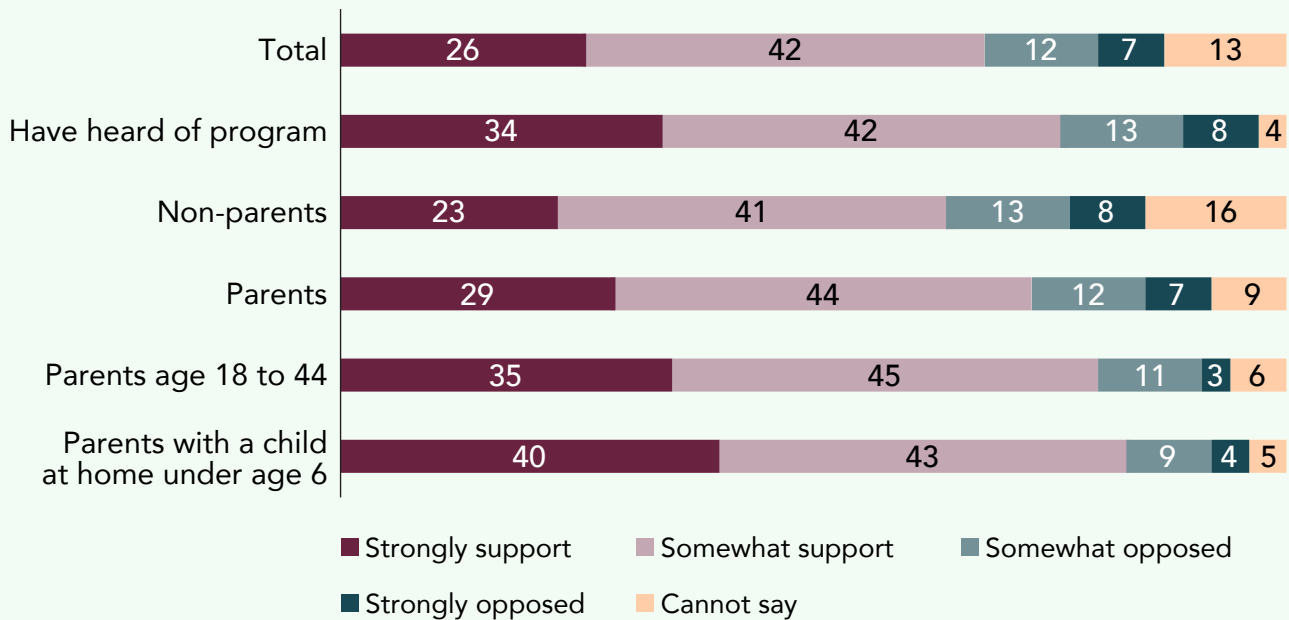
Q: Recently, the federal government launched the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program that provides funding to provinces so that they can provide child care spaces for parents at an average cost of \$10 per day. Have you heard or read anything about this program?

Awareness of the program is higher among parents with higher incomes compared to those with lower incomes – despite the fact that it is lower-income families in particular who stand to benefit from measures designed to subsidize child care costs.

Regardless of their level of awareness, a majority of Canadians are supportive of the program. About seven in ten (68%) say they strongly or somewhat support “the federal government’s Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program that provides funding to provinces so that they can provide child care spaces for parents at an average cost of \$10 per day.” Only 19 percent are opposed, and an additional 13 percent do not take a position either way. Support does not vary significantly across regions of the country.

Figure 13

Support for the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program



Q: And do you personally support or oppose the federal government's Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program that provides funding to provinces so that they can provide child care spaces for parents at an average cost of \$10 per day?

The program is supported by majorities of both parents (73%) and those without children (63%). Support is especially high among parents age 18 to 44 (80%), and parents with at least one child at home under the age of six (82%).

Those who are aware of the program are also more supportive of it: among those who have heard or read something about the program, 75 percent say they strongly or somewhat support it. However, a majority who have not heard of it (66%) are also supportive.

Support for the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care is no different among those who believe that is easy (75%) and those who believe it is hard (74%) for parents in their community to find affordable and high-quality child care. However, the level support differs according to opinions on whether child care is beneficial for children. Support is much higher among those who say that children benefit a lot (81%) or benefit a little (70%) from attending child care programs outside of the home, compared to those who say that children don't benefit very much or not at all (48%).

Majorities of both those who favour larger government, and those who do not both support the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program.

Finally, views on the program are related, as expected, to opinions about the role of government. Support is higher among Canadians who favour larger government with more services (81%), compared to those who favour smaller government with fewer services (55%); among those who believe that governments have a positive impact on most people's lives (82%), compared to those who believe that governments have a negative impact (63%); and among those who view taxes as mostly positive (78%), compared to those who view taxes as mostly negative (63%). It is notable, however, that majorities in each case – that is, both those who favour larger government and those who do not – support the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program.



Conclusion



Conclusion

There is widespread public support for child care in Canada. Just over four in five Canadians agree that their vision of Canada includes making affordable and high-quality child care for young children available to all parents who need it. And a majority approve of the federal government funding to provinces so that they can provide child care at an average cost of \$10 per day.

Governments are inevitably faced with competing demands. In addition to expressing support for child care programs, Canadians also see reducing taxes cuts on the one hand, and increasing spending on health care on the other, as priorities. Nevertheless, in a head-to-head comparison between tax cuts and continuing government spending on child care, it is child care that emerges as more popular.

In the case of public support for health care spending, what matters is how opinions vary by age. Majorities of Canadians in all age groups favour spending more on health care, but the extent to which the preference for health care spending overshadows that for child care increases with age. Older Canadians are able to be more single-minded in their concern about health care, while younger Canadians feel they have more bases to cover. In searching for the right balance in public spending, governments should keep in mind the need for generational fairness.

Finally, the YMCA-YWCA National Survey on Child Care Policy in Canada finds that access to affordable child care tops the list of things that parents say would have made the job of raising young children easier. This can help to motivate local YMCAs and YWCAs as they continue their work to meet this need.

In a head-to-head comparison between tax cuts and continuing government spending on child care, it is child care that emerges as more popular.



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