

This profile is intended to provide CUPE members with basic information about the sector they work in from a national perspective. Find all our sector profiles and more information online at cupe.ca

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CUPE represents early childhood educators, assistants, cooks, and cleaners in the sector in both stand-alone and multi-sector locals. The bargaining units tend to be small and the wages low. The employers can be not-for-profit volunteer-run boards, charitable, parent-run boards, or for-profit.

- Number of members working in child care or ECE: 12,000
- Number of bargaining units: 83

CUPE represents over 2,600 members in dedicated child care centres. CUPE also represents many early childhood educators (ECEs) delivering child care programs in other sectors such as education and municipal services. We represent 2,020 school-aged child care members in Quebec who are employed by school boards. In Ontario, we represent almost 4,500 full-time equivalent ECE members who deliver the full-day kindergarten program. In British Columbia, we represent 350 members who deliver the Strong Start early learning drop-in program helping prepare children for kindergarten. Many Ontario municipalities deliver child care programs directly; CUPE represents about 5,000 members employed in their child care centres. We also represent child care workers at universities and colleges that directly provide child care services. Finally, many multi-service agencies deliver child care programs where CUPE represents the members.

In total, CUPE represents approximately 12,000 members who work in the sector or work delivering ECE programs. We represent members in the child care sector for every province except Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, which are primarily not unionized.

FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE

Child care continues to be a patchwork of programs. Funding comes from the federal government through a national allocation of the Canada Social Transfer (CST) to provinces and territories.

Although there has generally been growth in provincial and territorial public funding for child care over the years, public expenditure on child care is low. Parent fees remain the main source of revenue for most child care centres outside of Quebec.

Eight jurisdictions have responsibility for child care in their ministries of education: Newfoundland and Labrador, PEI, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Seven provinces now offer kindergarten for a full school day: Newfoundland and Labrador, PEI, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, and BC. The Northwest Territories and Yukon have some full-day provision. In Alberta, the UCP government cancelled the NDP's proposed \$25-day child care plan, reverting back to a market model. Ontario is the only province with full-day kindergarten for all four-year-old children.

The NDP government in BC has taken welcome steps towards building a universal child care system. Wage enhancements, education and funding for training were all announced as part of an ECE recruitment and retention strategy.

Five provinces or territories offer some publicly-delivered (municipal or school board) child care: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Northwest Territories. However, in Ontario the Conservative Government's cuts to municipal funding means several municipalities are

considering eliminating their child care spaces, and allowing the private sector to take over the spaces. In Peterborough, CUPE mounted a successful campaign to pressure the local government to keep their municipal child care centres open.

The majority of child care centres are run by not-for-profit boards. Many CUPE members in the child care sector work with voluntary boards and there is large turnover leading to instability. The introduction of full-day kindergarten has also put these centres under tremendous stress to meet changing demands.

For-profit care is also expanding across the country. In six provinces and territories, half or more of all child care spaces are provided by for-profit corporations. For-profit care is nearly 30 per cent of total centre spaces in Canada. In Ontario, CUPE represents the 510 members at Kids & Company, a large for-profit privately held corporation. In August 2018, the Conservative Government in Ontario announced that it will remove the “For-Profit Maximum Percentage Threshold” from child care funding guidelines. This means that more public funds could go to big-box for-profit child care, creating downward pressure on wages and working conditions.

Issues

THE MARKET MODEL FOR SERVICES

In a child care market, services are a commodity and parents are treated as consumers – they must “shop” for services offered by a variety of competing “suppliers.” Governments have limited interest in or influence on how child care is set up, maintained and delivered. Outside of Quebec, Canada’s child care services are run as a market.

Countries that provide accessible, affordable, high quality child care are those that don’t rely on markets to deliver child care. These models are often publicly managed, operated and funded. Countries that rely on markets are much more likely to rank lower in international

studies. UNESCO, OECD, and UNICEF reports show that Canada’s child care spending ranks among the lowest.

Studies show that non-profit centres are more likely to have better child-staff ratios, better-educated staff and directors, and higher rates of professional development for staff.

UNIONIZATION

A 2013 report, *You Bet We Still Care!*, conducted by the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, showed 21.5 per cent of child care staff identified themselves as union members. Unionization is highest at 30 per cent in Quebec, where the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) is the dominant union. In BC, unionization is at 29.4 per cent; the government employees’ union (BCGEU) represents the majority of the sector. CUPE represents the largest number of members delivering child care and early childhood education services in child care centres as well as other programs.

Unionization rates for child care workers remain low. The *You Bet We Still Care!* study found a number of key differences between unionized and non-unionized child care employees and their workplaces. These included higher staff retention and job satisfaction, higher wages and benefits, and better workplace practices.

WAGES

Without adequate public funding, child care workers’ wages and working conditions are poor. However, child care workers who are unionized have better wages and are more likely to have pensions and benefits.

On average, in 2012, wages for staff in unionized centres were \$4.61 an hour higher than those in non-unionized centres (\$20.11/hour compared to \$15.50 for non-unionized staff). The biggest difference was in Ontario, where unionized staff were paid an average of \$23.06/hour, while non-unionized staff were paid \$15.77/hour.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on how child care is delivered in Canada. Initially, child care centres were open in many provinces solely for the children of essential front-line workers. As provinces have advanced through the stages of reopening their economies, child care centres have begun to reopen, but with severely reduced spaces. Many for-profit child care centres simply can not operate with reduced spaces, leading to an even greater shortage of available child care spaces. As child care centres rely on parent funding for most of their income, raising parent fees is one of the only ways child care centres can remain open. This situation has highlighted the need for universal child care across Canada.

Pensions

Pension coverage for the unionized child care sector is low outside of Quebec and BC. CUPE locals have made some headway with the Multi-Sector Pension Plan (MSPP) in Ontario and Manitoba. Just over 53 per cent of CUPE members in the child care sector have access to a registered pension plan, although only 22 per cent have a defined benefit plan.

Bargaining

CUPE has worked to create structures and strategies that provide more effective coordination, bargaining, and campaigns for the child care sector. In Nova Scotia, CUPE is working with allies to campaign for provincially-funded ECE wages and working standards. Ontario child care sector members are represented on the social services workers' committee and also support the provincial child care coalition. One large local in Toronto has 30 sites and represents 350 members. In Ottawa, one local represents approximately 300 child care workers at 13 centres and has set up a common bargaining table. One local is

representing all the workers for the private-for-profit centre Kids & Company across Ontario. Manitoba has a local representing around 90 members at five child care centres. Although CUPE represents few child care locals in BC, they are covered under province-wide community services bargaining. Outside of the Ottawa and Toronto locals and BC, coordinated bargaining in the sector is rare.

The not-for-profit child care sector is under extreme pressure. Many locals face pressure for concessions at the bargaining table, despite the need to make significant bargaining gains. Locals are facing two-tier proposals for both new hires and casual employees.

Campaigns

CUPE has been a leader in campaigns for child care, working in coalition with many groups, including Child Care Now.

In British Columbia, where there are only enough spaces for about 20 per cent of children, many parents are left without child care options or see kids shuffled between facilities throughout the day. CUPE is campaigning to build seamless child care throughout the public education system.

The integration of before- and after-school care into the school system using the seamless day model of early learning and child care would significantly increase available child care, while delivering a very high quality, value-added system of early childhood education.

CUPE has also been involved in anti-privatization campaigns, including campaigns focused on the large for-profit corporations that threaten the development of a strong public national child care program.

CUPE's child care sector has been engaging in the campaign for Migrant Rights. CUPE recognizes the intersection of child care work with the need for

landed status and better working conditions for migrant workers.

Provincially, CUPE has been active in wage campaigns in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and BC. The not-for-profit child care sector is very fragile across most of Canada. CUPE has been involved in many campaigns to prevent the closure of centres at the local level.

CUPE will continue to work with our partners and our allies to advocate for a well-designed, publicly-funded universal child care program.