



RECOMMENDATION 1

SUPPORT THE CREATION OF AFFORDABLE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Year over year, one of the most shocking statistics to emerge from our HungerCount report is just how deeply children are affected by low incomes and poverty in a country as rich as ours.

In 2019, and over the last decade, children have made up just over 20 percent of the country's general population – yet they represent almost 35 percent of those seeking help from a food bank. This means that hundreds of thousands of children rely on food banks each month in Canada. These numbers are not only staggering – they are unacceptable.

Childcare has become so expensive across Canada that many families with moderate to low incomes are struggling. In Toronto in 2018, the average childcare costs per child was above \$20,000 per year and most cities across the country are similarly expensive, even in provinces with subsidized daycare plans.³⁹

The federal government has made some significant investments in supporting families with the Canada Child Benefit and we are encouraged to see a slight decrease in food bank use amongst children since its introduction. However, while some progress has been made - it is clear that drastically reducing the cost of childcare is a key piece needed to truly reduce the need for food banks for so many children.

In order to make a substantial impact for families living with low incomes, an increased and sustained federal investment in early learning and childcare is essential. The links between social and economic policy in this area are clear: every \$1 invested in early learning and care will boost the economy in the long run by \$6.⁴⁰

Early learning and childcare is an investment in the well-being of Canadians that has real benefits for the country as a whole. Funding and supporting the creation of affordable early learning and childcare has multiple benefits - it supports parents to enter or remain in the workforce and increase their incomes, or to upgrade their education and skills; and it decreases school drop-out rates among children and youth and improves post-secondary educational participation.⁴¹

While wide availability of affordable childcare is particularly beneficial for parents facing financial hardships, it is a boon to parents at all income levels. This is especially true for single-parent households who are remain over-represented in food banks across the country. Single parent households face significantly higher levels of stress than other household types, and pressures of raising a child that include managing unaffordable childcare costs inevitably plays a role.⁴²

In an era when the majority of parents work, with a rapidly changing labour market and a shrinking labour force, it is simply good economics to invest in early learning and childcare.⁴³

We recommend:

To develop a National Strategy on Early Learning and Childcare with tangible targets and goals.

- **The strategy should include a significant increase in current federal investment levels towards early learning and childcare, and set measurable targets and goals that increase the amount of accessible, affordable and publicly-funded quality childcare in every province and territory in Canada.**
- **A central focus of federal investment should be on building the necessary infrastructure needed to physically create more childcare spaces.**
- **The strategy should outline affordability benchmarks that each province must respect to qualify for federal support and funding to effectively create national standards of quality and affordability for early learning and childcare in every part of the country.**

39 David Macdonald and Martha Friendly [2019]. *Developmental Milestones – Child care fees in Canada's big cities 2018*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

40 Alexander, Craig, Kip Beckman, Alicia Macdonald, Cory Renner, and Matthew Stewart [2017]. *Ready for Life: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada.

41 Ibid.

42 Statistics Canada CCHS [2015]. Public Use Microfile.

43 Food Banks Canada [2011]. *Nowhere to Turn*, Toronto: Food Banks Canada.