

This issue snapshot is excerpted from [Unmasking the Future](#) (2021), a scan of major current socio-economic trends and developments, at local, provincial, national and international scales, authored by James Stauch of the Institute for Community Prosperity, commissioned by the Calgary Foundation.



TOWARD UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE:

The Key to a She-recovery

The pandemic has dealt a disproportionately severe blow to female participation in the labour force, which is at its lowest level in three decades. According to RBC deputy chief economist Dawn Desjardins, women are bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 labour displacement, “as they tend to work in industries – hospitality and food services, retail trade, educational services, health care and social assistance – most affected by closures, earnings losses and layoffs.”¹¹⁹ While a net 68,000 jobs for men have been added to the economy since February, over 20,000 jobs for women have disappeared.¹²⁰ 80% of the tens of thousands of workers laid off in the retail, hospitality and food services industries are women.¹²¹ Pre-pandemic, about 64 per cent (1.4 million) of Canadian children aged 0-5 regularly used paid non-parental childcare. In Ontario and Alberta, only about 50% of child care centres remained open during the pandemic, and most of those are operating far from full capacity.¹²²

A recent report by social policy researchers noted that “economists, activists and parents alike” are in unison in understanding the social and economic price of this “she-session”, warning that without a national child care program, Canada’s recover will be “dragged down”.¹²³ Canadian economist Armine Yalnizyan, who coined the term “she-session”, has urged governments to focus on this, in addition to traditional ‘stimulus’ packages

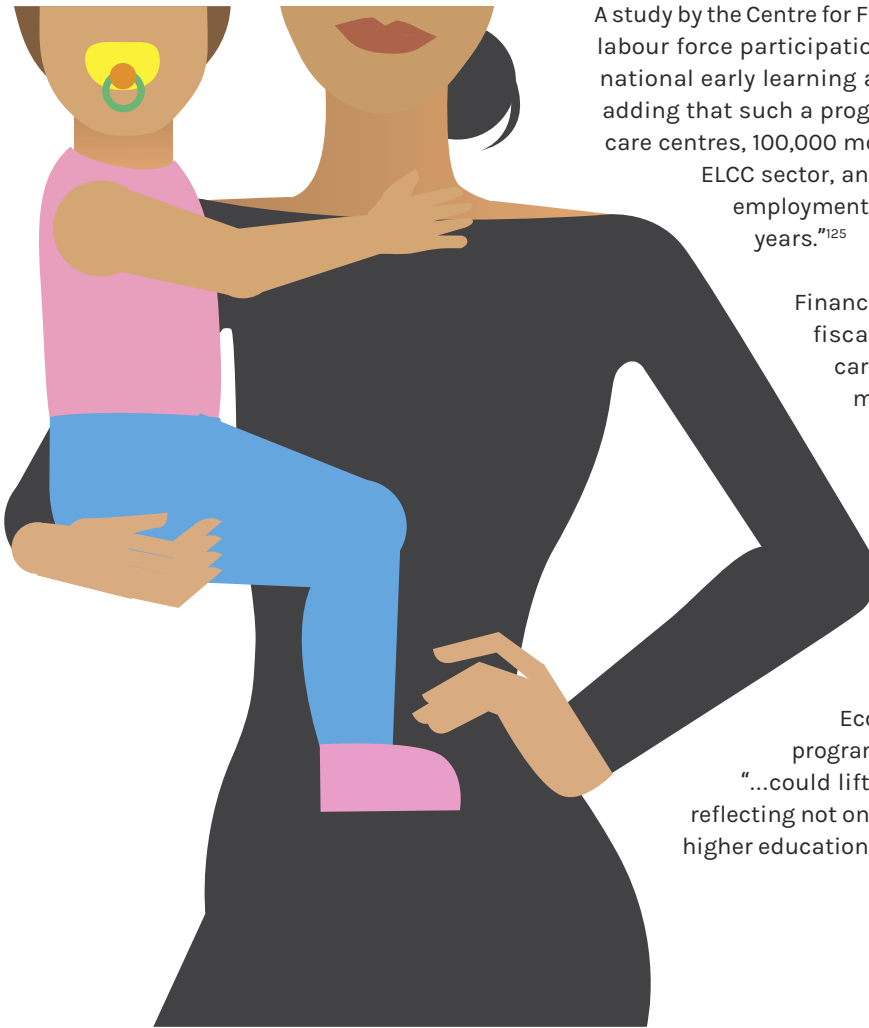
which tend to disproportionately support male labourforce participation (refer to Alberta’s \$10 billion stimulus package as a prime example of stimulus to male-dominated sectors). Rebekah Young of Scotiabank Economics has similarly urged governments to embed universal child care into a recovery plan, noting that Quebec’s universal daycare model has shown much stronger female labour participation.¹²⁴ For over a decade now, the Early Childhood Development Funders Working Group (led by the Margaret and Wallace McCain Foundation, Muttart Foundation, Lawson Foundation and others) have laid out the policy case in Canada for both universal child care and early childhood education (including early Kindergarten).

"We expect women to work like they don't have children, and raise children as if they don't work."

Amy Westervelt, *Forget Having It All: How America Messed Up Motherhood--and How to Fix It* (2018)

"I say this both as a working mother and as a minister of finance — Canada will not be truly competitive until all Canadian women have access to the affordable child care we need to support our participation in our country's workforce."

Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Finance, November 2020 Fiscal Update¹²⁶



A study by the Centre for Future Work argues that an expanded GDP from female labour force participation would enlarge tax revenue such that a universal national early learning and child care (ELCC) program would pay for itself, adding that such a program "would create over 200,000 direct jobs in child care centres, 100,000 more jobs in industries which support and supply the ELCC sector, and facilitate increased labour force participation and employment by up to 725,000 Canadian women in prime parenting years."¹²⁵

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, in her November, 2030 fiscal update, signalled that a national, universal child care program is indeed on the horizon. Earmarking \$20 million to embark on a national consultation and design process, and in the short term topping up the Canada Child Benefit. Freeland noted the success of the Quebec model, and how essential child care is to a full recovery. A Liberal election platform promise, we can expect such a program to be tabled as early as the spring budget, but more likely will form the centrepiece of a Liberal re-election strategy. Universal child care also has broad support from the private sector. In a Scotiabank Economics primer on the topic, they argue that such a program is critical to closing the workforce gap, which in turn, "...could lift Canada's GDP levels by 4% over the medium term, reflecting not only greater supply, but also a productivity boost given higher educational attainment levels of Canadian women."