



National Childcare Program: Making Childcare Accessible for Canada's Skilled Tradespeople

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CBTU SMCC

CANADA'S BUILDING TRADES UNIONS
LES SYNDICATS DES MÉTIERS DE LA CONSTRUCTION DU CANADA
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Canada's Building Trades Unions represent over half a million skilled trades workers across the country, who are employed in building and maintaining critical infrastructure in Canada – many of whom are parents. In the construction sector, job duration, work site location and start and end times change for a variety of reasons, from construction cycles to seasonality. A worker is employed on a job until the project is complete and then may take a job elsewhere; inclement weather may shut down a job site for a day, resulting in no work and no pay. What this means for parents is they need flexible, affordable childcare options that allow them to go to work and build our roads, bridges, hospitals and green energy infrastructure knowing their child(ren) are being taken care of by qualified childcare professionals.

Recommendations from Canada's Building Trades Unions

In Budget 2021, the Canadian Government unveiled its Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, committing \$30 billion over the next five years and \$8.3 billion ongoing. The Government committed to working with provinces and territories to build a Canada-wide, community-based system of quality childcare. This was welcomed news by Canada's Building Trades Unions as childcare has been a long-standing issue for families employed in the construction sector across Canada.

To ensure the development of an accessible childcare program that supports Canada's skilled trades workforce, CBTU conducted focus groups in Fall 2021 with parents who work in the unionized construction sector and their spouses. The focus groups were aimed at gathering information on their experiences and realities of working in the construction industry and managing childcare. This report is meant to identify and address barriers to assist both provincial and federal governments to provide inclusive and flexible childcare and includes a summary of key findings and recommendations.

BARRIERS

During the focus groups, participants identified barriers they had experienced during their careers to access childcare including:

- Limited daycare provider hours that don't correspond with the shifts they work
- Long waitlists to access childcare
- Long-term commitments to one childcare facility that don't correspond with the cyclical nature of construction
- Lack of qualified childcare professionals/drop-in childcare options

Due to barriers in accessing childcare, many tradespeople – and disproportionately tradeswomen - are unable to work or have considered leaving the construction industry altogether. Ensuring childcare services support parents in the skilled trades will create a stronger workforce and enable it to continue to grow, and attract more diversity to the industry.

"I have a six-year-old son- the hours don't work, the waitlists are long and they're unlicensed. There's a stigma of being a single parent - I'm the only female on the roof so it just adds to the stigma if I can't go to work because of childcare. I've got an opportunity to go to Newfoundland for work but don't have the childcare to actually go to work."

-Apprentice, Sheet Metal and Roofers, Nova Scotia

"As a family of tradespeople, it is extremely difficult to find childcare that accommodates our actual workday, that can start with leaving the house at 5:30am and not returning until after 6pm. As a new father, my priority is my family, but there is little ability to adjust my workday to get the most time with my son."

-Electrician, Ontario



In 2021, the Institute for Womens Policy Research surveyed 2,635 tradeswomen in the US on retention and advancement in the construction industry. Some key findings included:

- 63 per cent identified as parents
- Over one fifth had children age five or younger.
- 100 per cent of respondents with young children identified childcare as their main issue.
- 44 per cent of respondents said they were seriously considering leaving the trades; where 40 per cent ranked difficulty finding childcare as their main reason.



“I work from 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. My elderly grandmother looks after my kids because no other childcare is available. The one daycare in town has a two-year waitlist. I feel, right now, that I will have to quit work, I don’t know what else to do. I’m a single parent. I can afford it – but there’s no one that can accommodate my work hours. It’s the hours and no childcare spots available. There are people that run home daycares but again, their hours are not good for me – and they aren’t licensed so there isn’t the quality childcare.”

-Apprentice Carpenter, Nova Scotia

“We need more programs/supports to help women when they’re getting into the trade to remove those barriers and support them when they return to second, third year in the trade. Any single parent – not just women.”

- UA piping instructor, British Columbia

“My husband is also a red seal carpenter. We have three kids – I definitely struggle getting kids to daycares. He had to be on-site very early, or pick up late – daycares were always closed. He worked an hour and 45 minutes out of town so it fell on my shoulders.” - Carpenter, New Brunswick





"We shouldn't have to get out of the trades just because we have children. Especially single parents. It's not just about the money, it's the fact that nobody had the hours available."

- Electrician, Nova Scotia

RECOMMENDATIONS

In developing childcare programs, Canada's Building Trades Unions are calling for provincial governments to incorporate the following to ensure equitable access to childcare for all families, including those who work outside normal work hours.

Tradespeople and their families need:

1. Early and late hours of care

To accommodate the nature of construction jobs that oftentimes consist of early start times and late pickups we require earlier dropoff and later pickup hours given our workers often do not work the standard 9-5 schedule of parents in other industries.

"My current childcare does not open until after I start work. I am always late to work due to this issue and have been confronted by coworkers, who do not have children, that this is unacceptable behaviour." - **Carpenter, Ontario**

2. Shorter waitlists

Like workers in other industries, skilled trades people have struggled with being on long waitlists for childcare. Additional childcare spaces are needed. Parents need to be able to enroll their children promptly, especially when unexpected job opportunities arise or when workers are required to travel to a new location for work.

"I had my son on the waitlist when I was four months pregnant – and I didn't get childcare until he was 19 months."

-Apprentice Carpenter, Nova Scotia



“Quality of daycare would be one of my biggest concerns. You can’t paint every kid with the same brush. We work long hours in construction – we spend a lot of time at these job sites, and they spend a lot of time at these daycares. If I’m not concerned about their wellbeing, I would be a lot more comfortable. We need safe, accredited daycare. It will help retention for us – help in quality of workmanship and production because you don’t have to worry about your kid.”

-Welder, Alberta



3. Flexible Childcare Options

Many childcare centers require enrollment commitments over long periods, requiring families to pay for a childcare spot whether they are there or not. In the construction industry, work is cyclical and can be weather-dependent, shifts vary from jobsite to jobsite, shifts are often long and there can be periods where no work is available locally. It is often not feasible for skilled trades workers to sign a long-term commitment for a childcare spot.

Having the flexibility to make choices that are best suited to each individual family's needs and requirements was deemed as very important to members that participated in the focus groups.

*“The starting apprenticeship salary doesn't match the minimum cost of living plus daycare. As a single parent, if I work, than I don't qualify for childcare subsidies - yet to be able to work, I require childcare.” - **Apprentice Carpenter, Ontario***

“When I did have to bring them [their kids] to daycare – I had to wake them up so early. When I brought them home, they had had a 14 hour day themselves. So when we got home, they were exhausted and miserable. Not only is it challenging for us as parents, it’s so challenging for our kids. In trades, I’ve typically started at 6 a.m. – so my partner has to deliver the kids. At one time, we had to be a single-income family because it was too hard to navigate [childcare and work].”

-Commercial Transport Mechanic, British Columbia.

"I had my kids in a day home – it wasn't the greatest but it was my only option.

Sometimes, if they're not registered/monitored, you don't know what you're getting. Quality of home daycare is very important".

- Ironworker, Cape Breton



4. Quality drop-in childcare arrangements

Quality of childcare - whether short-term or long-term - is of utmost importance to families. Parents need to feel comfortable where they leave their children.

5. Raise the age limit

The age limit for the childcare program needs to be raised. Many of the agreements with the provinces specify that they plan to provide children under five or six years old with \$10-per-day childcare, but parents also require childcare for children under 12 (or the age that corresponds with provincial guidelines for children staying home alone) before and after school to accommodate their work schedules and the nature of shift work in the construction industry.



"I used to work at a daycare, and my husband was in the trades. Before he became a red seal carpenter, we struggled. Cost was an issue. We're ok now, but we have three kids and pay \$1,700 per month for daycare. The hours are definitely a big issue – and cost."

- Carpenter, New Brunswick



“My biggest issue was always the hours – our job sites start at 6 or 7AM. I’ve lost jobs because I couldn’t start work on time, because of lack of childcare. If you do find a work opportunity that will allow you to start later, you earn less, don’t get opportunities for overtime or opportunities to advance. If you start later than the rest of the crew, you also face animosity.”

-Welder, Alberta

ABOUT CBTU

Canada’s Building Trades Unions (CBTU) are an alliance of 14 international unions in the construction, maintenance, and fabrication industries that collectively represent over half a million skilled trades workers across Canada since our inception in 1908. Each year, our unions and our signatory contractor partners invest over \$300 million in private sector money to fund and operate over 195 apprenticeship training and education facilities across Canada that produce the safest, most highly-trained and productive skilled craft workers found anywhere in the world. Canada’s Building Trades Unions represent members who work in more than 60 different trades and occupations, and generate six per cent of Canada’s GDP; our industry maintains and repairs more than \$2.2 trillion in assets.

Our work is not just done on site, but in several facilities that provide modules or other components that are incorporated into the structures that we work on. Once structures are built, we are employed in their renovation, maintenance and repurposing. The unions that compose CBTU can be found on our [website here](#).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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