

FAMILY CHOICES

Manitoba's Five-Year Agenda for Early Learning and Child Care



Introduction

The Province of Manitoba is listening to families. They have told us that they need high quality, accessible, affordable care for their children. Two-thirds of Manitoba mothers, and 92% of fathers, with children under 6 years of age are in the labour force¹. Early learning and child care are critical for them, and they continue to be a priority for the Manitoba government. Following on the success of the Five-Year Plan for Child Care (2002-2007), Manitoba has introduced **Family Choices: Manitoba's Five-Year Agenda for Early Learning and Child Care in Manitoba**. The 12 points of action in **Family Choices** set an ambitious agenda to maintain and improve early learning and child care in Manitoba.

Building on Manitoba's First Five Year Plan for Child Care

Manitoba's first Five-Year Plan for Child Care was launched in 2002. Much was accomplished during that time, including:

- over 5,000 more child care spaces funded
- enhanced nursery school initiatives, including increased access to nursery school subsidies
- new child care subsidy levels implemented making more low and middle-income families eligible for subsidies
- more than 450 new Early Childhood Education graduates trained
 - Early Childhood Educators (ECE) salaries increased by 15%
 - revenues to family child care providers increased by 12%

Investing in Our Children and Our Future

From 1999 to 2007, Manitoba doubled its commitment to early learning and child care. By continuing to increase our investment in the child care system in Manitoba, **Family Choices** will help to create the best possible outcomes for children, families and communities. High quality early learning and child care provides children with safe, nurturing and stimulating environments, which, together with parents, helps children to develop to their full potential. They improve outcomes for children, and their families, in both the short and long-term, as measured by:

- improved health and learning in later life^{2,3}
- improved school readiness and performance^{4,5}
- improved family outcomes, since child care programs allow parents, especially mothers, to participate in the paid labour force^{6,7}

There are also economic benefits of increased investments in early learning and child care. Canadian research has found that every dollar invested in child care leads to a two dollar benefit to the economy⁸. Manitoba research has shown that, in the short term, every \$1 spent on child care generates \$1.58 of economic activity in rural and northern regions⁹.

Investing in child care stimulates local economies, provides social infrastructure to support workers, parents, and their employers, and is an investment in human development and education, leading to a productive future workforce.

The evidence is solid—economists, political scientists, neuroscientists, and social scientists have substantial data proving that programs which promote the growth and development of young children (ages 0–6 years) are the best investment for developing the human capital necessary for economic growth. Early child development—

- is the foundation of human-capital formation;
- has the highest rate of return in economic development;
- is the most cost-effective way to reduce poverty and to foster economic growth.

The World Bank 2007³

Parents have a tough job balancing family and work commitments. Families need more choices to strike that balance while contributing to the province's prosperity and helping to ensure a strong start for children. This agenda will enhance those choices.

Minister Gord Mackintosh



Principles

Improvements to Manitoba's early learning and child care system will be based on three principles:

Accessibility and Universality - investing in child care, nursery schools, and the early learning and child care workforce

Family Choices will improve early learning opportunities for children through the early learning and child care system, which includes child care centres, family child care providers and nursery schools. Recognizing the benefits of early learning and child care, **Family Choices** commits the Manitoba government to creating and funding new child care spaces and to meeting families' varying needs, through, for example, part-time, seasonal and extended hours of care. Through **Family Choices**, Manitoba will also increase its investments in non-profit, community based, regulated nursery schools.

Affordability - keeping fees low

Family Choices commits Manitoba to maintaining the second lowest fees in Canada, after Québec. A successful child care strategy must be affordable.

Quality - initiatives to enhance safety, curricula and inclusion

Family Choices commits Manitoba to further advance the quality of early learning and child care. Using a multi-faceted approach, and working with parents and child care providers, Manitoba will enhance safety, regulation, education and parental involvement.

Working collaboratively with post-secondary institutions, Manitoba will enhance Early Childhood Education curricula, so that our early childhood educators are better prepared to respond to the needs of all Manitoba children and their parents, including those of diverse cultures and children with special needs.

These principles are the foundation for **Family Choices**, Manitoba's 12-point agenda to improve early learning and child care from 2008 to 2013.



Did You Know

Spending - Manitoba spends more per child care space than any other province, except Québec.

Affordability - Manitoba and Québec are the only provinces in Canada to limit fees, keeping child care affordable for parents.

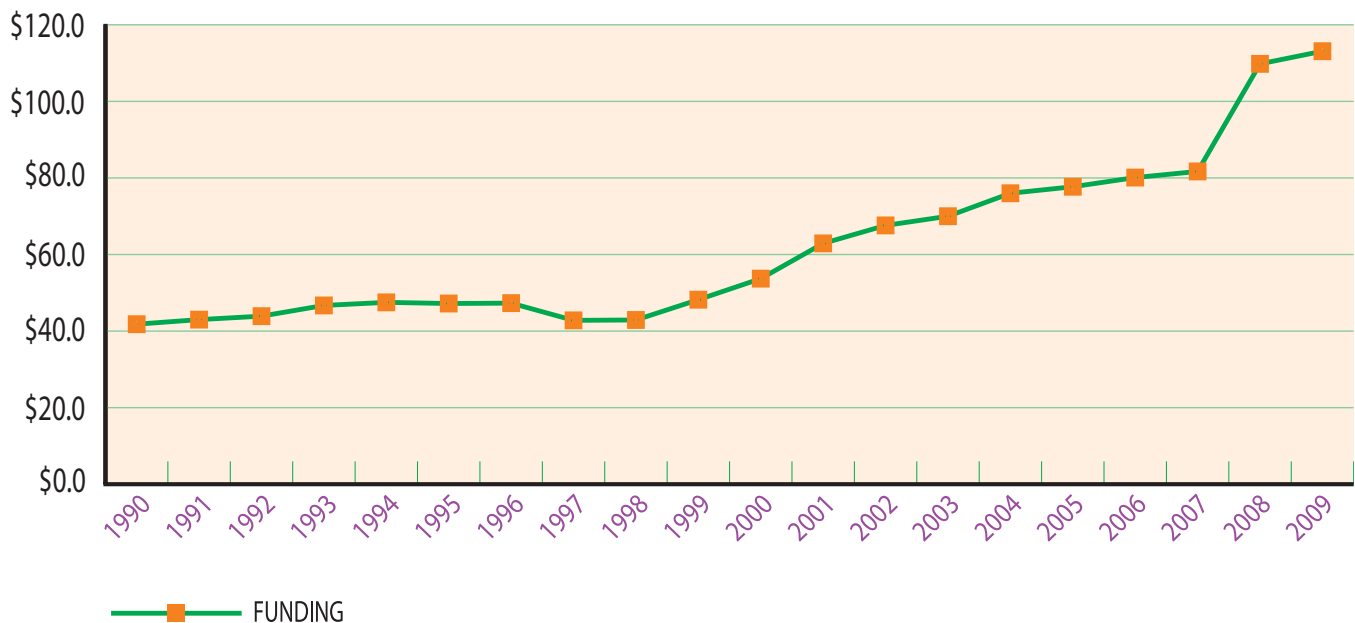
Quality - Manitoba's training requirements for early childhood educators are among the highest in Canada. Manitoba is the only province to require directors to have further credentials in addition to a two year ECE diploma program.



The evidence is compelling and overwhelming: well-funded integrated child development and parenting programs improve the cognitive and social functioning of all children... Early child development is a prime time investment opportunity for society providing greater returns than any other period of life. Investments need to be substantial and sustained to promote equal opportunity for optimal development for all children and produce the documented economic, health and social benefits. The involvement of the different sectors of society—public, voluntary, and private—in creating a system of early childhood programs will help build social capital, which is thought to be a key factor in long-term economic growth and the maintenance of tolerant democratic societies.

Early Years Study 2: Putting Science Into Action³

Growth of Child Care Funding (Dollars in Millions Rounded) Manitoba Fiscal Years Ending 1990 to 2009



1. 6,500 More Child Care Spaces Funded by 2013

Manitoba will invest in funding 6,500 more spaces over the next five years. Growth is planned for children of all ages in need of care - infants, preschool and school aged children. This will represent a 28% increase over five years.

2. Increased Nursery School Enrolment

Family Choices recognizes that not all parents want, or need, full time child care. Nursery schools also provide children with important social and educational stimulation. To ensure that more Manitoban children have access to these important resources, Manitoba will provide enhanced funding for an additional 1,000 nursery school spaces, enabling more children to attend these programs. This represents a 33% increase over five years.

3. Family Choices Building Fund

Manitoba will increase funding to the existing Early Learning and Child Care Capital Fund by \$22.5 million, to create a \$37 million *Family Choices Building Fund*. Through this fund, Manitoba will work with school divisions and the Public Schools Finance Board, to invest in capital funding focusing on using surplus school space for child care centres, in addition to supporting facilities that cannot be located in schools, with an allocation of \$14.5 million over five years.

During the next five years, Manitoba will also work collaboratively with the school system to develop improvements to school aged child care to make it more responsive to the needs of parents.



Good child care makes an enormous difference in the ability of poor families to find and keep jobs. Affordable child care supports those families that are not poor to stay in the workforce. But beyond all this, good child care is an excellent opportunity to provide early childhood education and to ensure that all children have the same chances for good development. Good early childhood education has enormous benefits for children, their families and their communities... Many social programs support families but child care is the backbone of them all. Child care has been shown over and over again to be the essential ingredient for the workforce participation of parents - and especially mothers.

National Council of Welfare (1999) *Preschool Children: Promises to Keep*⁴

4. Child Care Safety Charter

Ensuring children's safety while in care is a top priority for Manitoba. Manitoba will be the first Canadian jurisdiction with a comprehensive legislated Child Care Safety Charter. All licensed child care programs will be expected to develop enhanced safety plans and codes of conduct. Manitoba will commit resources to assist providers to meet these requirements.

5. Age Appropriate Curricula and Enhanced Program Quality

Age Appropriate Curricula

Early learning is essential to healthy child development and school readiness. Through **Family Choices**, Manitoba will develop a provincial framework to guide programs as they develop play-based, early learning curricula and will mentor and support them in this work.

Manitoba will produce a revised Parents' Guide to quality early learning and child care, including information about the importance of play-based, developmentally appropriate learning in contributing to literacy, numeracy, language, emotional and social development.



The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) supports programs which promote the development of the whole child – physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication and general knowledge. MASS supports warm and nurturing programs based on sound knowledge of child development, the children in the program and the socio-cultural context of the children's lives.

Manitoba Association of School Superintendents. Early Childhood Education and Care: A Position Statement

Enhanced Quality

Manitobans can be proud of our early learning and child care system. The quality of programs will be enhanced in areas such as learning activities, children's personal care routines, the development of parenting materials and space and furnishings, based on an internationally recognized, evidence-based approach.

Manitoba supports the highest standards in all of its licensed early learning and child care programs, and will work with parents and child care providers to ensure that all Manitoba children in early learning and child care programs receive consistent services of high quality.

The delivery of early learning and child care programs in First Nations communities is the jurisdiction of the federal government, in conjunction with First Nations. Manitoba recognizes the importance of these programs in supporting First Nations children and their families. Through **Family Choices**, Manitoba proposes to discuss with First Nations and the federal government how best to work together towards improving standards.

6. Centralized Online Waitlist

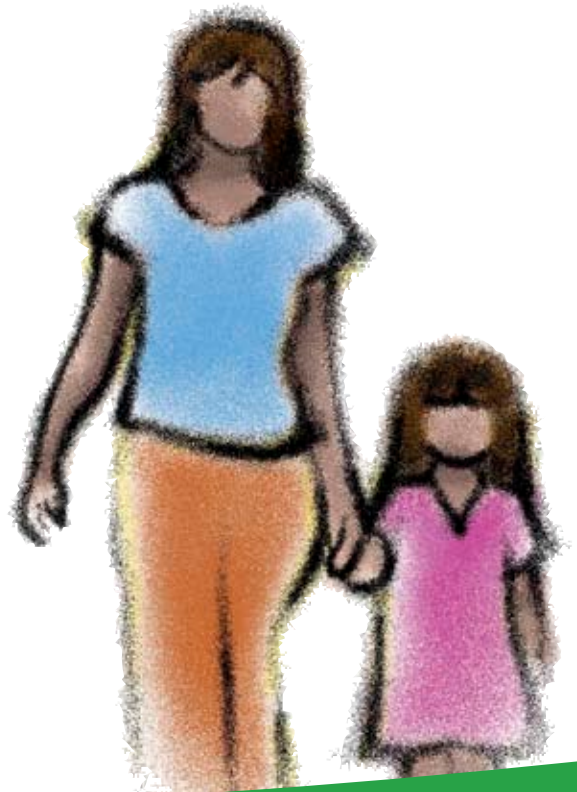
The commitment in **Family Choices** to fund an additional 6,500 child care spaces will reduce waitlists. Currently, because each program maintains its own waitlist, and because parents often place their children on several waitlists, parents may not have an accurate idea of when a space will be available for their child.

A centralized early learning and child care waitlist will be developed to provide families, with current, reliable information about the availability of early learning and child care in their community. This will be available to parents and child care providers, as a future enhancement to the Child Care Online website. This waitlist will also provide better information for planning the expansion of child care in Manitoba.

7. Lowest Fees Outside Québec

Manitoba maintains the second lowest child care fees across the country, and provides a targeted subsidy to make child care more affordable for low-income families. In 2007, Manitoba reduced the non-subsidized daily fee, paid by all subsidized parents, from \$2.40 to \$2.00/day.

In 2007, Manitoba increased the subsidy income eligibility levels by 13%, the first such increase since 1991. Manitoba will continue to regulate maximum fees that can be charged to parents, keeping early learning and child care affordable for middle income parents. Specifically, **Family Choices** will create a predictable cost for families, maintaining a regulated maximum fee.



8. Greater Inclusion

Family Choices will continue Manitoba's commitment to support children with special needs through the early learning and child care system. Meeting the needs of children may require additional program supports and staff training to ensure that inclusion is a reality in early learning and child care settings across the province. Manitoba will provide enhanced mentoring and training to early childhood educators to ensure that children with additional support needs receive the best possible care and opportunities to learn and to thrive in integrated, community settings.

Manitoba has always benefited from the diversity of its people. Parents of children from Manitoba's diverse cultural communities rely on the early learning and child care system. Support will be provided to programs and early childhood educators to strengthen programming approaches, and welcome more of Manitoba's diverse population into the early learning and child care workforce. **Family Choices** will enable programs to be more responsive to diverse cultures including Francophones, Aboriginal Manitobans and new immigrants.

9. More Flexible Hours

The need for child care may extend beyond the typical workday. To address this, **Family Choices** will increase Manitoba's commitment to off-hours and seasonal programming, where need is demonstrated.



10. Stronger Workforce

A 20% overall funding increase will be provided during this five-year period to establish a pension plan, increase wages, and establish a mandated minimum base wage for early childhood educators. A wage adjustment fund will be established to provide equity for front line staff.

Manitoba recognizes that creating more child care spaces will also create an increased need for more early childhood education professionals. Manitoba will continue to work with post-secondary institutions, to increase the number of early childhood education graduates by 2013.

Further efforts will be made to recruit more Manitobans to consider the rewards of a career in early childhood education. Recruitment campaigns will be launched and will include:

- incentives for Aboriginal students
- efforts to recruit more new Manitobans
- upgrading assistance for existing early childhood educators who wish to enhance their credentials
- scholarships
- efforts to recruit more men to the field
- a focus on more home-based providers
- steps to “recruit back” those who have left the field

Recognizing the importance of family child care, especially in rural and remote communities, Manitoba will explore new ways to make home-based child care more attractive to providers, encouraging them to stay in the field.

Quality child care supports the bottom line. Quality child care for employees is important to employers because it improves productivity, reduces absenteeism, cuts turnover...and can increase company value.

Shellenback. Child Care and Parent Productivity⁷



11. Strategic Expansion

Manitoba aims to strategically plan and build child care capacity based on parental and community needs. Some communities and groups are under-serviced and, through **Family Choices**, Manitoba will address these gaps. Spaces will be expanded based on population levels and need, maintaining the existing 4% commitment for French language programs.

Plans include working with community economic development partners, and supporting communities in determining and planning to meet their early learning and child care needs. Recognizing the particular challenges of providing this service in rural areas, Manitoba will develop a new, small centre funding model for smaller communities, and address the unique needs of farm families during seeding and harvesting.

12. Stronger Parental Stewardship

There are currently 550 voluntary boards, managing early learning and child care programs in Manitoba. Board members are mostly parents, and they volunteer their time because they are committed to high quality care for their children. Unfortunately, the current system also places a significant burden on parents who may not have the time or expertise to handle issues such as labour relations, regulatory compliance and curriculum development. Strong parental stewardship is key to Manitoba's early learning and child care system. Through **Family Choices**, Manitoba will work together with child care boards, to develop and pilot new models of governance, including the development of "hubs" enabling programs to share administrative costs and expertise, while allowing parents to focus on program matters. Participation in these programs would be voluntary, with the opportunity to opt-in to any proposed changes.

The Community Child Care Standards Act will be reviewed and modernized, to reflect the learning that begins in the early years. As part of a new *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, Manitoba will establish a Family-Centred Advisory Council with parents and stakeholders.

Childcare is an essential element of rural infrastructure, enabling rural families to combine work and family, enabling parents to earn off-farm income, and thus strengthening the rural economy...Child care services promote farm safety and can mitigate out migration and population decline...Over half of mothers in rural areas are in the paid labour force, and face barriers to paid employment when childcare services are absent.

Association of Manitoba Municipalities,
Resolution #16/07



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(Endnotes)

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