

# Families Third of kids unprepared for school

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There are only enough regulated child-care spaces for one in five children, leaving parents to place children in private care, which may not provide the same stimulating environments.

The lack of time for children is showing up in a growing number of kindergarten pupils who are not ready for school. One in three are not ready in areas of social, emotional and physical health, or language and communications skills, Muhajarine said.

The solution is a "New Deal for Families," built on three major public policy changes, Kershaw argues.

The New Deal includes extending benefits for new parents to 18 months from 12 for all single and dual earner households, including self-employed and unemployed parents, and a minimum benefit should be provided that would eliminate poverty for families with children under 18 months, he said.

The New Deal proposes providing \$10-per-day child care and promotes flex-time to help employees combine work and family, making them more productive while at work. Incentives should be available to employers to limit work weeks to 35 hours.



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Nazeem Muhajarine of the Health Children research team says a lack of early education can harm children as they enter school.

This would require policies that make it less expensive for employers to use people up to 35 hours per week on average and more expensive to use people after that, and would involve spreading the same amount of work over a greater number of people, he said.

The changes would require tinkering with overtime premiums, employment insurance and CPP premiums, he said.

In Saskatchewan, the net cost of the proposals to federal and provincial governments would be \$507 million in the first full year of

implementation, and would decline thereafter.

The \$22-billion cost of the programs Canada-wide could come from re-allocating existing government expenditures, raising taxes or cutting tax loopholes, asking the business community to step up and pay higher wages or parental leave benefits, or from the type of deficit financing the baby-boomer generation often relied upon, Kershaw said.

The net cost to governments after the first full year would be considerably lower, at \$16.3 billion, the report states.

"The net cost is lower because governments recoup tax revenue both from the labour supply gains that result from the New Deal and from the pay equity wages earned by child care workers," the report says.

It would also save government spending on health care, child welfare and anti-poverty programs.

The status quo is costing the Canadian business community \$4 billion per year, according to estimates reached by researchers in collaboration with British Columbia chartered accountants.

Employees with preschool-age children have work-life conflict,

leading to more absenteeism; they're less likely to stay on the job after having a new baby; and they use more health insurance benefits, which increases premiums for employers, Kershaw said.

"Couldn't we spend that \$4 billion differently?" he said.

Kershaw believes the plan would control health-care expenditures, control crime, reduce education spending and prepare a labour force that will be more job-ready when they graduate because they're more school-ready at the outset.

Baby boomers need to join with younger Canadians to pressure governments to create policies that will address the squeeze, Kershaw said.

The researchers hope the "squeeze generation" and the New Deal proposal will become an election issue in Saskatchewan.

The study was conducted with support from the Healthy Children research team at the Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit at the universities of Saskatchewan and Regina, through their early years network, kidSKan.

The report is available online at [blogs.ubc.ca/newdealforfamilies](http://blogs.ubc.ca/newdealforfamilies).  
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