

November 12, 2020

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, PC, MP
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6



Via Email

Dear Minister:

On behalf of the National Union of Public and General Employees' (NUPGE) more than 390,000 members across Canada, I am writing to you regarding the urgent need for a national child care system that is universally accessible and publicly funded.

NUPGE represents workers in the child care sector. NUPGE also represents working parents and caregivers, many of whom are critical services workers that have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you know, families have been struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Working parents scrambled to find child care arrangements, as schools and many child care settings closed. It has been particularly challenging for those working on the front lines of the pandemic, such as health care professionals, social service workers, and grocery store workers. Other parents found themselves working from home while also juggling child care and home schooling. Many children, especially those requiring additional support, missed out on learning experiences and supports that are crucial to their development. Where children are back in school or child care settings, working parents continue to be strained, as kids are more often at home sick, or isolating due to COVID-19 exposure.

It has become clear that these challenges, and the pandemic broadly, are disproportionately impacting women. Data show that women's labour force participation dramatically declined, as many women reduced their hours, or left their jobs entirely, to care for children, undoing the gains of recent decades. The gender employment gap among parents with young children widened significantly between February and May of 2020, [according to Canadian-based research](#).

Early childhood educators and child care staff, the majority of which are women, who continue to work through the pandemic have been faced with the enormous challenge of continuing to provide safe and nurturing environments for children amidst a pandemic. The many child care providers that had to close, or remain closed, have faced uncertainty about their future. The sector also saw widespread layoffs. Looking forward, [early childhood educators and child care staff are concerned](#) about health and safety, financial and staffing resources, and children's well-being.



Canada is experiencing a *she-cession*. This term, coined by economist Armine Yalnizyan, has become widely used to reflect the gendered impact of the pandemic. And in response, we need a she-covery. Yalnizyan has, now famously, said: “no recovery without she-covery. No she-covery without child care.”

The evidence has long been clear: child care provides an enriching environment for children, enables working parents, especially women, to participate in the workforce, and contributes to a strong economy overall. A well-funded system would provide fair compensation to its professional workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the value of child care clearer than ever. As your government has recognized, child care will be essential to the economic and social recovery—and, specifically, to a she-covery.

NUPGE and its Components previously wrote to your colleague, Minister Hussien, regarding our call for a national child care system. We commended the Minister for the commitment to supporting, and funding, access to child care across this country, and we urged your government to build further on these commitments.

And so, NUPGE was pleased to hear your government’s commitment to a national child care system in the Speech from the Throne. We agree that the federal government has an essential role to play.

As you can understand, this announcement was met with cautious optimism from child care advocates. We have been promised a national child care system before. We hope you agree that the time is now to make a universally accessible, publicly funded, national child care system a reality.

We are expecting to see your government deliver on this commitment in the upcoming federal budget. NUPGE believes that a national child care system must be universally accessible, publicly funded, not-for-profit, and high quality. It must meaningfully support its workforce, which means fair compensation, training, recruitment, and retention.

We call on you to implement federal funding transfers to the provinces and territories and, working with Indigenous communities and the child care sector, develop common national standards towards a universal public child care system, similar to Canada’s health care system.

This approach would enable high-quality child care to be accessible to all families who need it. The funds must also ensure fair wages for early childhood educators and child care workers, a historically underpaid and undervalued workforce predominantly made up of women workers.

We point your attention towards the [Strategy for Recovery](#) developed by Canada’s national child care organizations. It offers a roadmap to invest in child care as core to the post-pandemic she-covery and to build towards a universal public system. The strategy has been [widely endorsed by leaders and experts](#) in social and economic policy, labour, business, women’s rights, and early childhood development.

While child care is not solely a women's issue, a universal public child care system would make a valuable contribution to advancing gender equity. As a feminist government committed to gender-based policymaking, we urge your Liberal government to be the federal government to finally implement a national public child care system.

NUPGE and its Components have long advocated for a universal child care system. But we sense the renewed urgency of this present moment, marked by not only a pandemic but Canada's first she-cession. We hope you agree that now is the time to make a universal public child care system a reality in Canada.

I look forward to your response and would welcome the opportunity to meet with your office to further discuss NUPGE members' concerns, experiences, and recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Larry Brown', written in a cursive style.

Larry Brown
President

cc: The Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Families, Children, and Social
Development
Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Bert Blundon, NUPGE Secretary-Treasurer
National Executive Board
NUPGE Special Committee on Child Care