

Review of Childcare Facilities providing Extended Hours of Care



RESEARCH BRIEF

INTRODUCTION

Families requiring childcare outside of a standard Monday to Friday, 8:00 am to 6:00pm schedule often have an extremely difficult time accessing regulated childcare. Most families requiring childcare outside of standard hours in Canada, rely on a patchwork of unregulated care such as family, friends, or neighbours either in their own home or in the caregiver's home. This report will provide a scan of some of the regulated program options for extended hours of childcare, sometimes referred to as 'non-standard hours of childcare' within the province of British Columbia, across the country, and in other parts of the world.

EXTENDED HOURS OF CHILDCARE IN CANADA

A 2015 Canadian study, entitled *Work around the clock: A snapshot of non-standard hours child care in Canada*, documents the dearth of regulated childcare available outside of standard hours, a general lack of knowledge surrounding the need, and an overall absence of data about how much is currently available.¹ The report found that "no province or territory has a comprehensive program or policy to ensure access to non-standard hours of childcare (or childcare of any kind)."¹ BC is one of only three provinces¹ where it is possible to identify the number of childcare providers providing extended hours of care of via an online childcare search. The reality is that there are few possibilities for families to access regulated childcare that provides extended hours of care. A 2017 article from the *Globe and Mail* equated finding non-standard childcare in Canada with finding a "unicorn".²

¹ Manitoba and Saskatchewan are the other two.

The 2015 study *Work around the clock: A snapshot of non-standard hours child care in Canada*, included a case study of five childcare services from four provinces. The study found that:

- All non-standard hour programs were somewhat different from their standard day programs, with differences such as less programming, more free-time, multi-age groupings, dinner routines, bedtime routines, and homework support.
- There was an understanding that this was more “care” than an “educational” service.

Factors cited as supporting the success of these programs include:

- Being associated with a larger organization, specifically for the financial and administrative support they provide;
- Having access to a larger cohort of staff; and
- Extra funding, other than parents and regular government funding. Extra funding came from special government funding and employer/union funding.

Challenges included:

- Inconsistent usage due to irregular or rotating shifts;
- Affordability;
- Significant administrative and human resources, some quoted as much as 50 percent more administration than regular childcare programs;
- Shift to full day kindergarten is a challenge as the higher ratios for four and five year olds “allowed centres to subsidize of the costs for younger children – and – in this case – the non-standard hours provision;”¹
- Recruitment of staff willing to work non-standard or irregular hours;
- Maintaining high standards of care;
- Disruption to sleep patterns for school-age children; and
- Challenges for children with ever-changing schedules.

Childcare in BC

BC is one of only three provinces¹, where it is possible to identify the number of childcare providers providing extended hours of care through an online search.³ According to this provincial database, in 2018 there are 4,687 childcare providers registered with the provincial government. Of those, 1.2% or 59 childcare providers offer some form of extended childcare. Extended childcare is defined as childcare that is provided outside of a Monday to Friday, 7am to 6pm scenario. Of those 59, 14 or 24% are licensed group childcare facilities, and 45 or 76% operate as a licensed family childcare.

The most frequently offered form of extended childcare is on weekdays before 6am by 35 childcare providers, followed by 33 childcare providers who offer childcare after 7pm on weekdays. Weekend care is offered by 32 childcare providers, while just 16 offer care on statutory holidays. Just 11 licensed childcare providers across the province offer overnight care.

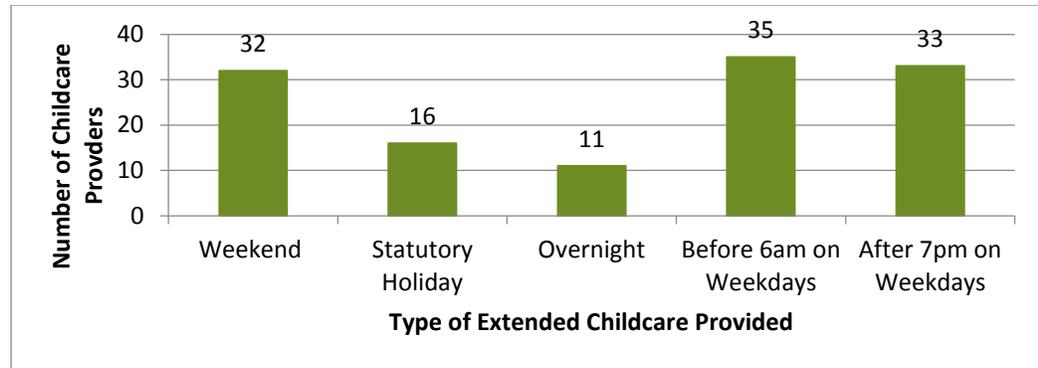


Figure 1: Extended Childcare in British Columbia³

Of the 59 childcare providers offering some form of extended hours of care, 26 childcare providers from non-urban parts of BC were contacted to provide insight into the type of extended hours of childcare they provide and some of their program features. 7 childcare providers responded to the request for information. Responses were received from care providers in Williams Lake, Kamloops, Merritt, Tofino, Invermere, Fort St. James, and Prince Rupert. 6 are private licensed family childcare providers while 1 operates as a not-for-profit. All 6 of the private licensed family childcare providers were run by 1 staff only and cared for a maximum of 7 or 8 children at any one time. Four providers access childcare operating funding from the provincial ministry, and four providers also indicated that they accept families who access the government childcare subsidy.

The hours of operations for each childcare provider varied greatly: three of the providers explicitly provide care on Saturdays and two provide care on the weekends as needed when arranged in advance with the family, while 1 childcare provider provides Sunday care during the summer only. Of the 7, only 2 provide care on weekdays only. Just one provider offered overnight care, and charged an extra \$5 per day in addition to the regular daily fee. Hours ranged from 6am – 10:30pm, with 6 of the family childcare providers indicating that the hours were flexible based on the needs of the family. Two of the family childcare providers identified that the long days and lack of breaks were a significant challenge to providing extended hours of care. The one group childcare facility noted that while they would like to offer care on Saturdays, there hasn't been enough demand, and have altered their policy to require a minimum of two children attending in order to offer care on Saturdays. They have found that approximately 50% of their families make use of the extended hours of care available on weekdays (6 am to 9pm).

Childcare in Alberta

The government of Alberta has created a program that recognises that parents who work or attend classes during evenings or weekends may require additional support for childcare. The Alberta model provides a subsidy of \$100 per month per child, when at least 4 hours of extended hours of care is accessed per month.⁴ The program has a number of eligibility requirements, including a qualification based on income. The government also provides general childcare subsidies for lower income families accessing childcare in a variety of licensed or approved childcare facilities, including centres, family care settings, and pre-schools.⁵ Additional programs that may support parents seeking childcare outside of regular hours include the [Kin Child Care Funding Program](#); this program provides a maximum of \$200 or \$400 per month depending on the age of the children to relatives not living in the child's home, and is available to low and moderate income earning families.⁴

Childcare in Manitoba

The province of Manitoba provides “annual operating grants to eligible, licensed, non-profit childcare facilities and sets maximum fee limits for those facilities.”⁶ Facilities that receive operating grants, are required to comply with provincial regulations that set out “the maximum fees that can be charged for the type of child care spaces being offered.”⁶ Families are also eligible to receive provincial subsidies, and eligibility is based on income, number and age of the children, number of days required for care, and the reason for care.⁷

The [Discovery Children's Centre](#) in Winnipeg is the largest centre for multiple age groups in Winnipeg with 171 licensed spaces serving children from 12 weeks to 12 years old. The centre has been providing extended hours care since 1996, in a program called ‘[Flex Program](#)’. The centre offers childcare for extended (not overnight) hours for children aged 2 – 12, from 6:30 am until 12:30am on weeknights as well as childcare on Saturday until 6:30pm.⁸

The two factors cited for the success of the Discovery Children’s Centre program is the model of government funding the program receives in the form of operating funds and the overall size of the centre.¹ The provincial funding model allows the Discovery Children’s Centre to receive “one and a half times the regular operational funding for each evening space and double the regular operating grant if also opened on the weekends.”¹ This results in funding for the Flex Program that is “twice the amount [of] the regular day spaces.”¹ The additional funding is necessary to sustain the program and was fundamental in the decision to create a Flex Program.¹ Additional funding is used to ensure the program is fully staffed, is able to accommodate urgent requests and unexpected changes, as well as the extra administrative costs of (estimated at 50% more) the Flex Program.¹ The large size of the centre creates built in administrative and staffing support for the higher needs of the Flex Program.

Childcare in Saskatchewan

[Stepping Stones Child Care Co-operative](#) in Regina, Saskatchewan provides extended hours care from 5:30 AM to midnight every day of the week for children aged 18 months and older in one of their three childcare facilities.⁹ The extended hour location gives priority to families who need extended hours care with the assumption that they cannot receive this type of care anywhere else.¹ The co-operative receives extensive external funding which contributes to the success of the extended hours program. Funding is provided by the province through the:

- Early Childhood Service Grant, which provides operating funds to all non-profit childcare providers. In Saskatchewan, childcare centres operating 80 – 120 hours per week receive a higher (+25%) early childhood services grant per space while those operating 120+ hours/week receive an additional 50% of the grant per space;
- Centre Inclusion Block Funding provides funding to enhance child to care provider ratios to facilitate inclusion of children with disabilities in regulated childcare;
- Social Services provides funding for families requiring respite or care while they attend programs/courses; and
- KidsFirst provides respite care for families on an as-needed, pre-booked basis.¹

Childcare in Ontario

Two innovative programs were identified in Ontario: A Children’s Place and the Short Term Child Care program with the Andrew Flex Child Care Services, both located in Ottawa. Neither of these programs receive substantial government funding.

[A Children's Place](#) is a non-profit providing extended 24-hour care, seven days a week in two centres. Care is available for a wide range of ages, from infants to school aged children. A Children's Place originally opened to cater for hospital personnel at two nearby hospitals.⁸ Priority is given to families who: work shifts or are on call, attend evening school, work part-time, work less than 20 hours per week, or have difficulty securing non-traditional licensed childcare.¹⁰

The Short Term Child Care (STCC) program provided by [Andrew Fleck Children's Services](#) is also located in Ottawa, Ontario. The program, originally funded by the Ontario government, provides 24 hour emergency childcare for children aged three months to 12 years when they are mildly ill, when regular childcare arrangements are interrupted, or when other family emergencies arise.¹¹ The service is only available to employees of the organizations that have an arrangement with the STCC program. STCC provides a variety of options for families: providing a caregiver in the child's home, finding space in a licensed home childcare facility, or in a licensed childcare centre. The service is available when a child is mildly ill, regular childcare arrangements are unavailable, school holidays, families requiring childcare due to business trips, evening meetings, family emergencies, or other unplanned events that require temporary back up childcare.¹¹

EXTENDED HOURS OF CHILDCARE - INTERNATIONAL

Childcare in the United Kingdom

The Childcare Act 2006 mandates local authorities with ensuring the supply of childcare satisfies parental demand, this includes considering the needs of families with irregular work patterns.¹² Some of the practices that have been developed as a result of this legislation include:

- Working with care providers to ensure that they are open by 7:30am – 7pm where there is demand;
- Locating childcare centres in areas where there are a large number of employers who employ staff outside of regular hours, such as hospitals, shopping centres, and airports;
- Sufficient drop-in childcare centres for parents with irregular work patterns;
- Recruitment of childcare providers; and
- Home-based childcare provided by registered caregiversⁱⁱ.

An example of innovation in the provision of flexible childcare is found in one local government; the Brent Council in London created a service to coordinate the provision of flexible childcare for parents working irregular hours, weekends or overnight. The local council ensures that the caregivers providing this service have all of the necessary qualifications, and provides regular assessments.¹³ The caregivers provide the service from their own home. A webpage is also available to assist parents in locating and contacting caregivers who offer flexible childcare.¹⁴ As the childcare providers are registered through the local council, parents are able to access the governmental grants and subsidies available.¹⁵

Childcare in Australia

ⁱⁱ Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, a government office responsible for the inspection and regulation of services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. This includes registering caregivers.

The Australian government has recently focused on policies to support parents who work non-standard hours or variable hours. A [Child Care Flexibility Trials](#) project was conducted by the Australian Government between 2012 and 2015. The objectives of the project were to:

- gain greater understanding about parents’ and service providers’ perspectives on flexible childcare;
- test the delivery of flexible childcare, with a focus on families whose needs did not fit with standard models of childcare delivery; and to
- explore the level of demand for greater flexibility and whether this demand could be met in the long term in a sustainable and replicable way.¹⁶

Specific trials for increased flexible childcare were undertaken at family day care centres, “long day care” settings or group childcare facilities, weekend care in centre-based settings, and school holiday care for older children and for children with special needs across the country. The key findings from the trials were:

- “parents’ child care needs and preferences are diverse, so parents need a range of easily accessed child care options;
- identification of demand for flexible care is not straightforward;
- “flexibility” is just one of the characteristics of care that parents look for;
- delivery of a flexible child care solution is dependent on service provider commitment and educator availability; and
- when introducing a new child care option, timing and continuity matters.”¹⁶

Additional research completed by the University of Queensland in 2016 consulted with family childcare providers to explore whether there was potential increase access to flexible care by delivering more models of flexible care. The findings suggests that while

“families’ demand for more flexible care has increased over time while coordinators’ reports suggest that [family childcare care] educators’ willingness to provide more flexible care has decreased over time in part due to the increased legislative requirements placed on educators who offer 24-hour and overnight care.”¹⁷

The University of Queensland’s research also included a review of overseas models, but did not find any country that provides a comprehensive strategy to address flexibility in childcare.¹⁷ Innovative models that they identified included: in-home after and before school care, combined group care and nanny services, and emergency care. In-home after and before school care is a model of care where a caregiver is assigned from a childcare service to pick up or drop off the child at school and provide for care in the child’s home. Delivering children to their after school activities is also accommodated. Combined group care and nanny packages are agencies that provide families with nanny care and access to a nursery or playgroup for a single fee, and all childcare providers are employees of the childcare agency. Emergency care is a one-off emergency care service for young and old persons; the agency provides regular care, but also has a program that provides 24/7 emergency care. A key finding of this research, was that more flexible forms of care tend to be either unregulated or very lightly regulated.¹⁷

The amount of policy, research and data available in Australia regarding childcare is substantially richer than the information available in Canada. For instance, quarterly reports are published by the Australian government and provide detailed data on childcare usage, availability and affordability, and vacancies across the country. Funding for childcare is also different, with the cost of childcare substantially subsidised by the federal government. According to government data, in March of 2017, childcare costs for families earning \$35,000 per year went from 28.3% of

their gross income to 7.6% after government subsidies, and for families earning \$215,000 the cost of childcare went from 9.1% to 4.6% after government subsidies.¹⁸

EXTENDED HOURS OF CHILDCARE IN SWEDEN

The model for childcare in Sweden is significantly different than the experience in British Columbia. Every child is entitled to a space in childcare and fees are based on the number of children they have and a percent of their income to a maximum of 3%.¹ While there is a national requirement for local governments to meet the childcare requirements of the families in their communities, this requirement does not extend to providing childcare during “inconvenient” or non-standard work hours. Notwithstanding this, access to licensed non-standard hours of childcare is significantly easier in Sweden than in Canada.¹

CONCLUSION

There are many factors which impact a childcare providers willingness and ability to provide extended hours of childcare. The current model in the province of BC appears to indicate that in the rare instances when regulated extended childcare is offered, it is done so predominantly by licensed family childcare providers in order to meet the needs of families in their care. Recent Australian research shows that the individual scenarios surrounding flexible or extended hours of childcare is complicated and is subject to many variables such as cost, needs, availability, and models of care, from both the families and childcare providers perspective. The regulatory and funding climates appear to be key factors in determining the viability of providing extended hours of care.

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