



TEN REASONS WHY UNIVERSALITY IS IMPORTANT IN PUBLIC SERVICES

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Acknowledgements

CRIAW acknowledges its presence and work on Indigenous Territories. We respectfully recognize the legacy of colonization upon Indigenous Peoples.

This fact sheet is jointly produced for the Changing Public Services: Women and Intersectional Analysis (CPS) project and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). The Canadian Federation of Students is Canada's largest student organization, uniting more than 650,000 students across Canada. The Federation, and its predecessor organizations, has represented Canada's full-time and part-time students at the college, undergraduate and graduate levels since 1927. The Federation's ultimate goal is to achieve a system of public post-secondary education that is accessible to all, of high quality, is nationally planned, which recognizes the legitimacy of student representation and the validity of student rights and whose role in society is recognized and appreciated.



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Changing Public Services (CPS)

CPS has been a four-year feminist research project supported by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA W) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). A Canadian bilingual network of academics, members of labour unions, community groups and individuals worked together to:

- 1) Track changes to public services and public sector employment since the 2008 recession in Canada
- 2) Develop tools to identify and understand the impacts of these changes on different groups of women over time
- 3) Learn about changes across municipal, provincial and federal government services
- 4) Determine important areas for more research and action

A feminist approach called intersectionality has guided the research and helped researchers find ways of working together to learn about the changes in public services and how they affect different women's lives. This and other fact sheets share the findings of this work.

Introduction

In 2016, Charlotte Kiddell, of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), was one of ten Canadians selected to meet “face to face” with Prime Minister Trudeau. The CFS has been a key partner in the Nova Scotia Changing Public Services network, and Charlotte is the CFS representative on the project. Remarkable in many ways, one of the things that was striking in Charlotte’s conversation with the Prime Minister, was his resistance to the vital principle of universality in social programs. In the case of both child care and post-secondary education (PSE), Trudeau resorted to targeted solutions. Since this approach is at odds with our findings in CPS, we thought it provided an excellent opportunity to reflect on a significant theme in public services.

In the community-based conversations we held through CPS, the need to protect and develop universal public services was a recurring theme. Participants from a diversity of backgrounds and social locations noted that one of the ways that public services are changing, is that governments are moving away from universal toward targeted approaches. However, publicly funded universal child care and PSE are essential elements of an equitable future for this country. Universality in child care and PSE means that everyone will have access, not only those who can afford it. As the Prime Minister’s comments reflect broader trends toward targeting and misconceptions about the delivery of public services, we would like to outline the importance of the principle of universality.

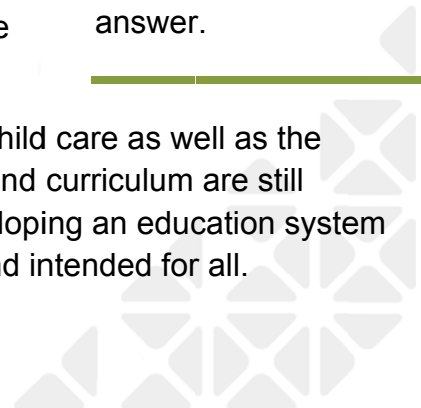
What is Universality?

“Universal systems are publicly funded systems that entitle access for all. At a minimum, universal systems provide access for all without discrimination based on income or other criteria. Effective universal systems also work to eliminate a range of social, ability-based, cultural, geographic, and other barriers to equitable access and participation ... universal systems are publicly funded and paid for through the tax system.”ⁱ

Thus, while conversations about inclusive, culturally-safe child care as well as the decolonization of the early learning and PSE governance and curriculum are still essential, universal entitlement provides the basis for developing an education system throughout the life course that is accessible to everyone and intended for all.

Trudeau Government on Universality

The Trudeau government believes that a targeted approach to funding childcare and PSE is the answer.



Universal publicly funded systems are preferable to a targeted approach for many reasons:

1. Universality values equal access for everyone

Most Canadian don't accept two tiers in health care, so why should it be acceptable for child care, and post-secondary education? Everyone has a right to high quality services, not just those who can afford to pay more.

2. Universality can reduce gender inequality

Child care and post-secondary education are unaffordable for *most* women, regardless of their social class.ⁱⁱ When child care fees are too high, women are more likely to leave the workforce than men. When tuition fees are too high, women are more negatively affected because they earn less than men and are likely to do so over their lifetime; therefore, it will take a woman longer than her male counterpart to repay student debt and she will pay more in interest in total.

3. Universality supports women as workers

Canada's market-based approach to child care has resulted in low wages, economic insecurity, and recruitment and retention challenges for the Early Childhood Education workforce.ⁱⁱⁱ In post-secondary education, unpaid internships – in which students pay tuition to work for free – are disproportionately practiced in female-dominated fields such as education, childcare and nutrition and women are over-represented among rapidly growing contingent faculty.^{iv} Research and experience shows that universal public systems are more likely to ensure that women in feminized sectors are fairly compensated for their work.

4. Universality addresses equality among women

There is a significant wage gap between women who have children and women who do not. In the United States, the gap between mothers and childless women under the age of 35 is now greater than that between young men and women. In Canada, in 2004, "hourly earnings of mothers were about 12% lower than those of their

childless counterparts.”^v Sometimes this is called the “mommy tax.” Universal child care reduces the effect of the mommy tax by supporting all mothers.

Rising tuition fees disproportionality affects women in otherwise marginalized positions.^{vi} In 2016, over 10,000 Indigenous learners were denied access to post-secondary education due to inadequate funding to the Post-Secondary Student Support Program. Racialized families are disproportionately low-income and more debt-adverse; therefore racialized students will not access post-secondary education that involves the possibility of onerous future debt repayment. Universality bridges the gap in education between Euro-Canadian settler women and racialized and Indigenous women.^{vii}

5. Universality is less stigmatizing

Citizens who access targeted services often face unfair negative judgements and stereotypes. When we all use the same services, we can all do so with dignity and pride.^{viii}

6. Universality makes programs more resilient

When programs are widely used, they are more likely to survive austerity and citizen opposition to government cuts is more broad-based and powerful. When targeted programs are cut, the most marginalized peoples are often left to defend them.^{ix}

7. Universality builds social solidarity

Universal programs create stronger communities, shared connections and collective identities. They reduce inequality between classes, generations, family types, cultural groups, and regions. Public, national child care and post-secondary education don't just help those using them. These services support the workforce and boost the economy overall.^x Since all of society benefits, we should collectively support universal services.^{xi}

8. Universality challenges privatization

While opponents to universality often frame their arguments in terms of equity, this is usually a cover for privatization, cost-saving, and tax cuts.^{xii} Research consistently

shows that private, market-based services offer less quality, accessibility, affordability, and accountability.^{xiii}

We are constantly told that we can't afford social investment and must accept austerity. But evidence confirms that public services are essential investments and that universal child care and post-secondary education are entirely possible. We can afford it. It just requires the political will to make it a priority.^{xiv}

9. Universality rejects the politics of scarcity

Opponents of universality suggest that universal programs will help wealthy Canadians who don't need it. The reality is that true equity is best achieved through progressive taxation. If higher income earners are paying their fair share of taxes, they will also be paying their fair share of program costs.

Child care and post-secondary education have in common that their users – young families and students -- require the services at a stage in their lives when their incomes are likely the lowest. And these services are currently very costly. Both cost thousands of dollars a year. Universal programs allow them to postpone their contributions to a time when they will have higher earnings and will be paying more in taxes. They will then support the next generation's access to these programs.^{xv}

10. Universality is evidence-based

Research shows that universal programs and services are more likely to achieve the equity, economic, and efficiency goals of good public policy. Universality, as seen in health care, results in a more effective use of public resources and reduces administrative costs and complexity.^{xvi}

It's time to have a public conversation about universality. Child care and post-secondary education are only two examples of universal public services that Canadians desperately need. Let's lend our voices to all of those calling to expand our public services.

Authors

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Charlotte Kiddell is the Chairperson for the Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia, and a member of the local CPS Steering Committee.

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