

NATIONAL POST

Most Canadians would prefer to see more stay-at-home parents: new poll

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Canadians want to see more stay-at-home parents, according to a new poll commissioned by the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada as it calls for governments to overhaul their approach to early childhood care.

The public opinion poll found 76% of respondents believe it is best that children under six be home with a parent. It also found almost two-thirds of respondents would rather see funding go directly to parents, rather than government-run daycare and all-day kindergarten.

“We see that Canadians’ desires differ from the direction being taken by provincial governments,” writes Andrea Mrozek in the study, released Wednesday to the National Post.

Ms. Mrozek, the institute’s executive director, has been a vocal critic of recent decisions to expand government daycare programs for young children — particularly the Ontario government’s implementation of all-day kindergarten and B.C. plans for \$10-a-day daycare.

The idea of parents at home with young children resonated with the most respondents, regardless of income, age, region, gender or whether or not the individual had children. Conducted by Albion Research, the survey interviewed 2,022 Canadians online in January, using six questions to gauge their opinion on early child care. The margin of error is +/- 2.2 %, 19 times out of 20.

Of the respondents who currently have children under six years old, 69% wanted to stay at home with them. When having a parent at home wasn’t an option, having a relative provide care was seen as the next-best option for a majority of respondents. A neighbourhood daycare in someone’s home was ranked in third place, while a not-for profit centre came fourth. A for-profit centre ranked in last place.

The study also probed preferences on government funding structures, which saw two thirds of respondents call for direct funding to parents through cash payments or tax deductions. About one third of respondents wanted to see funding go toward the public sector, including the expansion of public schools and subsidies to childcare centres.

Ms. Mrozek calls current funding models “discriminatory,” due to their emphasis on public childcare programs rather than models that involve some form of stay-at-home parent.

However, a childcare policy researcher said parents won't have choice if governments move away from publicly funded daycare programs.

“You don't provide for choice by making parents consumers and giving them money,” said Martha Friendly, the executive director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit in Toronto. “When it happens to be something like early childhood education or healthcare services, options come from having a publicly funded, publicly managed system that provides a variety of options that people can actually access.”