

**Age profile of infants with child care subsidy in Toronto:
Implications for policy formulation**

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We are grateful to the City of Toronto Children's Services for permitting us to extract data from their child care administration database.

Summary of the issue

- Managing the flow of children in three separate age groups from infants (0-18 months) to toddlers (19-30 months) and then to preschoolers (31 months - up to 4 years 8 months) in child care programs is a complex task. The introduction of full-day kindergarten has skewed the age served by child care programs down increasing the extent to which programs have to manage this flow.
- The Modernizing Child Care discussion paper raised the possibility of re-visiting various provisions of DNA.
- Some child care operators and advocacy groups have proposed introduction of either flexible ratios or reforming the existing three age groups that cover pre-kindergarten children into two groups usually consisting of children below and above two years of age.
- One of the supporting arguments for this position is based on the perception that infants entering formal, centre-based child care are, on average, approximately 12-months of age and that the current infant age grouping of 0 – 18 months does not reflect the population served and results in children having to transition classrooms a short time after they enter child care.
- We recently analyzed the City of Toronto's subsidy wait list exploring when children receive care vs. when their parents need it. Our findings suggest that this age of entry statistic is misleading and provides an incomplete picture upon which to base policy recommendations on changing the current definition of age groups.

What data did we use?

- The City of Toronto allocates child care subsidies to families who qualify based on program eligibility (work/study/special needs) and a financial needs assessment.
- There are many more applicants than available subsidies or spaces.
- Parents can place their children on the subsidy wait list starting in pregnancy.
- They can request immediate placement or placement to occur at a later point in time (e.g., based on when they expect to go back to work).
- The city maintains detailed information about the parents on the wait list and continues to track those who receive a subsidy.
- Our analysis is based on a cohort of children who first appeared on the wait list in 2008 and have been followed for 5 years.
- 8,150 children younger than 19-months (including 2,169 whose parents applied for a child care subsidy before they were born) were placed on the wait list in 2008.
- Of 8,150 infants we tracked 39% were never placed in a subsidized child care space. These children were excluded from our analyses.
- Thus, our analysis focuses on the 4,686 children:
 - Whose parents placed them on the wait list while they were infants (or in utero)
 - Whose parents requested an infant placement for their children
 - Who were eventually placed

What do the data really say?

- There are substantial differences between ages of desired placement and actual placement.
 - The average age of desired placement into child care of a child placed on the waiting list as an infant = 9.3 months.
 - The average age of placement of a child placed on the wait list as an infant with desired placement into an infant program and placed as infant = 11.2 months.
 - Across all families, the average delay of getting a space beyond their requested start date was 6.7 months (median = 5 months). For families who requested an immediate placement the average delay was 8.8 months.
 - It is important to note that only 72% of children who applied for infant placement were placed as infants. When we include children placed as toddlers or preschoolers the average age of placement increases to 15.3 months of age.
- The following charts illustrate some of these findings:

Chart 1 shows the requested start date and actual placement date for all children requesting placement as infants. While 50% requested a start date before 10-months of age, only 25% actually were placed before 10 months. Similarly while 75% required placement by 12-months of age, less than 50% were placed by that age. Finally by 18-months of age only 72% were placed (the remaining 28% were placed at a later date).

Chart 1 - Infants by Requested and Placement Dates

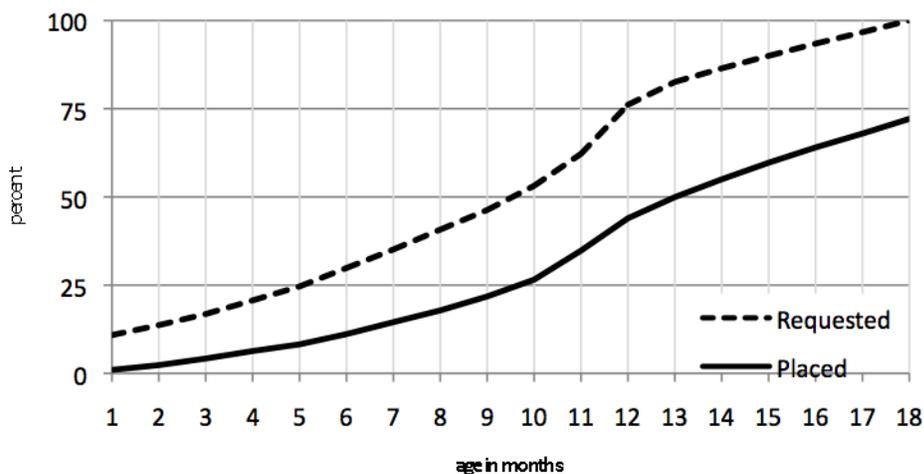


Chart 2 presents requested and placed dates only for children placed as infants (i.e., it excludes the 28% of children who were still not placed when they were 18-months old). Not surprisingly, these children were placed on the wait list at younger ages than the full population of children placed on the subsidy waitlist (i.e., the children who got an infant spot were put on the wait list at a younger age were higher than children who were placed when they were older).

Specifically, 25 % request a start date at approximately 4-months of age, 50% at 8-months and 75% at 11-months. In reality it takes 8 months for the first 25%, 11 months for 50% of children and 14 month for 75% of children to be placed.

Chart 2 - Children Placed as Infants by Requested and Placement Dates

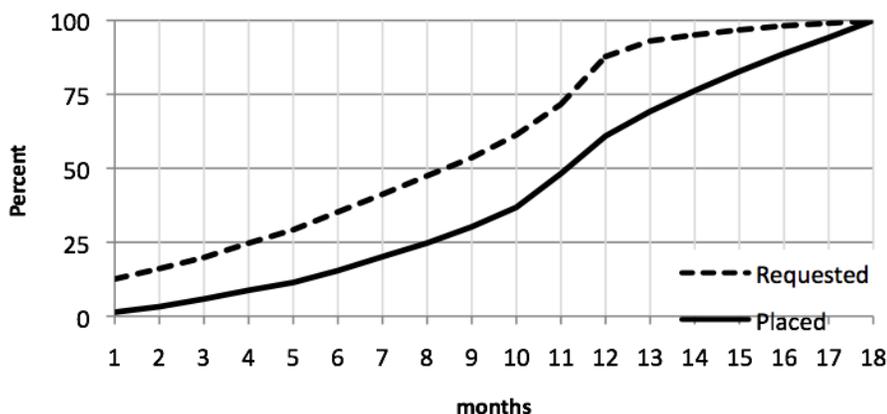
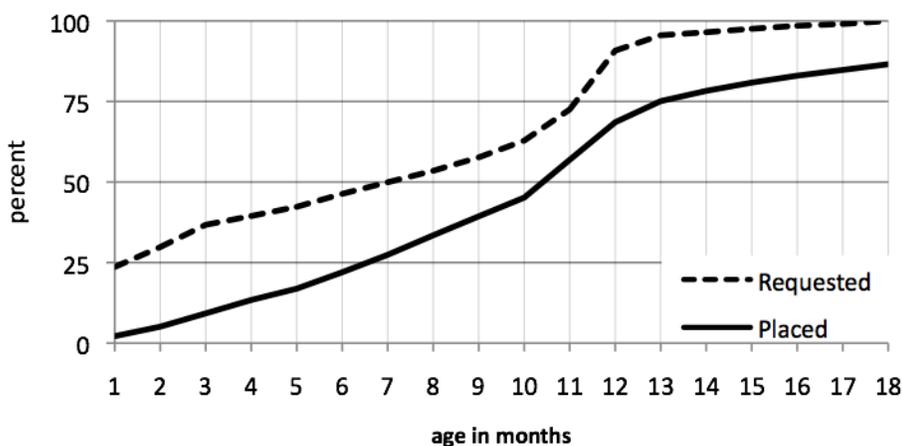


Chart 3 takes a closer look at those cases where an application for placement is made before the child is 4 months old; this includes those parents who apply before the child is born. As the chart demonstrates, for this particular group, 25% request a start date immediately after birth, 50% by age of 7 months, and 75% by 11 months of age. The lag between requested and actual placement is evident for this group as well: 25% are placed by 7-months of age, 50% at more than 7 months and 75% by age of 13 months. Of course, while currently earlier application generally leads to an earlier placement, this would become ineffective if every family applied before the child is actually born; the lack of supply of spaces and subsidies is the main culprit in delay between requested and placement dates.

Chart 3 - Requested Start and Placement Dates for Those Applying Before Child Was 4 Months Old



Conclusion – for discussion purposes only

- Infants are entering child care at young ages (25% are younger than 9-months, 50% are younger than 12 months).
- The desired/requested start date suggests that parents need child care substantially earlier than when they are getting it (e.g., 25% requested a placement at 6 months or younger).
- Given appropriate access, the average age of entry into child care is likely to be substantially lower than the average of entry is today.
- The desired/requested start date is a better indicator of the need for infant child care spaces than actual uptake/usage and should be considered during any discussion of changes to age groups and ratios.
- The long wait times and the fact that some families never get the care they need and qualify for, clearly indicate that more funding is needed to create more infant child care spaces with a corresponding increase in fee subsidies.