

Wynne government promises much-needed investment in child care: Editorial ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Experts around the world agree that a key tool in disrupting the cycle of inequality is universal access to early childhood education.

Studies show subsidized child care spaces not only help reduce educational inequalities that result from poverty, but also decrease the number of children in special education classes by allowing for the early identification and treatment of problems.

According to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, the stark lack of access to affordable, quality daycare is actually putting the health and well-being of children at risk. More than a quarter of Canadian kids start kindergarten vulnerable in at least one area of development — something that can affect them for the rest of their lives, the college says.

For this, and many other reasons, it is vitally important that families from all income brackets be able to access affordable child care.

So it was heartening to hear Kathleen Wynne commit on Wednesday to invest \$200 million in 2017-18 to increase the accessibility and affordability of licensed child care for children up to four years old throughout the province.

This funding promises to help 24,000 kids access daycare, addressing an urgent funding shortfall. Right now some 15,400 kids are on the waitlist for subsidized care, while at the same time more than 4,000 spaces sit vacant because parents can't afford fees that run as high as \$20,000 a year.

The problem is particularly dire in Toronto. A 2015 study from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that the average family with two children in the GTA was paying a staggering 48 per cent of after-tax income on child care. In 2016, the same organization reported that fees in Toronto had jumped by 15 per cent over the previous two years.

Wynne's investment promises to make a profound difference in the lives of many Ontarians.

Funding subsidized spaces, for example, will help some women back into the work force, improving the family's bottom line while boosting the economy and the tax base.

One Ontario government study found that every dollar invested in child care adds \$2.47 to the provincial economy. A TD Bank study found that for every \$1 invested in child care in Canada, provincial and federal governments receive \$1.50 in increased tax revenues.

The subsidized spots should also help reduce the pay gap between men and women in Ontario. According to a 2016 Ontario government study, the number one way to reduce the 29-per-cent gulf between men's and women's pay in the province would be to provide an affordable and publicly funded geared-to-income child-care program.

With its commitment to subsidizing more child care spaces, the Wynne government has taken an important and overdue step. Now it's up to the Trudeau government to take the baton and run with it. Canada was at the bottom of a list of 25 states ranked by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2014 for the quality and accessibility of its child-care programs. That is a disgrace. Ontario has stepped up. Now Ottawa should do its part.

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