

Ontario commitment to child care transformation will be a historic game-changer for families ^[1]

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Today's announcement on child care by the Ontario government is transformational for the impact it will have on families, for its substantial financial commitment and for the broad scope of its policy changes. It puts Ontario squarely on the path to a system of universally accessible, high quality child care by addressing the linked issues of affordability for families, and decent work and professional pay for early childhood educators through public funding.

Ontario's commitment to make regulated child care available free of charge for all children 2.5 – 4 years whose parents choose it by 2020 is unprecedented in North America. "This is a victory for advocacy efforts over the decades. Our coalition of parents, child care programs, women's groups, unions and social justice advocates have called for "affordable" child care for many years. This commitment to no-fee child care for preschoolers in Ontario - which is the model of choice in many countries--will truly be a game-changer both for families and for Canada", said Laurel Rothman, Interim Coordinator of Public Policy, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. The plan is sensible because it introduces this new universal approach hand-in-hand with a publicly-funded wage grid for Ontario's child care workforce. Both measures are essential for the program's success and for ensuring that decent pay for early childhood educators does not depend on cash-strapped parents' ability to pay. "A publicly-funded wage grid for early childhood educators will mean more transparent, fair wages ECEs can rely on, giving them the confidence and means to make child care their preferred career path," adds Rothman.

We also welcome the pledge to address families' pressing need for high quality, affordable infant/toddler child care through a specific commitment to expand services and provide much-needed fee relief for families. While we continue to believe that infant/toddler care ultimately needs a new funding model too, we appreciate that developing a well-staffed supply of high quality services for the youngest children is a substantial multi-year task. Thus, we are pleased that this need will be addressed in the immediate-term through more financial support to more families.

Finance Minister Sousa has confirmed that an allocation of an additional \$2.2 billion over three years includes funds to cover the full operating costs of expanded child care services for children 2.5 – 4 years; funds to provide more, and more affordable infant/toddler care; funds to publicly-fund wages for early childhood educators through a wage grid; funds to assist First Nations communities with existing and new services; and an Innovation Fund to assist with challenges such as child care for families working non-regular hours and to support development in the not-for-profit child care sector.

This multi-faceted plan will enable programs in every region to move forward assuredly with expansion in the public and non-profit sectors to meet the demand in their communities. Whether you live in Sioux Lookout, Sarnia or Swansea, Ontario's families and ECEs will benefit," added Rothman.

"Ontario is poised to take a giant leap towards a universally accessible, publicly managed system of early learning and child care. We encourage all decision-makers in all political parties to embrace this direction so that Ontario families now and in the future can budget to pay no child care fees for preschool-age children and more affordable fees for their infants and toddlers because there will be additional and more secure, predictable funding for child care programs. We look forward to more details in the budget tomorrow".

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is Ontario's central advocacy group for a universal, affordable, high quality system of early childhood education and care. Formed in 1981, the OCBCC is a member organization comprised of non-profit child care programs, local and provincial groups and individuals from across Ontario. Our members are parents, early childhood educators, trade unionists, women's advocates and social activists. Most importantly-- we are people who care about child care.

-reprinted from Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

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