

Affordable for all: Making licensed child care affordable in Ontario ^[1]

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Description

This study seeks to answer the question “What is the best way to improve the affordability of licensed child care for infants, toddlers and preschoolers in Ontario?” It seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of alternative funding and policy options and to recommend steps forward that can dramatically improve child care affordability for families.

After much consideration of evidence and ideas, our main recommendation is that the Government of Ontario should implement free child care for preschool-aged children (30 months to kindergarten age) as an immediate priority. As physical and staffing capacity are ramped up over the next few years, increased affordability for other ages should be phased in.

Making child care free for all children of preschool age will improve affordability for all families in the one or two years before kindergarten. As physical capacity for preschoolers is expanded, the Ministry will have to ensure that physical and staffing capacity for services to infants and toddlers expands as well.

In the near term, the Ministry of Education should continue, and fund more generously, the existing subsidy system. Restrictive regulations on activity requirements should be loosened.

When additional licensed child care capacity is available and qualified staff shortages have been reduced or eliminated, the child care subsidy system should be replaced with a sliding scale of payments - a \$50,000 to \$150,000 sliding scale - to make licensed child care affordable for children of other ages. Family income would determine the percent of full fee a family would have to pay. For children other than preschool age, families with earnings less than \$50,000 would pay nothing; and families earning over \$150,000 would pay 80% of the full fee. In between, families pay an increasing percentage as family income rises. We call this a \$50K-\$150K sliding scale.

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[funding ^{\[12\]}](#)

[mothers labour force participation ^{\[13\]}](#)

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