

Childcare: What's at stake in Ontario ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Ontario has the highest child care fees in Canada and long waiting lists for affordable child care; only about 3 in 10 children ages 0 to 4 years have access to a licensed child care space.

Early childhood educators and child care staff – the core of high quality child care services – are significantly underpaid. As of 2017, 16% of registered early childhood educators (RECEs) working in child care earned less than \$15 per hour. About 45% of RECEs earned \$15 – \$20 per hour.

The need for child care in the province is significant. Almost 70% of mothers in Ontario whose youngest child is under the age of 3 are in the workforce, and 76% for those whose youngest child is less than 5 years old. Yet, child care fees in Ontario can be as expensive as rent or mortgage costs. For infants, the median fee per month is over \$1,200, but can go as high as almost \$2,000. For pre-schoolers (ages 2.5 to 4) monthly fees are as high as \$1,500.

The affordability crisis affects almost all families with young children. Recent research determined that 80 per cent of families cannot afford licensed child care – they would spend more than 10 per cent of their after-tax income to purchase it, even taking into account the fee subsidies that some low-income families receive. Unlicensed caregivers are not much cheaper, and the unknown quality and safety of care makes families prefer licensed care.

Lack of access to high quality, affordable child care is widely acknowledged as the key barrier to women finding and keeping decent work. Even the Ontario government's own Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee made child care its top recommendation for action.

It does not have to be this way – Universal Child Care IS Possible. In Ontario we have never been closer to an affordable system of publicly funded child care. Other provinces and many countries have shown that universal child care is beneficial to children and families. Universal child care also fuels economic growth as it supports parents to enter and remain in the labour force.

Universal Child Care IS Possible, but we need to think big.

Read more ^[3]

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