From reopening to recovery: A plan for child care reopening in Ontario and moving to a publicly funded system [1]

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Source: Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario and Otario Coalition for Better Child Care
Format: Report
Publication Date: 27 May 2020

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Excerpted from the executive summary

Executive Summary From Reopening to Recovery: A plan for child care reopening in Ontario and moving to a publicly funded system

Child care centres across Ontario have been closed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This report sets out the steps needed to ensure the safe, healthy reopening of child care. To achieve this, we need adequate funding and support for educators and programs. With this support, a strengthened child care system could be the core of economic and social recovery.

The challenge

Today, the Province has not put the necessary support in place. The early years and child care sector is unheard, unrecognized, underfunded and, therefore, unprepared. RECEs and early years staff want to return to work but are very concerned about what it will look like. Some of their most urgent concerns are:

- Being able to protect themselves while at work;
- Having the appropriate staff, resources, and support to implement new health and safety protocols in their program; and
- Their program's ability to access supplies and implement new health and safety procedures.

Recommendations

Based on our extensive consultation with the early years and child care sector this report presents 27 detailed recommendations to ensure a safe and healthy reopening and recovery. They provide in-depth advice to government on the need for transparency, health assurances, guidelines, access to space, testing, safety supplies and equipment, funding, employment conditions, communication, and training.

- We call for meeting or exceeding current best practices in Emergency Child Care for reopening, including greatly reduced groups sizes and enhanced staff to child ratios, and full base funding for child care programs.
- We estimate that this approach will mean tripling the child care budget. We need the federal and provincial government to work together to ensure that the necessary funding and policy is in place.

Next steps

We cannot stop at reopening. Early learning and child care programs must be a priority for both economic and social recovery:

- The economic recession triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic is disproportionately impacting women. Programs to support women's employment must be at the heart of Canada's plans for economic recovery.
- To properly support a generation of young children to recover from the trauma of the Covid-19 pandemic requires Canada to finally treat child care as a priority, rather than an afterthought.

Our children and families – and the educators that support them – deserve no less.

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