

A universal child care system with decent work at its core must be the goal of Ontario's review of the child care and early years act^[1]

Joint statement from the professional pay and decent work project

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Source: University of Toronto (OISE)

Format: Article

Publication Date: 24 Jul 2020

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

It is a critical time for early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Ontario. Across the sector educators, operators, families, and allies are calling for change. The mandated 5-year review of the Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA) must be an opportunity to ensure that we do not go backwards, or further entrench a fragmented, market approach to vital ECEC programs. The province has allowed a short turnaround time for the public to respond. Deadline for written submissions are July 31, 2020. Letters and submissions should be sent to cceya_consultation@ontario.ca ^[3].

The COVID-19 pandemic has made public the failures of a market model approach in organizing and delivering ECEC programs. Where programs have adapted and responded to the pandemic, they have done so in spite of the failures of the system. The gaps and inequities that result from our current patchwork are not new, but they have become more visible as the pandemic drew attention to the lack of infrastructure to support ECEC programs. Ontario must not be complacent about the CCEYA review. Ontario's legislated quality standards and supports lag behind most other Canadian jurisdictions (see attached). A modern early years act is needed, one that reflects children's entitlement to quality programs regardless of their unique abilities, cultural or ethnic origins, or family income. Parent fees would be eliminated. Regulations backed with sufficient resources would support the early childhood workforce with decent pay and working conditions. Ontario's market system is failing children, families, early childhood educators and early years staff as it continues to download responsibility to individual operators, educators and families without proper systems or supports. To capitalize on this opportunity for change, we must see strengthened provincial legislation alongside a significant increase in both federal and provincial resources guided by a national framework that lays the groundwork for quality ECEC as an entitlement for all Canada's children. We must ensure that any legislative change moves us towards a universally accessible, publicly funded and managed ECEC system with decent work for early childhood educators and early years staff at the core. 2

Ontario's child care standards lag behind

Educators are key to providing high-quality experiences for children. But underfunding, poor oversight and the lack of decent work in licensed child care create challenging conditions. Far from being a legislative leader in promoting quality early learning and care, Ontario's standards lag behind those of other Canadian jurisdictions. Now is the time to strengthen, not downgrade quality in Ontario's child care legislation. Per capita, Ontario spends below the Canadian average on child care at approximately \$3,500 per space, compared to the national average of \$5,500. This contrasts with the \$12,000 Ontario spends annually for a child in kindergarten. Underfunding is reflected in the compensation of educators working in licensed child care. In Ontario, on average ECEs earn 58% of a teacher's salary, a wage gap wider than can be justified by educational differences.

All jurisdictions support the wages of eligible staff in licensed child care. Quebec, Prince Edward Island and Manitoba establish province-wide wages levels. Others include wage support in their operating budgets. Six jurisdictions provide hourly wage supplements. Ontario's \$2/hr top up is among the lowest by far.

Educators report less job satisfaction in programs dominated by unqualified staff. Next to Alberta, Ontario has the lowest density of trained staff. Only 1 in 3 staff working with children require credentials. Ontario is also among the minority of jurisdictions that does not require additional training for centre supervisors.

The majority of Canadian jurisdictions require all staff working with children to have at least some entry level training. Amounts vary from 45 hours to 180 hours of course work in child development. Ontario has no such requirement.

When it comes to child care parents don't always get what they pay for. Jurisdictions with the lowest standards charge the highest fees. The most expensive care in the country is found in Ontario.

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