

# 'Virtually all' provinces have interest in child-care plan: Hussen<sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The provinces and territories have shown varying degrees of interest in the federal government's multibillion-dollar cost-sharing plan to create more affordable early-learning and child-care programs, with none in "outright opposition" to the idea, says Families, Children and Social Development Minister Ahmed Hussen.

A national child-care program was the marquee promise of the Liberal government's 2021 budget released April 19. By dedicating almost \$30 billion to child care over the next five years, including about \$27 billion in new spending, the government hopes to lower the average cost of care that parents pay per child to \$10 a day. Reaching this goal will require buy-in from the provinces and territories, split 50/50 with Ottawa.

"Virtually all of them are very much eager to sit down and negotiate," Hussen told iPolitics in an interview on Friday. "And some of them are outright saying, 'Where do I sign? When do I sign?'"

Hussen said he didn't want to "pit provinces against each other" by singling out which ones had confirmed their interest in Ottawa's plan, but he said Newfoundland and Labrador, British Columbia, the Yukon, and Nova Scotia "were already moving in (the) direction" imagined by the federal government.

Based on what members of their governments have said, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Alberta, and Ontario are less sold on Ottawa's plan.

Quebec is in a unique position, because Ottawa studied the province's existing \$8.50-a-day daycare system to inform its own plan. Quebec Finance Minister Eric Girard said his government expects that \$6 billion of the total \$30 billion dedicated to the national plan should be given to his province with no strings attached.

Hussen said he spoke to his provincial and territorial counterparts in the lead-up to the tabling of the budget, as well as on the day it was released. Ottawa will hold formal negotiations with each province and territory as soon as the budget-implementation bill is passed.

"We will also ... make sure that this Canada-wide system works for each and every province, and also takes into consideration local circumstances," Hussen said.

The ministers who'd be responsible for the program in Ontario and Alberta have said they want flexibility, which Hussen said Ottawa is also seeking. For example, whereas one province might use the funding to hire more early-childhood educators — which is Quebec's case, since its affordable daycare spaces are in short supply — other provinces might use it for training, higher wages, or direct subsidies of program fees.

Whether to make the programs means-tested, meaning they're available only to people below a certain income level, could also be discussed with each province, Hussen said.

When asked if the government's plan would fall apart if cash-strapped provinces weren't willing to pay their half, Hussen said he didn't want to "address hypothetical situations." Instead, provinces and territories should be reassured by Ottawa's promise to continue contributing \$9.2 billion each year to keep child-care fees low, he said.

However, the history of sharing the cost of health care in Canada — which was set at 50/50 in 1966, but now provinces and territories pay 78 per cent — suggests that Ottawa's contribution, which won't take into account inflation or other costs, could become a bone of contention between the governments.

As described in the budget, the plan is to cut fees for early-learning and child-care programs in half in all provinces except Quebec by next year. This will be made possible by "a number of provincial governments telling (him) now that they are ready to proceed," Hussen said.

**Region:** Canada<sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** federal budget<sup>[4]</sup>

have-interest-child-care-plan-hussen

#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/04/%E2%80%98virtually-all%E2%80%99-provinces-have-interest-child-care-plan-hussen> [2] <https://ipolitics.ca/2021/04/27/virtually-all-provinces-have-interest-in-child-care-plan-hussen/> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-budget>