

# Ontario Liberals promise daycare and after-school care help for parents<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online<sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Affordable daycare, a top-up for extended parental leave as well as better pay and free tuition for early childhood educators are among the Liberals' plans if elected in the next provincial election.

Unveiled Thursday morning by Liberal Leader Steven Del Duca, the "Care for Every Child In Ontario" would substantially reduce fees for child care as well as before- and after-school care, and in particular help women who have been hard-hit by the pandemic.

"The best way to build lasting prosperity is to help parents stay or re-enter the workforce and give children the best start in life," said Del Duca in announcing the move in a Zoom call with a number of parents and babies, days before Mother's Day on Sunday.

"Every family in Ontario, regardless of the kind of care they choose for their child, will be better off because of our plan," he said.

The plan also focuses on early childhood educators, with a pledge to boost their pay and also eliminate tuition for the college programs they require to do the job in the hopes of attracting more staff that will be needed.

Del Duca said an Ontario Liberal government would spend about \$1 billion a year for its child-care plan, on top of an estimated \$3-plus billion from the federal government for its national child-care program that includes \$10-a-day care for kids by 2026.

The Liberals say if elected, they would phase in the changes with a goal of having all children under five covered by 2024. However, \$10 a day before- and after-school care would be in place by September 2022, just a few months after the June 2, 2022 election.

Currently, licenced child-care spaces cost parents \$50 or more a day.

For parents who aren't interested in licensed non- or for-profit child care, the Liberals would boost the current CARE (child care access and relief from expenses) tax credit, brought in by the Ford government in 2019, to an average of about \$2,000.

Del Duca said the Liberals would also provide a top-up for parents who wish to take advantage of the allowed 18-month leave.

Education Minister Stephen Lecce, whose portfolio includes child care, slammed the plan, calling it a "one-size-fits-all system that does not work for every family."

The Liberals "promise action in the first 100 days, yet, after 15 years in office, they saddled Ontario parents with a legacy of income stagnation, a rising cost of living, and one of the most expensive child-care systems in Canada — of which Ontario moms and dads paid the price," Lecce said in a written statement to the Star.

The Ford government's child-care tax credit provides families an average of \$1,500 per child each year, Lecce said, adding that "last year alone, 16,000 child-care spaces opened, in sharp contrast to the 800 centres that closed under the Liberals between 2014 and 2018."

New Democrat MPP Bhutla Karpoche, her party's child-care critic, also said the Liberals had 15 years in power "to make child-care affordable. They chose not to."

She said "I hear from moms and dads every day who can't afford the child-care fees the Liberal government left them with. Families are paying thousands of dollars a month — and some are even putting off growing their family because they can't afford the Ontario daycare costs."

Meanwhile, a group of Toronto city councillors said it's time that federal, provincial and municipal governments work together to immediately improve access to affordable child care.

"The \$10 per day child-care program from the Trudeau government will be essential to building back our economy after this pandemic ends ... This program will help thousands of Toronto families access economic opportunity and contribute to building back our city in the aftermath of the pandemic," Councillor Shelley Carroll (Don Valley North) said in a written release.

The province currently spends about \$2 billion a year on early learning and child care, and has budgeted \$1 billion over five years to create 30,000 additional spaces.

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

**Tags:** funding <sup>[4]</sup>

affordability <sup>[5]</sup>

school-age <sup>[6]</sup>

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<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/school-age>