

# P.E.I.'s Early Childhood Development Association preparing for potential influx of money promised in the federal budget <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

While early childhood educators in some provinces worry about their governments' willingness to negotiate with the federal government on a national child care system, the Early Childhood Development Association of P.E.I. has already started preparing for those discussions.

With \$30 billion promised in the federal budget to build a child care system, any plan will require the buy in of provincial governments, as child care falls under provincial jurisdiction.

Jennifer Nangreaves, executive director of the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA), is confident those talks will go smoothly, she said.

"Our provincial government has been instrumental in how far early childhood has really come, so I feel like negotiations and all those consultations, I look forward to them because I think they're going to be really rich and really child centred."

### Getting ready

Though the budget hasn't passed in the House of Commons, it calls for a 50 per cent reduction in fees by the end of next year, with an end goal of \$10 a day child care across the country for regulated centres.

In the meantime, the ECDA has begun a survey to find out the needs of the sector in P.E.I. and is also looking for families to get on provincial registries to gauge demand, said Nangreaves.

"... because if we do get to those fee (reductions), the demand is likely going to be higher, so we just need to make sure we're building a system to be ready for that."

While the majority of children in P.E.I. are in some form of child care, access, particularly in rural areas remains a concern, said Nangreaves.

"As far as enrolment, I don't think there are a lot of children that we're missing but that doesn't mean the ones who are in it aren't struggling."

Those struggles can include up to a half an hour drive to a centre.

### By the numbers

A breakdown of spending in the federal budget for national child care:

- Up to \$27.2 billion over five years, starting in 2021-22 to bring the federal government to a 50/50 share of child care costs with provincial and territorial governments, as part of initial 5-year agreements.
- \$29.2 million over two years, starting in 2021-22, to Employment and Social Development Canada through the Enabling Accessibility Fund to support child care centres as they improve their physical accessibility.
- \$1.4 billion over five years, starting in 2021-22, and \$385 million ongoing, to ensure that more Indigenous families have access to high-quality programming.
- \$515 million over five years, starting in 2021-22, and \$112 million ongoing, to support before and after-school care for First Nations children on reserve.
- \$264 million over four years, starting in 2022-23, and \$24 million ongoing, to repair and renovate existing Indigenous early learning and child care centres.
- \$420 million over three years, starting in 2023-24, and \$21 million ongoing, to build and maintain new centres in additional communities.
- \$34.5 million over five years, starting in 2021-22, and \$3.5 million ongoing, to Employment and Social Development Canada to strengthen capacity within the new Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care.

With details lacking, Kathleen Flanagan, an early childhood specialist who has done research on P.E.I.'s early learning system, is concerned

the funding may not focus enough on retention of employees, she said.

“You can’t have a quality program without quality staff and qualified staff who keep up with professional development.”

An ongoing issue is early childhood educators opting to switch sectors and become educational assistants in the school system for better wages and benefits.

One way to stop that is to offer competitive wages, which the provincial government promised to do in its March budget.

Speaking with The Guardian on April 23, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Ahmed Hussen said federal support for that effort was part of ongoing negotiations between federal and provincial governments.

“As part of our efforts to renew the bilateral agreement with P.E.I., P.E.I.’s share of the \$420 million dedicated to ECEs will be part of that mix.”

That money was announced in the federal government’s Fall Economic Statement in November.

Though Hussen couldn’t say how much of the new \$30 billion or ongoing \$8.3 billion would go toward retention, growing a qualified workforce was part of the five-year plan revealed in the budget.

At a glance

Budget promises for national child care:

- A 50 per cent reduction in average fees for regulated early learning and child care in all provinces outside of Quebec, by the end of 2022.
- An average of \$10 a day by 2025-26 for all regulated child care spaces in Canada.
- Ongoing annual growth in quality affordable child care spaces across the country.
- Meaningful progress in improving and expanding before- and after-school care.
- Provide training and development opportunities for early childhood educators.
- Build a baseline of common, publicly available data to measure progress.

Strings attached

Hussen is also confident talks with P.E.I. will go well, given previous agreements between governments, he said.

“First of all, we already have a framework and a precedent in which the federal government has been flowing dollars to provinces for affordable child care.”

While the new agreements will be separate and their details up in the air, cost reduction will be one of the requirements, though each province would be different, he said.

“In the negotiations we will be customizing those agreements in a way that reflects the realities of different provinces and territories in Canada.”

**Region:** Prince Edward Island <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** national child care system <sup>[4]</sup>

federal budget <sup>[5]</sup>

funding <sup>[6]</sup>

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