

Forgotten on the frontline: A survey report of Ontario's early years and child care workforce ^[1]

Author: Powell, A.; Ferns, C.; & Burrell, S.

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

The OCBCC and AECEO's survey asked Ontario's early years and child care workforce about current working conditions, mental health and well-being. The responses paint a picture of an early years and child care workforce at a breaking point. Already supervisors have reported having to reduce programs hours and close rooms due to a lack of staff. If there is not meaningful action from the federal and provincial governments to support the workforce, we anticipate further program instability and centre closures.

What we heard from Early Childhood Educators and child care workers:

- 54% reported decreased job satisfaction
- 89% reported an increase in job-related stress.
- 43% reported that they have considered leaving the sector since the onset of the pandemic
- 13% were actively looking for opportunities outside the sector.
- 20% have seen work hours increase, but of those only 9.3% reported an increase in wages.
- 36% reported a decrease in planning time.

Voices from the frontline

"More work with lots more cleaning and disinfecting, **longer hours and no pay increase**. No recognition from the government for being an essential worker."

"I feel like the **cleaning takes over the time to teach and be present with the children** I leave work every single day feeling **exhausted, hopeless, frustrated** and emotional."

"I've found it difficult to be positive at work, as well as feeling uninspired and unmotivated in my field. **It's hard to feel all of these stressful emotions and try to hide it in front of the children.**"

"Our centre is falling apart and **I feel like so much of this could be prevented if ECEs were more protected - decent pay, safer working conditions, universal childcare for all instead of treating it like a business**. I couldn't be more unhappy and this field is my passion, my life's purpose. And yet I want to quit because I can't take it anymore."

"We are important too. I feel we are the **forgotten frontline staff**. Nobody is taking care of our concerns and rights."

Recommendations

The federal government's 2021 Budget has pledged \$30 Billion to transform Canada's early years and child care system - the promised federal funding could more than double Ontario's child care budget. But the success of the federal plan is dependent on provincial governments signing funding agreements. We urge the Ontario government to move swiftly to unlock this funding, by collaborating with the federal government to meet targets for affordability, quality and workforce support in licensed child care. Working collaboratively the federal government and provincial government must:

Respect and value early years and child care professionals

1. Commit to increasing operational funding to raise wages and implement a wage grid that ensures a \$25 per hour starting wage for ECEs, early years staff and child care providers. This will address the current staffing retention crisis and long-term recruitment challenges.

2. Work with the early years and child care sector to develop and establish Decent Work Standards to support pedagogical practice. Decent Work Standards should align with the AECEO's Decent Work Charter and include:

- the provision of daily, collaborative, on-site paid planning time;

- permanent paid sick and emergency leave days;
- engagement in communities of practice;
- paid time for professional learning;
- an Early Childhood Workforce Learning Framework that ensures meaningful professional learning opportunities, mandates Anti-Racism training, commits to Truth and Reconciliation, and enhances pathways to acquiring and upgrading qualifications.

3. Create practitioner roles and identify educational requirements alongside a career ladder that will strengthen program quality while formally recognizing the value of credentials and experience. This initiative will support the recruitment and retention of Registered Early Childhood Educators and provide a greater incentive to make early years and child care a life-long career.

4. Work with the early years and child care sector to form an Advisory Committee that is representative of the early years and child care workforce, including Black, Indigenous and Racialized educators, to coordinate and inform policy development.

Provide immediate Covid-19-related supports

5. Provide additional funding and operating guidelines that protect ECEs' professional role during the pandemic. For example, adequate funding should be provided to hire enough staff for screening, cleaning and transition to program, or lower ratios, rather than expecting ECEs to do additional work on top of their regular responsibilities.

6. Provide enhanced operating funding to stabilize child care programs, prevent program closures, provide fee relief for families and ensure no educator loses their job.

7. Provide additional pandemic-related sick days, self-isolation days and time off for vaccination appointments.

8. Organize access to all necessary Personal Protective Equipment, health and safety supplies, and laundering supplies, as defined by Public Health agencies and as requested by early years programs to meet their needs. This should be provincially funded and efficient distribution should be organized through CMSM/DSSABs and licensed home child care agencies.

9. Ensure healthy workplaces by funding upgraded ventilation and air filtration systems and other necessary retrofits.

10. Undertake a community consultation to understand the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and well-being of the early years and child care workforce and develop a long-term, funded response plan.

Region: Ontario ^[5]

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