

Ottawa and Nova Scotia sign child-care agreement ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Ottawa and Nova Scotia have come to an agreement for new child-care funding outlined in the 2021 budget, joining British Columbia as the second province to have signed on the dotted line with the federal government.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the \$605 million agreement will create 4,000 new spaces in regulated centres for children under six over the next two years, with another 9,500 in the following five years. The province is putting up \$40 million over five years, according to a provincial news release. A federal-provincial implementation committee will oversee progress on the agreement and handle stakeholder consultations.

Ottawa and Nova Scotia will work towards a \$10-per-day arrangement for children under six-years-old by 2027. Trudeau promised average child-care fees will be cut in half by the end of 2022.

The 2021 federal budget pledged nearly \$30 billion over five years in new spending and over \$8 billion in permanent funding thereafter to bring \$10-per-day child care to every province and territory in Canada, subject to federal-provincial negotiations and a 50/50 cost split with provinces.

In Halifax, median toddler fees are about \$853 per month, according to a 2021 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a progressive think tank. That's on the lower end compared to other municipalities in Canada, but is one of the highest in Atlantic Canada.

Toronto is by far the most expensive city to raise a toddler, with costs exceeding \$1,500 per month. In other Atlantic municipalities such as Fredericton and St. John's, median monthly costs are around \$700. In Charlottetown, median costs are just over \$600 per month.

In 2020, 55 per cent of children under six-years-old were in a regulated or unregulated form of child care in Nova Scotia, down from 61 per cent in 2019, according to data from Statistics Canada. That was the lowest percentage amongst the Atlantic provinces, but higher than all provinces west of Quebec and all territories.

The agreement with Nova Scotia is the second such accord to be signed with provinces following the 2021 federal budget. Nova Scotia was very keen to sign onto the pledge, according to comments to iPolitics by Families, Children, and Social Development Minister Ahmed Hussen in April. Hussen said the other highly-interested provinces and territories were B.C., Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Yukon. Quebec already has a universal childcare plan, and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said the federal government is drawing inspiration from the Quebec model.

Ottawa also agreed to inject \$11.6 million to extend a pre-existing bilateral childcare and early learning agreement between the two governments, in addition to a one-time \$10.9 million investment into Nova Scotia's child-care workforce. The \$10.9 million will go towards higher wages, free tuition, books, and bursaries for select early childhood educators, according to the provincial news release.

Having this agreement be buttressed with the additional investments in the Nova Scotia child-care workforce is a big deal and will help create a better environment for children, parents, and child-care workers, said Armine Yalnizyan, an economist with the Atkinson Foundation and a member of the federal task force on women in the economy created in March by Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland.

It was a "doubling down on what we mean by high-quality care and literally putting money where the expansion needs to happen in a universal way so that no child is left behind," she told iPolitics on Tuesday.

Without a properly trained and compensated child-care workforce, you can't have a good child-care program, she said.

In 2005, then-Prime Minister Paul Martin signed childcare agreements with every province and put up \$5 billion over five years in federal funds. That deal eventually collapsed after Martin lost to Stephen Harper in the 2006 election.

After the agreement with B.C. was announced on July 8, the NDP said Trudeau should steer clear of an election and instead focus on signing deals with all the provinces and territories to bring more affordable child-care options to all Canadians.

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

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