

# Opinion: As a federal child-care plan moves ahead, Doug Ford risks Ontario being left behind <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Big changes are happening in child care.

Two weeks ago, the federal and British Columbia governments signed the first bilateral agreement aimed at building a \$10-a-day child-care system. On Tuesday, Nova Scotia signed on, announcing their own agreement with the Trudeau government. Federal and provincial leaders stood behind a lectern reading “Affordable Child Care for Everyone.” Then on Wednesday, P.E.I. confirmed that they too will join the club, expecting to sign an agreement “within weeks.”

In Ontario, families and educators are watching closely to see if the Ford government will step up and make a deal on child care — or choose to play political football with a program that should be a lifeline for women and the Ontario economy.

There is no denying that Ontario has a child-care crisis. Ontario has some of the most expensive child-care fees in the country. Parents in Premier Ford’s riding pay an average of \$1,250 a month for a preschool space. An analysis released on Thursday by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that parents in Ontario have the most to gain from a federal program. Parents of infants could be saving over \$10,000 annually in child-care fees by next year under the plan.

The pandemic has exposed what advocates and workers in the child-care sector have known for decades: child care is essential to the well-being of families and communities, and also to the full participation of women in our workforce. During the pandemic, the shuttering of child-care centres forced many parents — mostly women — to dramatically reduce their working hours or leave their jobs altogether in order to provide necessary care. The expectation of women to do care-related duties without sufficient support has devastating long-term impacts that further expand the wage gap, and hamper the ability of women to enter the workforce on equal footing to men.

Ontario’s child-care system faces other challenges that federal funding could help address. Families scramble to find regulated child care in many communities. Wages for early childhood educators (ECEs) and child-care workers, also predominantly women, are barely half of the average national income.

These ECEs and child-care workers are increasingly leaving the sector; more college ECE graduates are not even entering the profession. Their pedagogical and caring work has always been important, and is now more publicly appreciated as we’ve navigated the pandemic. Yet, this has not been met with an increase in financial support for the workforce.

These challenges — affordability, staff retention, space shortages — can’t be fixed by band-aid solutions. A tax credit or wage grant alone won’t do. We need a publicly funded child-care system.

For years, child care advocates in Ontario have called for government action on three big ideas: affordable fees for families, decent work and pay for educators, and enough space for all. Now advocates have even provided the provincial government with a “Roadmap To Universal Child Care in Ontario” featuring 20 policy interventions to make that system a reality. But will the premier listen?

The Ford government didn’t respond quickly or robustly enough last spring to prevent child-care centres from harsh enrolment declines or closing altogether. So there are serious concerns about how the province will negotiate an agreement with the federal government on universal child care.

Will Premier Ford follow in Premier Horgan and Premier Rankin’s footsteps and deliver a landmark deal on child-care funding that is affordable and accessible for families? Or will Ontario continue on the risky path of underfunded, market-based child care with unaffordable fees and long wait-lists?

If Premier Ford can’t even do the minimum to unlock billions of dollars in federal child-care funding, he can be sure that families and educators will remember it during next June’s provincial election.

Action on universal child care has never been more urgent. Ontario must collaborate with the federal government to prioritize women, children, families and communities — and make universal child care a reality.

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

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

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/07/opinion-federal-child-care-plan-moves-ahead-doug-ford-risks-ontario> <sup>[2]</sup>

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