

Ottawa and P.E.I. sign child-care agreement^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Prince Edward Island has agreed to receive funding from Ottawa for child care in the province, making it the fourth province or territory to have signed on to the national child-care plan.

P.E.I. joins British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and the Yukon in agreeing to the funding arrangement with Ottawa, which was originally described in the federal government's 2021 budget.

P.E.I. will get \$121 million to build a \$10-a-day child-care program for kids under six by 2024, and to cut fees in half by 2022, said Families, Children, and Social Development Minister Ahmed Hussen, speaking to iPolitics on Tuesday.

Implementing a \$10-a-day program by 2024 is two years ahead of the timelines promised in other jurisdictions.

The funding will create 450 new child-care spaces in the province, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised. The agreement also includes a one-time payment of \$3.6 million to improve training and wages for child-care workers.

The 2021 federal budget promised nearly \$30 billion over five years in new spending, and more than \$8 billion in permanent funding thereafter, to bring \$10-a-day child care to every province and territory in Canada, subject to federal-provincial negotiations, and as long as provinces agreed to pay half the costs.

Trudeau and Hussen announced the agreement on Tuesday alongside P.E.I. Premier Dennis King, members of the provincial cabinet, and Liberal MPs from the Island.

They are "agreements that bind the government of Canada and the particular province or territory that signs them," Hussen told iPolitics when asked whether a federal election would affect the deals. "So these agreements are real, and they're tangible."

Parents in P.E.I. already pay some of the lowest child-care fees in Canada, thanks to "a reasonably well-funded and publicly managed early-learning and child-care sector," whereby the province sets fees in existing child-care centres, said Kate Bezanson, a sociology professor at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont.

On average, it costs \$8,800 per year for infant care in Charlottetown, and around \$7,000 for a toddler or preschooler, according to an analysis by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

It's the second-cheapest city for child care in Canada, behind only Winnipeg, which also has pre-existing provincial subsidies.

P.E.I. is also "ahead" of many other provinces and territories in having a well-funded system for paying child-care workers, Bezanson said in an email to iPolitics.

The province has a "wage grid" that sets a standard wage range for every position in the sector. A wage grid provides a minimum, mid-point, and maximum wage for a given position.

It's a "foundational, necessary element of child-care quality and system building," because it helps attract and retain workers, she said.

P.E.I. also has one of the highest rates of child-care enrolment in the country, according to Statistics Canada. It's second only to Quebec, which already has a publicly funded system.

In 2019, 66 per cent of kids under six in P.E.I. were enrolled in some kind of child-care program, compared to 78 per cent of Quebec children.

On July 8, British Columbia became the first province to accept Ottawa's offer, signing a \$3.2-billion agreement to create 30,000 spaces over five years for children under six.

Nova Scotia joined on July 13, agreeing to a \$605-million plan to create nearly 15,000 new spaces for children under six by 2027.

On July 23, the Yukon also agreed to receive \$41.6 million from Ottawa for 110 new spaces over five years.

Governments in Ontario, Alberta, and New Brunswick have been especially critical of the plan.

"Ontario needs long-term financial support that is flexible, (so it can) respond to the unique needs of every parent, not a one-size-fits-all approach," said Caitlin Clark, a spokesperson for Ontario Education Minister Stephen Lecce in response to questions from iPolitics on July 22.

The Ontario government has a separate plan to create 30,000 child-care spaces, and to give parents a tax credit of up to \$1,500 per child.

Some of Ontario's largest municipalities, however, have urged the province to reach an agreement. Both Toronto's and Ottawa's city councils recently passed motions to that end.

Before the 2021 federal budget, London Mayor Ed Holder, a former Conservative MP, wrote a letter in support of a national program to Hussen and former Ontario Children's minister Todd Smith.

Alberta recently renewed an existing \$290-million federal-provincial child-care agreement, and is reportedly in talks with Ottawa about the \$10-a-day plan, despite Premier Jason Kenney's reservations about it.

Kenney said the program favours publicly run centres, as well as urban families working nine-to-five jobs.

New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs, speaking after the federal budget was released in April, called Ottawa's child-care promise a "great election ploy."

Region: Prince Edward Island ^[3]

Tags: federal budget ^[4]

bilateral agreement ^[5]

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