

# 'It's not enough': Money at the heart of child-care disagreement between Ontario and Ottawa, sources say <sup>[1]</sup>

Liberals have already concluded agreements with 7 provinces and one territory

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## EXCERPTS

Doug Ford's government has not yet signed a deal with Ottawa on child care in part because of a "money" disagreement, says a senior Ontario Progressive Conservative official.

According to the source, who was not allowed to speak publicly on the matter, the Trudeau government is ready to offer around \$10 billion over five years to Canada's most populous province, so that it can create \$10-a-day child-care spaces by 2026.

The federal Liberals have already concluded agreements with seven provinces and one territory: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and the Yukon.

In its last budget, the Trudeau government promised a total of \$30 billion over five years to establish a Canada-wide daycare program. If Ontario receives roughly \$10 billion from Ottawa, it would amount to a third of the national envelope.

"It's not enough," said the senior Ontario Progressive Conservative official. "We represent close to 40 per cent of the Canadian population. We need close to 40 per cent of the amount."

This source also highlighted concerns among the Ford government that the province would end up with a program it "can't afford," especially as Ontario's population is growing rapidly.

"We don't want another Medicare," he said. Under that agreement, health transfers diminished over time, leaving provinces to foot most of the bill. He is hopeful, however, that an agreement with the federal government can be reached.

Another source with knowledge of the file confirmed that money represents one of the key points of disagreements in the negotiations between Ottawa and Queen's Park.

This source underlined how daycare fees are particularly high in Ontario. In Toronto, for instance, they can surpass \$2,000 a month. She says that some officials therefore believe that it will be more expensive in Ontario than elsewhere to lower the cost to \$10 a day.

### 'A public shakedown for money'

Asked to comment on the matter, a senior official in the Trudeau government expressed displeasure that discussions between Ottawa and Ontario were surfacing in the public domain.

"We don't negotiate in the media," said the source, who asked to remain anonymous. "You will notice that we have eight agreements with provinces and territories, all done without public shakedowns for money from backroom operators."

This high-ranking federal official did not confirm the amount that Ottawa has put on the table for Ontario, but he says that the province will get its "full share in terms of its population" and that it's "wrong" to claim otherwise.

On Sunday, the federal minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Dominic LeBlanc, appeared on the Radio-Canada TV show *Les coulisses du pouvoir*, where he said that it would be impossible for his government to change the financing formula at this point, since the majority of provinces have already signed a deal with Ottawa.

"If seven other provinces have all accepted that this is a fair formula when it comes to the number of young children in their jurisdiction," LeBlanc stated on the show, "you will understand that we cannot just add \$2 or \$3 billion just because we want to be nice to Doug Ford."

LeBlanc acknowledged that these agreements are adapted to the reality of each jurisdiction. "There are obviously asymmetrical deals, because the situation in each province is different."

The minister added that his government is committed to a long-term stable funding model, after the initial five-year agreement, with "around \$8 or \$9 billion per year."

"If a future government decides to cancel this funding, it would be like vandalizing a program important to Canadian families," he said. "I can't imagine that a government would do that."

LeBlanc described the discussions with Premier Ford as "highly positive" and said he had reasons to believe that in the next few weeks, all of the provinces will have signed a deal with the federal Liberals.

#### **Ford should sign deal quickly: advocate**

The Ford government is facing outside pressure to accept the agreement. Carolyn Ferns, policy co-ordinator for the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare, believes the province has "a good deal" on its hands, one that "does not require cost matching" and should therefore be signed "as quickly as possible."

"I just wish that the Ford government would listen to the clamour that's going on in this province for the need for child care," said Ferns. "Not just from long-time advocates like me, but from chambers of commerce, from families, from banks."

Ferns also pointed out that the Ford government has had the opportunity to invest more in child-care services since being elected in 2018, but instead chose to cancel a plan for free pre-school education that the previous Liberal government proposed.

"Before complaining that the federal government is not doing enough when they are bringing so much to the table," she said, "I would ask [Doug Ford] to reflect on what his government has done for child care in Ontario."

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

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

budget 2021 <sup>[5]</sup>

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