

Child care advocates welcome Canada-Alberta child care agreement and call on Ontario and New Brunswick governments to join effort to build Canada-wide system of early learning and child care ^[1]

Source: Child Care Now

Format: Press release

Publication Date: 15 Nov 2021

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Nov 15, 2021 | **News** ^[4]

Canada's national child care advocacy association says the Canada-Alberta child care agreement could more than double the existing supply of regulated not-for-profit child care spaces for the province's youngest children over the next five years, in addition to cutting parent fees by 50% in the next year and bringing them down to \$10 a day by 2026.

"The addition of 42,500 affordable regulated spaces in the not-for-profit, public and family child care sectors in Alberta over the next five years will improve access significantly but this rapid expansion must be well planned and executed" said Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director of Child Care Now.

"We call on the Alberta government to consult widely with advocates, the early learning and child care sector, Indigenous leaders and communities and many others to develop a comprehensive public expansion plan to ensure the new regulated child care spaces are located and funded to reach underserved populations and communities," Ballantyne added.

Ballantyne noted that the Canada-Alberta agreement will require that the Alberta government address the barriers in the way of recruiting and retaining early childhood educators—barriers that have grown higher during the pandemic.

"We have said time and time again that it is impossible to build a high quality universal child care system without significantly raising the very low compensation paid to those in the sector," said Ballantyne. "The commitment to develop a provincial wage grid among other workforce measures set out in the Canada-Alberta agreement is essential to bring educators back into the child care system and encourage their further education and professional development."

Ballantyne said child care advocates are very pleased that the Canada-Alberta child care agreement mirrors the eight others reached in the last six months.

"We applaud the federal government for making sure that each of the child care agreements lays the groundwork to build a comprehensive, responsive, high quality, universal child care system that will be affordable for all families regardless of where they reside in Canada," said Ballantyne. "This ninth agreement, like the others, requires more robust public management of the supply of child care programs including the setting of affordable parent fees, provincial wage grids guaranteeing decent wages and benefits for all early childhood educators, proper community and stakeholder consultation, and government expansion plans," said Ballantyne. Ballantyne said increasing the number of regulated child care programs will require a large increase in the early learning and child care workforce.

Ballantyne said that the successful conclusion of a federal child care agreement with Alberta will now add pressure on Ontario and New Brunswick to participate in the Government of Canada's effort to establish a Canada-wide system of early learning and child care.

"It is now even more difficult for the governments of Ontario and New Brunswick to say that what has been agreed to by eight of ten provinces is not good enough for the remaining two," said Ballantyne. "How can the governments in those two provinces continue to refuse the federal government's offer of billions of dollars to meet the needs of children, families, and employers, especially when it is unrefuted that building an affordable and accessible quality system of child care is key to economic recovery from the pandemic."

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