

Ontario holding talks with feds on national child care plan today as education minister insists province wants deal 'as soon as possible'

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EXCERPTS

Members of the Ontario government are sitting down with their federal counterparts today in an attempt to hash out a deal on child care funding but there is still no indication of when the dispute could be resolved.

A total of nine provinces and territories have already signed onto the Trudeau government's \$30 billion national child care plan, paving the way for parents in those jurisdictions to see their monthly fees cut in half by the end of 2022.

But the Ontario government has so far refused to sign the accord with Premier Doug Ford suggesting that he wants the "same deal" as Quebec.

Quebec, it should be noted, already has a heavily subsidized provincial child-care system with the lowest fees in the country so it is being given its share of the federal money – about \$6 billion – with fewer strings attached.

The federal offer to the other provinces and territories, meanwhile, is contingent on those governments cutting child care fees in half by the end of 2022 and reducing them further to an average of \$10 a day in 2026.

"We want to get a deal as soon as possible so long as it is fair for the people we serve and it actually delivers affordable childcare for all families and gets us to \$10 a day, which the offer on the table at least as it is composed does not do," Education Minister Stephen Lecce said during a press conference on Tuesday morning. "It's why we're at the table with the feds making the case for a better deal, a fair deal that reduces costs and increases access for working people in Ontario."

Lecce has claimed that the federal deal, as proposed, does not take into account the high cost of delivering child care in Ontario and would only lower fees to an average of \$21 a day.

He has also said that the federal government should reimburse Ontario for the \$3.6 billion it spends on delivering full-day kindergarten for four and five year olds, something that only a minority of provinces do.

Opposition parties, however, have slammed the Ford government for trying to redirect money intended to lower the cost of child care to its bottom line and have questioned why it is now the only other province, besides New Brunswick, which has been unable to reach a deal with the feds.

"We want to make sure that prices come down for all families and we want to see \$10 a day delivered for moms and dads in Ontario," Lecce insisted on Tuesday. "It is too expensive for too many families and that is why the premier is committed to getting a fair deal. To taking the time, working with the feds and landing the best possible deal for the people in this province."

In Ontario the average child-care cost per child is currently \$12,800 a year or about \$53 a day. Fees are, however, much higher in Toronto where the median infant fee is more than \$1,800 a month. A total of nine provinces and territories have already signed onto the Trudeau government's \$30 billion national child care plan, paving the way for parents in those jurisdictions to see their monthly fees cut in half by the end of 2022.

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