

# Canada, NWT ink deal to create 300 child care spaces by 2026 <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Universal, \$10-a-day child care for children six-and-under is coming to the Northwest Territories.

Premier Caroline Cochrane, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Families and Social Development Minister Karina Gould, NWT MP Michael McLeod and Northern Affairs Minister Dan Vandal made the announcement in Ottawa on Dec. 15. Education Minister RJ Simpson also attended virtually. Cochrane is in Ottawa to discuss Northern issues and challenges with leaders including Governor General Mary Simon.

“Before I got into politics, I worked with Yellowknife women’s society,” said Cochrane. “We had licenced child care, but it was a losing proposition. We couldn’t pay staff appropriately and couldn’t get people.

“This agreement actually allows us to pay people properly so people aren’t just babysitting our children. Before there was a long waiting list. It was a losing proposition, but this changes that.”

Under the agreement, the federal government and the GNWT will work together to create 300 new child care spaces by 2026, with Ottawa kicking in \$51 million over five years to cut fees for children six and under by up to 50 per cent. All of this will apply to non-profit child care spaces and community spaces.

Also included in the agreement is a plan to attract and grow a skilled workforce in early childhood education (ECE), with plans for establishing a wage grid and retention initiatives to keep good staff in the field, as well as guarantees for accessibility for both low mobility and low income households.

Cochrane noted many communities in the NWT, include Inuvik and Yellowknife, have long wait lists and this funding would help to alleviate that.

“Regional centres have wait lists,” she said. “Some don’t even have a childcare facility. It’s their parents and grandparents looking after these children.

“(So we’re focusing on) making childcare a decent wage, Not something you do because you have no choices. Make it a profession for people.”

Finally, the announcement includes a commitment to work with Indigenous governments to ensure any early childhood education delivered is culturally sensitive to Indigenous needs.

Simpson praised the announcement virtually from Yellowknife.

“This is a historic moment for the Northwest Territories,” said Simpson. “The signing of this agreement with the Government of Canada brings our territory a step closer to an early learning and child care system that recognizes, and is responsive to, the unique needs and cultures of the Northwest Territories. With a focus on availability, affordability, inclusiveness, and high-quality child care, this agreement will improve families’ access to safe, inclusive environments for their children to learn, grow, and thrive. This investment into early childhood education will play a pivotal role in the long-term social and economic prosperity of our territory.”

## Pay them and they will come

Patricia Davison, executive director of Children’s First Centre in Inuvik, said she was very excited to hear the announcement and was looking forward to hearing more about how the wage grid and retention initiatives would be handled, noting she was having difficulty keeping staff.

Davison noted she currently has seven positions open — with the current amount of spaces the building needs 33 full and part time employees to be at full capacity. And that’s still with a waiting list, which Davison estimated had six to eight children currently.

“They’re talking about more spaces, which is lovely,” she said. “But we’re struggling to hire people right now as it is, for the positions and spaces we have. So if you don’t have the staff, creating the spaces will be really tough.

“So I’m excited and curious to hear about supporting staff and getting more educated early childcare professionals in the NWT.”

She added she would need at least three to four more staff on top of the seven positions she's trying to fill to empty the wait list.

Subsidizing wages so ECE centres can compete with other employers would be a huge help, she noted.

"It would improve things immensely," she said. "It would help us to be able to move forward, do more creative programming and open up more spaces."

She added that, as an essential service, Children's First Society was continuing its programming over the holidays, excluding statutory holidays.

However, while still waiting for the details, she said she was quite happy to see things moving forward.

"Their statement was kind of global," she said. "It touched on all the key areas that we've been advocating for, but I will be very curious to see what the details will be.

"When you can literally walk across the street and make almost double that you could in early child care, why wouldn't you? Right now, it takes a pretty dedicated person to stay."

**Region:** Northwest Territories <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** Canada-wide agreement <sup>[4]</sup>

universal system <sup>[5]</sup>

workforce <sup>[6]</sup>

wages <sup>[7]</sup>

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