

# Child-care deal touted as jobs game-changer for women <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The worker-starved London labour market may see an influx of job seekers as a child-care deal between the Ontario and federal governments removes a barrier to employment, London and area business groups said Monday.

Employment surveys done for agencies and the City of London have cited child care — which can cost more than \$1,000 a month per child — as a barrier to getting more parents, especially women, into the workforce.

On Monday, Ottawa and Queen's Park announced an agreement to bring child care fees down to an average of \$10 a day by the end of 2026.

"We have seen women decide they cannot return to work due to child care. It hurts and it happens all the time," said Jaymie Crook, owner of Bosco and Roxy's, a London dog treat manufacturer.

Crook employs 180 people and about 85 per cent of his workforce are women.

"It is not affordable for them. The math does not make sense. We need every opportunity for people to enter the workplace, so this is great news."

The agreement will see rebates of 25 per cent kick in April 1, and a reduction will be phased over several years to \$10 a day.

In August 2021, PwC — the chartered accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers — released a report it did for the city on the London labour market. Of the women surveyed, 29 per cent cited child care as a barrier to employment. If all barriers were addressed, it could mean more than 22,000 women entering the city and region workforce, the report stated.

"Child-care responsibilities are a barrier that affects women much more significantly than men," the report said.

It added, however, lack of jobs with a preferred schedule, low pay and lack of transportation are also barriers. The report also concluded women remain out of the workforce longer than men, making their re-entry even more challenging. Despite having comparable education to men, women are often paid less, meaning they do not have as much of an incentive to return to work, the report said.

"This is going to open opportunities for people, especially women. It will free up a large concentration of people to return to work," said Mike Elliott, owner of Express Employment in London, an employment agency working with businesses.

"There is a worker shortage across every industry in London at the moment. A lot of women do not return to the workplace" after having a child, he said.

"A barrier has been removed."

Express has more than 300 clients and all are looking for workers, Elliott said. The greatest impact may be in the agri-food sector, as manufacturers such as Cargill, The Original Cakerie and Dr. Oetker employ mostly women.

"Everyone has a staff challenge these days."

Pathways, an employment and skills training agency in London assisting those looking for work, deals daily with child-care issues, said Laurie Rintoul, skills training co-ordinator.

"I deal every day with clients struggling with child-care issues, individuals looking for work and training," she said. "This will be huge for people. It will take away a lot of fear and worry about 'how do I get work as a single parent?'"

An employer needs assessment survey done by the Workforce Planning and Development Board for Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford in 2020 cited increased access to subsidized child care as a program business would like to see.

"Employers emphasized that getting access to child care remains a huge barrier in getting ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most manufacturing employers have moved to address the impact of COVID-19 on their businesses by introducing flexible work schedules to accommodate staff needs," the report said.

Deb Mountenay, director of the board, also believes there is a need to hire more child-care staff. The sector needs workers to fill the demand that is coming, she said.

“We have a shortage of people working in child care, so additional funding is great news but we need more people,” she said.

“I do know employers during the last year in particular have been reporting lack of child care preventing them from recruiting labour. We hear it from employers.”

London and region has about 6,750 jobs unfilled, as workers are tough to find, Mountenay said.

At Childreach, an early years agency in London working to prepare young children for school and offering parent support, director Yvette Scrivener agrees the federal-provincial deal will result in “an influx” of local workers.

“It is a barrier to entering the workforce. There will be a larger talent pool to choose from and a diverse skill set,” said Scrivener, who works with children up to six years old, as well as their parents.

“Some parents don’t find it economically viable to return to work.”

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

**Tags:** universal child care <sup>[4]</sup>

Canada-wide agreements <sup>[5]</sup>

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