

Ontario's child-care deal a 'positive' step, but staffing needs attention: Advocates ^[1]

Author: Aziz, Saba

Source: Global News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 28 Mar 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Daycare providers and parents in Ontario are welcoming a new deal that would lower the cost of child care in the province, but say the inked agreement with the federal government does not adequately address staffing problems faced by the sector.

On Monday, Ontario finally joined other provinces that have signed onto the federal government's plan, which aims to reduce child-care fees to an average of \$10 a day by 2026.

According to the Ministry of Health, under the new deal, Ontario families with children five years old and younger in licensed child-care centres will see fees reduced up to 25 per cent to a minimum of \$12 a day, retroactive to April 1, 2022. The rebates will be delivered to families beginning in May.

With child-care fees further halved by the end of the year, the federal government said families will save an average of about \$6,000 per child.

Over the next five years, Ontario will receive \$10.2 billion in overall funding.

Spyros Volonakis, executive director of Network Child Care Services that operates 19 child-care centres across Toronto and the GTA, said the deal would make "a huge difference" for families.

"This is a very positive development in the early years and child care field. It supports families without compromising quality," he told Global News.

"Parents need to have a peace of mind that their children are safe and are supported so that they receive the necessary programming within the early childhood education."

Morna Ballantyne, executive director of Child Care Now, said it was "fantastic" to see Ontario join the federal government plan with many strong provisions, but noted that Ontario's agreement was very similar to deals reached with other provinces.

"The Ontario government kept saying that it was holding out for a better deal, but there isn't anything in what was announced to suggest that the Ontario agreement is different in any fundamental way from the other ones," she told Global News.

What is missing?

Rudy Luft, who is a registered early childhood educator at Friends Day Care in downtown Toronto, said while he remains optimistic, there are still many unanswered questions about the program and how it will be rolled out.

Luft said it was unclear where the money for the parent rebates retroactive to April 1 will come from.

"We're not exactly sure how some centres may afford to do that, seeing as we don't have any direction on how funding is going to come in yet," he said.

The new hourly minimum wage for early childhood educators is also set to rise by \$1 an hour each year until reaching \$25 an hour.

But advocates argue that is not enough to attract and retain staff, especially as the province is also aiming to create approximately 71,000 new child-care spaces.

"I do not believe that the increases in compensation that the Ontario government is proposing are nearly sufficient to be able to attract the numbers of staff who will be required to fill these child-care centres," said Ballantyne.

"We need to see much higher wage increases, and we also need to see other forms of compensation being addressed in early childhood," she added.

Luft agrees, saying even \$25 is not "necessarily a respectable wage" when compared to other industries in the education field. Besides

staff retention, the issue of worker training was also not addressed in the deal, he said.

Toronto resident Saad Qasim and his wife had their first daughter last November.

While his wife is planning on staying home with the baby for another seven to eight months, daycare will be a requirement going forward, said Qasim, who immigrated from Pakistan last year.

Qasim, who works at Deloitte as an IT consultant, said he was disappointed that Ontario had taken so long to sign up for the federal plan, adding that the new rates will now take time to come into effect.

He also questioned how realistic the \$10-a-day figure is and anticipates he will end up having to pay more in downtown Toronto, where he lives.

As a new parent and immigrant, his main concern besides the pricing and increase in the number of daycare centres is for the province to ensure a healthy and safe environment for the kids.

"I hear horror stories from my friends whose kids get sick because they're obviously interacting with other children," the 34-year-old said.

"I'm sure they're doing the best they can, but there's always room for improvement."

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: workforce ^[4]

wages ^[5]

Canada-wide agreement ^[6]

Source URL (modified on 29 Mar 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/03/ontario%E2%80%99s-child-care-deal-%E2%80%98positive%E2%80%99-step-staffing-needs-attention>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/03/ontario%E2%80%99s-child-care-deal-%E2%80%98positive%E2%80%99-step-staffing-needs-attention> [2] <https://globalnews.ca/news/8717566/ontario-childcare-deal-reaction/> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/workforce> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/wages> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9206>