

# On child care, don't make the perfect the enemy of the good<sup>[1]</sup>

'When it comes to Ontario signing on to Canada's national child care plan, let us not make the perfect the enemy of the good.'

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## EXCERPTS

When it comes to Ontario signing on to Canada's national child care plan, let us not make the perfect the enemy of the good.

Could the deal announced on Monday be better? Of course. And would it have been preferable if Ontario had joined the other provinces and territories a few months ago? Certainly.

But the most important thing about this deal is not that it falls short in some ways. It's that it exists at all. With all the caveats, the fact remains that making affordable child care a reality across the country is a remarkable achievement.

It was barely a year ago that the Trudeau government outlined a \$30-billion plan to make child care accessible and lower the cost to an average of \$10 a day, modelled on Quebec's highly successful program. After literally decades of attempts and disappointments on this front, there was plenty of room for skepticism.

But now that Ontario and Ottawa have reached a deal, all the provinces and territories are on board and national child care is becoming a reality.

If the plan rolls out as described, it will improve early education for kids, cut costs for families at a time when they are badly pressed, and give the economy a boost by making it easier for women to participate fully in the workforce. All that is especially true in Toronto and surrounding cities, where parents struggle to pay the highest child-care fees in the country.

This is a win-win-win, and it deserves hearty applause all round. It will surely go down as one of the Trudeau government's most significant accomplishments.

All that being said, it's still true that the Ontario deal is not all it could be. And, indeed, in some ways it is less than advertised.

For one thing, the Ford government insists on playing games with the amount it secured from Ottawa to sign on. It boasts that the agreement is worth \$13.2 billion, not the \$10.2 billion long discussed as Ontario's fair share of the total federal program, based on its proportion of the national population.

But it turns out the larger number is reached simply by extending the five-year deal to six years and adding on what Ottawa projects it will spend in that additional year for Ontario's part of the program.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau noted on Monday that all provinces will get the same proportion of the money in year six of the program, so Ontario isn't actually getting more at all. But it does get to argue that it somehow extracted more from Ottawa than other provinces.

Otherwise, why wait months longer than the others to sign on? By delaying for months, the Ford government actually deprives parents of some fee rebates they might otherwise have claimed. But parents will still start getting rebates in May, it seems, coincidentally (or not) on the eve of the provincial election set for June 2.

There are other questions about the Ontario deal. Both governments say it will create an additional 86,000 licensed child care spaces over the next four years, but some experts argue that will still leave the province short, given the fact that lowering fees will inevitably increase demand.

The deal's provisions for paying child care workers also seem to fall short. It would set \$18 an hour as a "floor" for their pay, but that's well shy of the \$25 their unions have been pressing for.

All this will be worked out in the years ahead. But it should not detract from the most important reality: Canada is actually getting a national program for affordable child care. Three cheers for that.

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

**Tags:** universal system<sup>[4]</sup>

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

governments<sup>[6]</sup>

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