

# Raise their pay or face shortage of workers to staff Ontario's new daycare spaces, advocates warn <sup>[1]</sup>

86,000 new spaces were announced Monday in new Ontario-Canada child-care deal

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

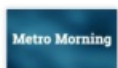
While many people are celebrating Monday's announcement that \$10-a-day child-care is coming to Ontario, some advocates are worried there will be a shortage of workers in the sector due to low pay.

Under the \$10.2-billion deal between Ontario and the federal government, there will be 86,000 new child-care spaces, though that number includes more than 15,000 spaces already in place since 2019.

Carolyn Ferns, policy coordinator at Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBC), told CBC News the new deal is going to make a big difference for families, but she's concerned there won't be enough workers to staff the new spaces.

"We have a workforce crisis in child care," she said.

"We need [early childhood educators] joining the system, staying and making a career. Right now they only stay an average of three years."



8:10

Daycare operators and advocates skeptical about childcare deal as industry faces worker shortage

<sup>[3]</sup>

Danielle Wittick is a director of programming at Nyad Community Inc., a non-profit that runs seven daycares in Scarborough. 8:10

The new deal includes a wage floor for all child-care workers of \$18 an hour, with annual increases of a dollar a year, up to \$25. But Ferns and other advocates say that isn't enough.

The OCBC and the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO), issued an open letter to the provincial and federal governments on March 15, asking for a \$25 per hour starting wage for all child-care workers and a \$30 per hour starting wage for qualified ECEs.

## 'Neglect of the workforce'

Without these wage increases the sector won't be able to attract and retain workers, Ferns said.

"You can create all the spaces you want but ... without early childhood educators, it's just four walls. It's not child care," she said.

While it's important to expand child-care offerings, it's already difficult to staff the spaces currently there, Rachel Vickerson, executive director at the AECEO, told CBC News.

"There is this neglect of the workforce that's going to harm so many people, so many early childhood educators, but [it's] ultimately going to harm all of Ontario," she said.

Being a child-care worker is more difficult than people often see from the outside, Vickerson said.

ECEs are expected not just to look after young children, providing snacks and changing diapers. They are also responsible for educating them, creating lesson plans of their own and communicating those objectives to parents, she said.

In addition, they are often balancing licensing requirements with health and safety standards, which has become more difficult during the pandemic.

All of this entitles these workers to better wages, Vickerson said.

Ontario's Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, said the new deal's \$18 an hour starting wage is in fact enough to attract and retain more workers.

"We estimate about 25 per cent of the workforce will benefit from this," Lecce told CBC's Metro Morning on Tuesday. "Most are already north of this amount. But this will create ... an equilibrium. It'll raise everyone up."

The minister said in addition to retaining workers, the new wage floor will help hire about 14,000 more ECEs than current projections say are needed to fill the 86,000 spaces.

Premier Doug Ford, however, said child-care workers are not paid enough at the news conference on Monday in which he and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the new child-care deal.

"To be frank, they deserve more money. That's my opinion," Ford said.

"They have a special skill set and they deserve to get paid appropriately and we'll work as quickly as possible and collaborate with stakeholders."

Vickerson said in light of Ford's comments, she's looking to see what the other parties have to say about wages for early childhood educators leading up to the June 2 provincial election.

Ferns said she's optimistic that ministers at both the provincial and federal levels recognize the importance of the workforce.

"We just need to do better when it comes to compensation."

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** workforce <sup>[5]</sup>

decent work <sup>[6]</sup>

expansion <sup>[7]</sup>

universal system <sup>[8]</sup>

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