

# Ontario signs on to long-awaited federal \$10-a-day child-care deal<sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Ontario Premier Doug Ford says it was worth the wait to be the last province to sign on to the federal government's \$10-a-day child-care plan – but critics say there are few differences between the deal announced on Monday and those Ottawa made with all other provinces last year.

The two governments say the deal means Ontario parents, facing some of the highest child-care fees in the country, can now expect phased-in rebates by the end of the year that will save them up to \$6,000 a child in 2022, as a start. The agreement marks the finishing of the foundation of the federal government's promised national affordable child-care program. (Quebec has had its own similar system since the 1990s.)

After months of negotiations and talks concluded over the weekend, the Premier and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau unveiled a plan on Monday in which \$10.2-billion will flow to Ontario over five years – the same amount Ottawa had originally promised last year, despite Ontario's pleas that more money was needed.

Critics accuse Mr. Ford of needlessly delaying the deal, as parents wrestle with long waiting lists and the country's highest fees while those elsewhere in Canada are already paying less.

The Premier said Ontario secured a pledge of a sixth year of funding, \$2.9-billion, in Monday's deal, as well as "built-in protections" for taxpayers, such as a review of costs in the program's third year. He also pointed to the flexibility of the deal, which will allow Ontario to spend the five-year, \$10.2-billion funding in four years – although this provision comes after Ontario missed almost the entire first year of the program because it was still negotiating with Ottawa.

Mr. Trudeau said the deal, reached after "very tricky negotiations," is "the same quality of deal" as those "signed months ago in other parts of the country." He said Ontario's share of the program's first five years is the same "as we calculated it almost a year ago, and that's exactly what this deal is."

But he acknowledged that "different provinces got different levels of flexibility."

Pointing to the pledge of a sixth year of funding, he said, "We were happy to sign that because as you may remember, when we announced this child-care funding, it was permanent funding. So all the other provinces also know they get funding on the sixth year, on the seventh year, on the 10th year, on the 20th year."

The deal is also silent on Ontario's demands last year for cash for its all-day kindergarten program.

Speaking at a YMCA child-care centre in Brampton, Ont., alongside the Prime Minister, Mr. Ford sold the deal as another way his government was saving people money, noting his recent cancellation of \$120 in licence-plate sticker fees.

"As a government, we're laser-focused on finding more ways to keep costs down for Ontario families," Mr. Ford said.

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said the child-care program is the result of more than half a century of activism by Canadian feminists and would help the economy by helping mothers get back to work.

"This deal comes at exactly the moment when we need it most," Ms. Freeland said in Brampton. "Labour-force shortages are a choke point right now for our economy."

Beginning in May, parents with children 5 and younger, in participating licensed child-care centres, will have their fees reduced by as much as 25 per cent, the Ontario government says, with the change retroactive to April 1. In December, those fees will be refunded again by another 25 per cent.

And Ontario says that by September, 2025, child-care fees will hit the goal of an average of just \$10 a day for children under 5 – well below the current \$30 to \$95 a day. In Toronto, according to federal figures from 2020, the median monthly cost of a licensed child-care spot for

a toddler was \$1,578, compared with \$1,165 in Vancouver and \$853 in Halifax.

The plan also calls for the creation of 86,000 new daycare spaces, and for pay increases for early childhood educators, or ECEs, in order to attract and retain more of them. (Ontario says it has already created 15,000 new spaces since 2019, and now aims to add 71,000 more.)

Don Giesbrecht, chief executive officer of the Canadian Child Care Federation, said Ontario did not get anything more than other jurisdictions, despite the delay. The deal also covers only regulated, licensed child care, Mr. Giesbrecht points out, meaning families with children in unlicensed care will not see their fees drop.

The new child-care spaces Ontario hopes to create will require about 15,000 early childhood educators, Mr. Giesbrecht said. He warns the pay increases announced in the deal, which include an \$18-an-hour minimum wage, will not be sufficient to attract more workers.

“That alone is not enough, and frankly it’s not enough even for right now,” he said.

While calling the announcement historic, Carolyn Ferns, policy co-ordinator with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, said child-care workers need to be offered paid sick days, benefits and pensions.

“We have child-care programs that are closing rooms that can’t serve the number of families they have space for because of the shortage of ECEs,” she said

Speaking to reporters, Mr. Ford also said he believed ECEs should be paid even more: “To be frank, they deserve more money. That’s my opinion. We’re going to work on that.”

The federal NDP support the \$10-a-day child-care plan. But in the last election, the federal Conservatives said they would scrap the deal. On Monday, the party wouldn’t disclose its stand on the program but said Canadians need more flexibility with their child-care choices. The party is in the midst of a leadership race. Candidate Jean Charest said he would keep the program. The campaigns for candidates Pierre Poilievre and Patrick Brown did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

At Queen’s Park, opposition politicians gearing up for an election set for June 2 criticized Mr. Ford for delaying the deal. Ontario Liberal Party Leader Steven Del Duca said a provincial Liberal government would make the refunds retroactive to Jan. 1, handing the average family an extra \$2,750.

“It’s deeply disappointing that the people of Ontario had to be last in line to get nothing really for that kind of delay,” he told reporters. “I don’t see anything in the agreement that tells me it was worth this wait.”

Opposition NDP Leader Andrea Horwath called on the Ford government to provide a retroactive payment to families for the past nine months while the deal was being negotiated.

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

**Tags:** Canada-wide agreement <sup>[4]</sup>  
workforce <sup>[5]</sup>

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