

Longer waiting lists and possible staff shortages: child care industry braces for change ^[1]

The \$10-a-day child care program in Ontario is still three years away

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Source: Guelph Today

Format: Article

Publication Date: 31 Mar 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

There is a demand for spots in daycare centres right now and that demand is only expected to increase with the introduction of the province's affordable child care plans over the next couple of years.

And when those new child care spaces are created they may not be able to open if they don't have the staff to fill them.

The largest daycare provider servicing Guelph is the YMCA of Three Rivers.

"Demand is going to go up as the price goes down," said YMCA CEO Peter Sweeney. "It's a simple supply and demand equation."

He said they don't have all of the details from the province of how the investment will play out.

"So as a leading advocate for this work we feel we have a responsibility as sector leaders to talk about the staff recruitment and retention piece as well," he said.

"The hours are long, the work is hard, the impact of the pandemic. These are essential workers and we are on the front lines of keeping the economy moving."

Sweeney said he hopes Ontario's announcement for affordable child care will alleviate waiting lists at child care centres. He said times on waiting lists are circumstantial, based on parents wanting a child care centre close to them. A spot can become available in as little a week or could be months.

"It sounds to me like Guelph tends to have a little bit more in terms of waiting lists, more centres have waiting lists than other communities," said Andrea Hannen, executive director of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario.

"To be honest, there is a huge demand right now for early childhood educators in centres. The pandemic has exasperated the issues in the workforce to the point that educators have been leaving in droves over the last two years," said Amber Straker, project coordinator at the Association for Early Childhood Educators Ontario.

The child care centres Ontario has right now need more early childhood educators and even more when additional child care centres are created to meet the expected demand, said Straker. Part of Ontario's child care deal is a promise to create 86,000 child care spaces to meet the demand of the industry, 15,000 of the spaces have already been created.

"Ontario already has horrifying waitlists for families and I think that while folks are getting really excited to be able to have access to child care we're going to hit that roadblock where the spaces are created and there are not educators to staff them," said Straker.

"Those waitlists are just going to continue if this issue is not addressed."

In terms of wages, the Ontario government has a minimum wage of \$18 for registered early childhood educators and will raise it by \$1 a year until it reaches \$25.

Straker said they should be paid \$25 now and include a comprehensive benefits package with it to help retain staff and to get staff back to the industry.

The agreement is \$13.2 billion from the federal government to Ontario over six years.

The \$10-a-day child care won't start right away. It is an incremental process, starting April 1 fees will be reduced up to 25 per cent to a minimum of \$12 per day. Rebates retroactive to April 1 will be handed out in May.

By December 2022 fees will reduce again to about 50 per cent on average. Only by September 2025 will fees be an average of \$10 per day.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: \$10aDay ^[4]

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