

Ontario joins Canada-wide early learning and child care system^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Ontario government signed a child care funding agreement with the Government of Canada on March 28, 2022, days before the March 31st deadline.

Ontario will lower parent fees for licensed programs by 25% effective April 1, 2022, and another 50% by the end of the year. Fees will drop to an average \$10 a day by September 2025.

Ontario has agreed to create 86,000 new regulated spaces over the next four years, including 15,000 created since 2019. A further 22,000 spaces are already “in the pipeline.” However, the proposed expansion will not do enough to address the existing gap between demand and supply, and the demand will increase further as parent fees go down.

As is the case across Canada, the main barrier to expansion is the provincial government’s failure to resolve the crisis of staff recruitment and retention in child care.

“It will be impossible for Ontario to deliver on the much-needed expansion of licensed child care without very big improvements in the compensation paid to qualified early childhood educators,” said Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director of Child Care Now.

“We have a workforce crisis in child care. We need Early Childhood Educators joining the system, staying and making a career. Right now they only stay an average of three years,” said Carolyn Ferns, Government Relations and Policy Coordinator of Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, and member of the Child Care Now Board of Directors.

Child Care Now has called on the Ontario government to create a workforce strategy without delay and to consult closely with sector stakeholders, child care advocates, as well as public partners such as municipalities and school boards.

“You can create all the spaces you want but ... without early childhood educators, it’s just four walls. It’s not child care,” Ferns added.

Across Canada, child care advocates are asking the federal, provincial and territorial governments to take bold action to address workforce problems. Child Care Now Nova Scotia recently launched The Time is Now campaign to improve the compensation and working conditions of Nova Scotia’s ECEs. In their 2022 budget submission, Coalition of Child Care Advocates of British Columbia said that ECEs must be a well-supported profession, which includes proper compensation.

“Building a system of early learning and child care in Canada will require the retention of qualified staff and the hiring of hundreds of thousands of other qualified educators across the country,” said Ballantyne. “This is a national challenge we want every government to address, including the federal government, which should be using its considerable spending power to raise compensation and bring forward evidence-based workforce strategies so that each jurisdiction is not reinventing the wheel.”

Region: Ontario^[3]

Tags: Canada-wide agreements^[4]

\$10aDay^[5]

child care system^[6]

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