

What federal budget 2022 said about early learning and child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Federal Budget 2022, tabled on April 7, 2022, says the federal government's previously announced \$30 billion investment in early learning and child care (ELCC) will achieve "a marked improvement in labour market participation by women with children."

However, child care advocates say this objective may not be met because Budget 2022 does too little to support the expansion of regulated child care. As a result, a minority of families will have access to licensed programs, and a minority will benefit from the federal government's remarkable \$10 a day child care policy.

In a budget briefing by feminist groups, organized by the Canadian Women's Foundation and Oxfam Canada, Child Care Now Executive Director, Morna Ballantyne, pointed out that the 276,400 new licensed spaces funded by the federal government and promised in the federal/provincial/territorial child care funding agreements will not materialize without significant government funding for capital construction, and without the hiring of at least 62,600 qualified Early Childhood Educators (ECEs).

Ballantyne said that the federal government must be congratulated for including in Budget 2022 a new Early Learning and Child Care Infrastructure Fund. However, the \$625 million allocation over four years starting in 2023-24 for capital funding falls well short of what is required to get new centres built.

"Our research shows that it costs \$50,000 per space to build a quality facility and that excludes the cost of land or the purchase of property," said Ballantyne. "A \$625 million fund over four years is enough to build just over 3,000 new spaces each year."

In its pre-budget submission, Child Care Now proposed an Early Learning and Child Care Infrastructure Fund of \$10 billion to make possible the building of the new non-profit or public child care facilities required to address the demand for child care.

Ballantyne said Budget 2022 does not address the workforce challenges that come with expanding the availability of child care. The child care sector is experiencing an acute shortage of qualified ECEs because of very low recruitment and retention rates, yet not one of the Canada-wide early learning and child care agreements properly addresses the problem.

"It will be impossible to hire the 62,600 educators required to staff the anticipated growth in spaces without raising the very low compensation in the sector and none of the child care agreements include proper strategies for doing this," said Ballantyne.

"In sum, we are pleased the federal government remains solidly committed to building a Canada-wide system of early learning and child care, and that a child care infrastructure fund will be created. But the government must find ways to address the gaps in Budget 2022. Otherwise, the full economic benefits of the government's \$30 billion investment in child care cannot be realized," Ballantyne said.

Region: Canada ^[3]

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