

# Federal budget for child care good start, but more needed: advocate<sup>[1]</sup>

Feminist advocates say the federal budget doesn't fully account for the challenges in scaling up child-care systems across the country.

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## EXCERPTS

Morna Ballantyne, executive director of advocacy group Child Care Now, said she's pleased the government created a fund for building new child-care spaces.

"It shows that the federal government recognizes that the funding agreements that they've reached with the provinces and territories don't provide sufficient funding for physical infrastructure," Ballantyne said in an interview.

Even so, the government's fund for building new child-care spaces will only pay for 3,125 new spots each year, said Ballantyne in a feminist budget briefing Friday.

The federal Liberal budget for 2022 said it would give \$625 million over four years to help provinces and territories invest in child care, including building new facilities.

Creating new child-care spaces involves high capital costs that aren't accounted for in the funding agreements with the provinces, and the new budget's fund wouldn't be enough to build the number of spaces it has estimated, Ballantyne said.

The budget said its funding would create just over 276,000 child-care spaces across the country.

In 2019, there were enough child-care spaces in Canada for about 27 per cent of kids aged five years old and younger, according to a report from the Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

Another challenge government faces in getting expanded child-care facilities off the ground is recruiting the workers to run them, said Amar Nijhawan, policy specialist at Oxfam Canada.

Between 52,000 to 63,000 early childhood educator jobs will be created as a result of Canada's early learning and child-care agreements between the federal government, provinces and territories, according to the budget.

"How are we expected to build so many new child-care spaces when there's no workforce strategy to address early childhood educators?" asked Nijhawan.

"The real crisis in the care economy that we're seeing around wages, poor working conditions, burnout, labour shortages, recruitment, were not referenced in this budget document at all," she said.

In 2015, median annual income for early childhood educators and assistants in child care was \$34,192, according to the research unit.

Many who are qualified to work as early childhood educators are not working in the sector in order to pursue jobs that are better paid, Ballantyne said.

To make sure that enough workers are attracted and retained in the sector, they need to be offered better compensation, she said.

That means that the operational funding the government gives to the sector has to be enough to pay higher wages, since providers will no longer rely as much on parent fees to cover their costs, said Ballantyne.

Bonnie Brayton, CEO of the Disabled Women's Network of Canada, said disability as it intersects with the child-care sector continues to feel like an afterthought.

The government pledged \$141.1 million to make disability programs, workplaces and child-care centres more accessible, but didn't provide further detail.

"We're going to build ramps, and then what are we going to do? Send children and parents off to the maybe accessible child-care centre and hope that there are properly trained and disabled child-care workers there to teach them and their colleagues about inclusion and

ableism?" Brayton asked.

Brayton said in the context of intersectional budgeting, there has to be a stronger focus on disability.

The office of Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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

**Tags:** federal budget <sup>[4]</sup>

child care expansion <sup>[5]</sup>

system building <sup>[6]</sup>

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