

Ministers responsible for child care urged to make workforce crisis their first priority ^[1]

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Source: Child Care Now

Publication Date: 11 Jul 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online: ^[2]

EXCERPTS:

The critical shortage of qualified early learning and child care educators across Canada is a major obstacle to fulfilling the Government of Canada's promise to build a high quality \$10 a day child care system that all young children can access, says Child Care Now, Canada's national child care advocacy association.

In an open letter to the federal, provincial and territorial ministers who hold primary responsibility for early learning and child care released to coincide with their meeting on July 12, 2022 in Burnaby, BC, Child Care Now recognized the rapid progress governments are making in bringing down parent fees for licensed child care. However, now that programs are more affordable, demand is growing and if governments do not take effective steps to increase supply the goal of making child care affordable and accessible to all won't be realized.

"There is no doubt that recruitment and especially retention of qualified early childhood educators is a huge barrier to expanding licensed child care so that programs are not just affordable but also available in every community," said Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director of Child Care Now. "There is also no doubt that the workforce crisis will worsen if governments fail to significantly raise the very low salaries in the sector and put in place decent staff benefit plans."

Child Care Now says that while every government has acknowledged the problem of recruiting and retaining qualified early childhood educators, the patchwork measures taken so far, including ad hoc wage enhancements for some, are not good enough particularly given high inflation and the highly competitive labour market outside of the sector. Canada's child care advocates say what is needed is a comprehensive workforce strategy supported by sufficient public funding to ensure that the value of the work performed is properly valued and compensated.

"We welcome this week's meeting of Ministers and urge that they agree to work together, and in collaboration with the child care sector and child care advocates, to address the obstacles in the way of expanding the number of licensed child care programs," said Ballantyne. "The fact is the obstacles do not vary significantly from one jurisdiction to another because everywhere there is a shortage of licensed child care, everywhere there is inequitable access, everywhere there is a shortage of qualified early childhood educators."

Child Care Now's open letter urges all governments to act assertively to ensure that new not-for-profit and public child care is put in place and that governments take special measures to significantly improve the availability for, and inclusion of, populations and communities that have little or no access at present.

The letter states: "We argue that building the ELCC system can no longer rely on "requests for proposals" to fill the gaps between demand for, and supply of, licensed child care. A publicly funded system that is responsive and accountable requires much stronger and concerted government involvement in the creation and provision of services. It is imperative to move away from the failed market-based approach of the past. Transformation of early learning and child care will not be possible without much greater public management of supply."

The letter further reiterates Child Care Now's appeal that the transformation of early learning and child care must respect First Nations, Métis and Inuit rights and jurisdiction, including—but not limited to—fulfilling the distinctions-based obligations detailed in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Frameworks.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: labour shortage ^[4]

\$10-a-day child care ^[5]

government ^[6]

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