

New report finds child-care spots available for only 29 per cent of those who need it ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Excerpts

A new report details a lack of child-care spaces is at a crisis level in Canada and why it has worsened.

The report, published in April 2023 by the non-profit Childcare Resources and Research Unit, shows just one spot in a child-care setting was available for 29 per cent of children who need it.

During lockdown orders, the crisis took centre stage for parents who had to take time off work in order to care for their child. However, the issue has persisted for decades, according to Morna Ballantyne, executive director of Child Care Now, an advocacy organization.

"I think one of the things that's driving the shortage of licensed spaces is that child care has been in the news a lot," Ballantyne told CTV's Your Morning on Monday.

Recently, the federal government created a plan in partnership with the provinces and territories to create more than 300,000 new child-care spaces and bring down the fee to \$10 a day in the next five years.

"So a lot of parents, families for whom child care was unaffordable in the past, they now see that maybe they could afford it," Ballantyne said. "So they're out there looking and adding their names to waiting lists."

Ballantyne said the crisis is not new, citing her own experience with child care in Canada 39 years ago when she had to add her unborn child to a waitlist.

"Particularly getting access to licensed child care (is a problem)," she said. "Governments for decades now have essentially relied on individuals, organizations, whether they be for profit or not for profit, to set up child-care centres."

Ballantyne says governments need to take action because the problem is "urgent and universal" and won't be solved by a patchwork of smaller organizations.

Another issue of achieving \$10-a-day child care and adding enough spaces is employee wages, Ballantyne said. Salaries vary across the country, but nationally they hover around \$38,800 a year.

Due to low wages, Ballantyne says, staff are leaving the industry in "droves."

"It is really difficult to retain staff, especially qualified staff, because the wages are so low, and it's not just the wages, but there's very little additional compensation, for example, in the form of benefit plans or pensions," she said.

"If governments move towards creating more spaces...it's going to be very, very difficult to staff them," she said. "Existing centres (and) existing providers are having trouble keeping spaces open because they just can't find staff."

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