

# Ontario parent groups call for more funding for after-school programs amid rising cost of living<sup>[1]</sup>

Parents say funding has flatlined, province says changes to the program are ongoing

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online<sup>[2]</sup>

### Excerpts

Many Ontario parents say a lack of after-school programs is making it even more difficult to raise a family in the province amid the rising cost of living.

Two advocacy groups, Moms at Work and Moms Together, are calling on the government to increase funding for after-school care programs. The groups represent over 17,000 parents, and say funding for the program has flat-lined since its inception in 2009.

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The province, meanwhile, says it's reviewing the program, has increased the investment this school year by \$1.1 million, and currently supports hundreds of sites.

But many families say they're facing long waitlists, and struggling to find accessible and affordable care options in their communities.

"After-school care seems to have sort of fallen under the radar with \$10-a-day childcare and all these other things," said Allison Venditti, founder of Moms at Work.

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Katie German, senior adviser for Moms Together, says the organization is hearing from several parents who say they are receiving notices that their fees are going up because the funding the providers are receiving isn't enough to keep up with costs.

"We heard stories of moms who have been on waitlists for five years," German said. "I hear from moms every day who have to reduce their hours at work and take a pay cut to be able to pick up their kid on time. And it affects their cost of living and their ability to get through to the next paycheck."

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### Waitlists 'not getting better': non-profit

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport provides funding to non-profit organizations to run after-school programs, including BGC Canada. The ministry recently announced a \$1.1 million dollar increase to the program, which will benefit BGC Canada. Owen Charters, the organization's president and CEO says the increased funding is a "great first step" but rising costs and inflation remain a big problem.

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"Our clubs say, 'Don't promote us because we don't have any room for these kids to show up,'" Charters said, adding many of the areas with longer waitlists also have higher levels of poverty.

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"Not just a sort of a piecemeal — fix one problem over here and fix another problem over there and hope that these Band-Aids will take us through the next five or 10 years. We really need to think about

the future of childcare and how it contributes to a strong society and a strong economy," Charters said.

#### Province reviewing after-school program

In a statement, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport said the government has invested \$67.5 million in Ontario's After School Program since 2018, which it says helps 110 organizations deliver programming at approximately 400 sites including in over 80 "priority neighbourhoods."

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Meanwhile, Venditti says the impacts of not having access to after-school care are far reaching and will have long-term effects.

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"If parents can't find care, they can't work."

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