

Ontario non-profit calls for stable funding as Toronto child-care facility suspends infant program ^[1]

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Excerpts

A non-profit organization that operates child-care centres across Ontario is raising concerns about staffing shortages after one of their Toronto facilities was forced to suspend its infant program due to a lack of early childhood educators.

Parents were informed that as of January 2024, the Toronto High Park YMCA Child Care Centre will not be able to continue offering infant care.

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Steeve said the centre will continue offering care to those in the program until they move on to the toddler program; however no new infants from the waitlist will be accepted.

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While the staffing shortage is a localized issue, Steeve acknowledged there exists a wider human resources issue within the sector.

“The YMCA of Greater Toronto would require 700 more [Early Childhood Educators] (ECEs) just to get back to our pre COVID enrollment levels, so 700 more childcare professionals to provide the care that we desperately need for our youngest learners,” he said. “That’s just at the YMCA for greater Toronto. Think about what that means across the province.”

An October report by advocacy group Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care found that early childhood educators in Ontario are among the lowest paid in Canada.

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“The childcare workforce crisis is causing local childcare programs to close rooms and limit enrollment at a time when more parents are hoping to gain access to affordable childcare spaces,” Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care told reporters at the time.

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The problem, some operators have said, is that a simple fee replacement doesn’t account for inflation or any additional costs the facilities may incur.

In a memo obtained by CTV News Toronto, the ministry says they recognize that “licensees may be subject to cost escalation that is beyond their control (e.g. rent increases) and may feel that the revenue replacement funding approach could impact their capacity to participate in the CWELCC system.”

“Like any other sector or any other households, we are experiencing inflationary pressures as well, including labour,” he said. “The biggest indicator of quality in childcare is that you have high quality people delivering the care.”

Education Minister Stephen Lecce told reporters a month ago that he would be providing an update on increased wages for early childhood

educators sometime in the fall.

In a statement issued to CTV News Toronto, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Education said the government "has already" reduced child-care rates in the province by 50 per cent and increased wages for workers by \$1 per hour in 2022.

"We will go further to increase wages to recruit, retain and incentive the best early child care educators to work in Ontario, so that families have access to affordable child care," the spokesperson said in an email.

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