

Report shows 'a perfect storm' is brewing as Ontario falls further behind on wages in child care sector ^[1]

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Source: The Pointer

Format: Article

Publication Date: 15 Mar 2024

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

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Wages have dropped far below a livable level, resulting in a child care workforce crisis the group warns is "blunting the effectiveness of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program — limiting enrolment, impacting quality and making programs unstable."

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It recognizes that "Given the current challenges of retaining and recruiting ECEs and child care workers, and the need to expand the qualified workforce in the coming years, it is clear that the ECE workforce should be a priority policy area for Ontario."

"Ontario has a child care workforce shortage amid an increased demand for child care spaces," the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare states. "Currently many child care programs are limiting enrolment because they cannot adequately staff. This workforce crisis is now a major roadblock to the successful implementation of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan in Ontario. It is slowing planned space expansion and blocking access to child care for many families."

"The root cause of the workforce crisis is low and uncompetitive wages," the report states. "ECEs and child care workers identify compensation and working conditions as the primary issues contributing to their wellbeing, and ultimately, their decision to stay in, or leave, the profession."

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"The expansion of early learning services cannot happen without improvements to working conditions and benefits in a sector that struggles to attract and retain workers. With no staff, all we will be left with are empty buildings," the Canadian Union of Public Employees stated in a November press release.

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To be effective in solving the child care workforce shortage, the Coalition's report calls for a salary scale of at least \$30-\$40 per hour for RECEs; at least \$25 per hour for non-RECE staff; annual increases and steps to reward years of service; and immediate implementation of benefit and pension plans. If these recommendations are not fulfilled, the report warns "retention challenges will continue and worsen."

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"It's a perfect storm. The child care workforce crisis has been worsening since the start of the pandemic and now it is meeting increased demand for child care spaces as fees are lowered," Carolyn Ferns, member of the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare, said in a press release. "The sad part is that this was entirely predictable and preventable if the Ford government had done more to raise ECE and child care worker wages. Everyone the Ministry has consulted with has told them to raise wages, but instead Ontario is falling further and further behind."

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