

How to make Canada's \$10-a-day child care program work ^[1]

The key driver of the child care crisis is persistently low wages for child care workers

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Excerpts

On March 28, 2024, the federal government made headlines with a new \$1 billion investment aimed at expanding child care spaces across Canada. The new investment does a lot, such as offering low-cost loans to non-profit child care providers and student loan forgiveness for early childhood educators (ECEs) in remote areas.

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We are facing a national child care crisis. Despite the implementation of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan in 2021, families across the country are grappling with excruciating waitlists that stretch over years and a drastic shortage in child care spaces.

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According to leading child care advocacy organizations, including the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC), the root cause of this crisis lies in the alarming labour attrition rates within the child care workforce.

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Indeed, the province could be short 8,500 ECEs by 2026. Ontario needs to do better and pay its ECEs and child care workers a decent wage.

While the recent wage increase for ECEs within CWELCC from \$18 to \$23.86 per hour in Ontario is a step forward, advocates maintain that the new wage floor "leaves too many behind." It fails to include non-registered ECEs, early childhood assistants, and other employees that are critical to the operation of a child care program.

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Child care advocates saw this roadblock in CWELCC coming. In October 2023, the AECEO and OCBCC wrote a report on the need for a publicly-funded salary scale that would ensure fair wages for both registered and non-registered early childhood educators.

"A salary scale must be part of sustainable and predictable funding and part of a broader ELCC system-building plan."

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Child care work remains one of the most underpaid and undervalued forms of labour in our society.

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Moreover, poor pay in care work continues to be justified by the notion of 'psychic income.' This concept captures the idea that the emotional or spiritual fulfillment derived from caring professions supersedes the need for adequate financial remuneration. It does not, however, pay the rent or buy food.

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Programs like CWELCC represent a much needed publicly funded approach to one of the most vital forms of care in our society. But, until there is recognition of the economic value of caregiving, programs like CWELCC will not succeed.

Related link: The child care crisis is a workforce crisis ^[3]

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