

Lower daycare fees are a game-changer. But federal plan to expand spaces still faces roadblocks, say experts ^[1]

Wages for child-care workers a key issue: 'It can no longer just be a labour of love,' says advocate

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Excerpts

For Canadian families who've seen their child care fees halved or plummet to \$10 a day in the past few years, Canada's affordable child care plan has undoubtedly been a game-changer.

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To meet the federal goal of 250,000 new daycare spaces by March 2026, Ferns says provinces and territories must tackle the sector's workforce crisis with systemic change: to retain those in the system and recruit a fresh wave to join them. She's advocating for higher wages and a wage grid — a stepped-salary range recognizing qualifications and experience — for daycare workers, plus strong benefit and pension plans to make the sector a more sustainable career choice. Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, for instance, have made moves in this direction.

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Spurring the construction of new child care centres has been another challenge across regions, particularly for non-profit and public daycare providers who can struggle with planning and financing major capital projects alone.

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Lack of detailed information and communication have also shaken up operators. For instance, in Ontario, a new adjustment is coming to the province's funding formula and operators say they have had a short timeline to submit the required application. "Everyone's scrambling [and] there shouldn't be scrambling, especially now that we're going into Phase 2," Wittick said.

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The federal government set central guidelines for provinces — make daycare affordable, expand spaces, improve wages — but gave each wide latitude, says Susan Prentice, a child care policy expert and professor at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. That's why there are 13 different agreements.

"It's completely appropriate that there should be accountability [with] the money transfers from Ottawa to provinces," she said. "The strongest and most stable early learning in child-care systems are one where the service itself gets the funding and the service itself operates with some stability, providing affordability to parents. This is the best stewarding of public dollars."

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