

Raising Alberta: Making \$10-a-day child care work in our province ^[1]

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Executive Summary

Since Alberta signed the \$10-a-day Child Care deal, officially known as the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan (CWELCC), reports on the results have been mixed. While many parents have benefited from reduced fees, some providers have voiced concerns about the program, and the Alberta government has complained that the federal agreement is overly restrictive. This report examines the progress made under the \$10-a-day plan in Alberta, identifies persistent challenges, and outlines actionable recommendations to build a more effective and equitable child-care system.

The implementation of CWELCC has brought several notable successes. Parents accessing the system have experienced a reduction in fees, making child care more affordable for many families. Additionally, Alberta has increased its number of licensed child-care spaces, creating opportunities for more families to access licensed care than ever before. These developments mark important steps toward a more accessible child-care framework in the province.

Despite these gains, Alberta's child-care system faces significant challenges. The funding formula used by the province is deeply flawed. In an attempt to control costs, the provincial government is trying to define a base level of care, hoping to shift additional costs back to parents or providers. At the same time, for-profit providers in Alberta are resisting a system that reduces their control over their businesses and requires accountability for government funding.

The main issues with the \$10-a-day child-care system lie with the Alberta government, which maintains jurisdictional control over child care and retains significant authority over its design and management, even as federal funding — now the majority of childcare financing in the province — comes with conditions on its use.

Many of these issues can be addressed at the provincial level, such as fixing the funding formula and tying funding to quality care. Collaborating with municipal governments and school boards can further optimize space creation, and implementing Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework would contribute to enhancing quality. Additionally, the province is well-positioned to introduce a wage grid for early childhood educators, as well as a pension and extended medical plans, as seen in other provinces. Increased provincial resources could also help connect families to available spaces and reduce wait times.

Before the \$10-a-day program, Alberta faced high parent fees, limited licensed spaces, and low pay for early childhood educators, leading to high turnover and burnout in the sector. Significant progress has been made, but building a robust system takes time. The \$10-a-day child care can work in Alberta. However, while its success will require a committed effort from all levels of government, the province has considerable room to enhance its role and address the challenges ahead.

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