

# Ontario to get 'thousands' more child-care spaces in next few years [CA-ON] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Ontario will get "tens of thousands" more child-care spaces over the next several years as \$352 million in new federal funding flows to the province, the provincial government said Wednesday.

"Over time there will be thousands of spaces, tens of thousands of spaces over the next few years as a result of this money," Children's Services Minister Marie Bountrogianni said at a Toronto school and child-care centre.

This year, the first instalment of \$9.7 million will go to Ontario's cash-starved non-profit, regulated child-care centres, which will use the money to fix existing buildings and buy equipment, Bountrogianni said.

The money is part of a federal-provincial deal reached last March in which Ottawa pledged to spend \$900 million over five years on early-learning and child-care programs.

For fiscal year 2004-05, the amount will jump to \$29 million and rise to \$137 million by 2007-08.

Currently, there are only enough regulated child-care spaces for 10 per cent of the province's kids under the age of 12 whose parents are in the workforce, said Kira Heineck, acting executive director of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

Although the federal government has put forward millions of dollars for child care over the past several years, the province didn't allocate the money to improve access to child care, Bountrogianni said.

Bountrogianni said fixing and renovating child-care centres will assist the province as it moves to expand the system in coming years.

Although satisfied the new Liberal government is putting this money towards child care in the province after years of cuts, it isn't enough, Heineck said.

Under the federal government's Early Childhood Development Initiative, another plan put into place several years ago, there should be about \$190 million coming to the province this year and most of it should go to fund child care, Heineck said.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario also said any new money has to be spent on creating more regulated child-care spaces.

In Toronto, the child-care crisis has grown as funding has been cut, resulting in a loss of spaces.

City Coun. Olivia Chow said the announcement means more than \$1 million will be going to the city for child care, but it won't deal with the nearly \$22-million operating shortfall the city's non-profit child-care centres face after years of cuts.

- reprinted from The Canadian Press

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