

Piecemeal solutions get piecemeal results: Addressing wages in regulated child care in Ontario ^[1]

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Full article in PDF ^[2]

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Introduction

Over the past 30 years there have been a number of initiatives in Ontario aimed at increasing wages for the early childhood education and child care (ECEC) workforce working in regulated child care centres and regulated home child care. In this article we will look back at what has been done to improve wages for the ECEC workforce in Ontario and examine how effective these initiatives have been for achieving professional wages. Recent changes to the provincial child care funding formula and the \$1 per hour wage increase for some staff working in the regulated child care sector will also be analyzed. A concluding discussion about where we are now and how we might begin to move forward will identify some critical points for addressing the chronic issue of the regulated child care workforce's low wages.

The root of the problem

Decades of Canadian and international research have confirmed that ECEC delivered through a market-based system (as is regulated child care in Ontario), one that depends mostly on user fees to cover the cost of services, cannot provide adequate wages and working conditions for the ECEC workforce. Much of this research has concluded that the ECEC workforce actually subsidizes the true cost of these services through their low wages. As the largest item in the budget, compensation and benefits for the staff in a market-based approach to services is the most obvious item to be limited to keep user fees affordable. What this means is that the struggle to increase wages is compromised by the fact that these demands will inherently result in an increase in fees for families. In other words, it is difficult for ECEs to advocate for increased wages when they know it will make the programs in which they work harder to access for the children and families they serve.

This reality has been acknowledged up to a point by the various government interventions (discussed in more detail below) that provide funding to ECEC programs to supplement the cost of staff wages. While this funding has contributed in some measure to some improvement in compensation for the ECEC workforce, it has failed to get to the root of the problem. Staff wages cannot be tied to parents' ability to pay fees or precarious funding streams in the form of grants and subsidies. Indeed, all the evidence points to the need for a systemic approach to supply side (base or direct) funding for child care programs with a formula that takes into account and provides funds both for adequate wages and affordable parent fees.

Related link: A publicly funded child care system is key to closing the gender wage gap ^[4]

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Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/15/04/piecemeal-solutions-get-piecemeal-results-addressing-wages>

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