



# Roadmap

to Universal Child Care in Ontario

## Policy Brief 1

Recommendations for a publicly-funded ELCC salary scale

October 2023

COALITION ONTARIENNE POUR  
de meilleurs services  
éducatifs à l'enfance



Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario

Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario. Policy Brief 1: Recommendations for a publicly-funded salary scale

October 2023

Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario: [www.aeceo.ca](http://www.aeceo.ca)

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care: [www.childcareontario.org](http://www.childcareontario.org)

Written by:

Alana Powell, Executive Director, Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario

Carolyn Ferns, Public Policy Coordinator, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

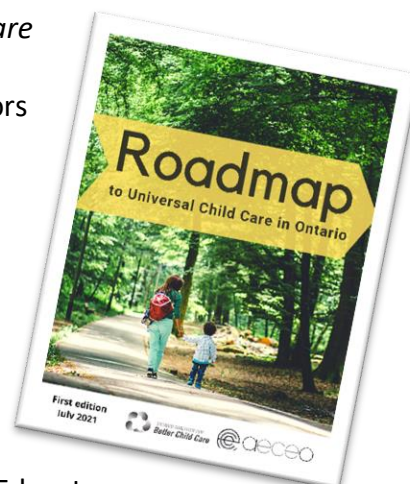
Roadmap Policy Brief and Program Profile series editors: Carolyn Ferns & Alana Powell

This report is fully downloadable. Sections may be freely reproduced for educational, scholarly and not-for-profit purposes if they are limited in length and fully cited. Permission to reproduce longer sections or for commercial publications should be sought in writing from the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

## INTRODUCTION

In July 2021, the first edition of the *Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario* was released by the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare (OCBCC) and the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO). The *Roadmap* set out our vision and shared our path forward, but did not delve deeply into each area of transformation needed. We are now releasing a series of policy briefs that discuss specific issues in more detail, and program profiles highlighting innovative practices and programs in Ontario.



This Policy Brief summarizes our “Position Paper on a Publicly Funded Early Learning and Child Care Salary Scale”, which was developed following extensive consultation with Early Childhood Educators, child care workers and sector experts. We tackle one of the most pressing issues holding back the successful building of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System (CWELCC) in Ontario: the child care workforce crisis. We recommend a publicly funded salary scale of at least \$30-\$40 per hour for RECEs and at least \$25 per hour for non-RECE staff as part of a comprehensive workforce strategy and compensation framework.

## CURRENT CONTEXT

### A WORKFORCE SHORTAGE AMID HIGH DEMAND FOR CHILD CARE

A child care workforce crisis is blunting the effectiveness of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program – limiting enrolment, impacting quality and making programs unstable. Currently many child care programs are limiting enrolment because they cannot adequately staff. The Ministry of Education’s own estimates predict Ontario will require 8,500 additional ECEs and child care workers in order to meet the target for CWELCC space expansion by 2026.

Problems with retaining staff in licensed child care are at the centre of this crisis. Recent data from the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) demonstrate that twice as many RECEs working in licensed child care resign their membership after three years compared to those working in the public education system or other settings.<sup>i</sup> ECEs and child care workers identify compensation and working conditions as the primary issues contributing to their wellbeing, and ultimately, their decision to stay in, or leave, the profession.<sup>ii</sup> The Ontario government must urgently increase wages and improve working conditions. A salary scale must be part of sustainable and predictable funding and part of a broader ELCC system-building plan.

There is currently great variation in the compensation levels of Registered Early Childhood Educators in licensed child care. According to Ontario's *Early Years and Child Care Annual Report 2022*, among full-time RECEs employed by licensed child care centres:

- 32% earned between \$15 and \$20 per hour;
- 46% earned between \$20 and \$25 per hour;
- 16% earned between \$25 and \$30 per hour
- Only 6% earned above \$30 per hour.<sup>iii</sup>

In Ontario, Registered Early Childhood Educators work within a defined and legislated scope of practice, follow a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, engage in continuous professional learning, and are guided by principles outlined in the provincial pedagogical framework "How Does Learning Happen?". Regardless of their employer, RECEs should experience equal pay for their work.

Similarly, non-RECEs deserve decent compensation and conditions across workplaces. In 2022, among non-RECE staff:

- 76% earned between \$15 and \$20 per hour;
- 21% earned between \$20 and \$25 per hour;
- Only 9% earned between \$25 and \$28.59 per hour.

In recent years, the Ontario Ministry of Education has introduced limited wage supports for the ELCC workforce. In 2017, the Provincial Wage Enhancement Grant (PWEG) was introduced: initially \$1 per hour, then increased to \$2 per hour. The PWEG is available to both RECE and non-RECE staff, but only for time spent in ratio. Furthermore, the PWEG is only available to staff making under a threshold, an hourly wage based on average wages for ECEs working in full-day kindergarten programs in Ontario. Even six years into implementation of this policy initiative, we have not seen an improvement to retention and recruitment into the profession.

Under CWELCC, the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced a new compensation initiative for the ELCC Workforce: a wage floor and annual increase. Starting in 2022, the wage floor establishes a minimum wage (which includes pre-existing PWEG) for the RECEs working in licensed ELCC programs that are part of CWELCC. In Year 1, 2022, the wage floor was set at \$18 per hour. The wage floor increases annually, until reaching maturity in 2026 at \$22 per hour for RECEs. Non-RECE staff are excluded from the wage floor and annual increase.

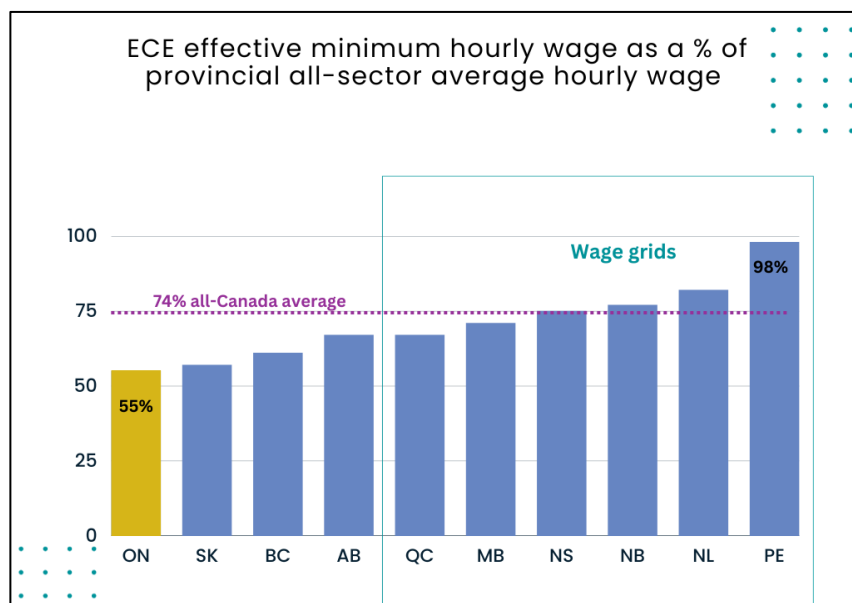
While well-intentioned, these approaches have proved to be insufficient. They do not appropriately or competitively compensate educators for the value of their work, nor do they properly ameliorate the decades of wage stagnation that child care staff have experienced in a parent-fee reliant system.

Ontario’s wage floor makes the effective minimum wage for Ontario’s RECEs the third lowest in the country. Even with Ontario’s planned \$1 annual increases, in 2024 Ontario will still be one of the lowest in the country.

ECE wages in Ontario are even worse and less competitive when we consider them in the context of the “all-sector average”, wages across a jurisdiction’s entire economy. The effective ECE minimum wage in Ontario is only 55% of the province’s average wage for all sectors, placing Ontario in last place across the country. Across Canada ECEs make 74% of the average wage for all sectors. In a helpful analysis by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Association of Early Childhood Educators BC in July 2023, we can see that five provinces that have implemented wage grids have improved ECE wages the most in comparison to the all-sector average.<sup>1</sup>

## ECE Effective minimum wage (\$)

Province/territory	\$ per hour	Highest step
Yukon	\$32.08	n/a
Prince Edward Island	\$27.11	\$29.06
Newfoundland and Labrador	\$25.00	\$26.53
Alberta	\$23.62	n/a
New Brunswick	\$22.00	\$24.47
Quebec	\$21.60	\$30.03
Nova Scotia	\$21.43	\$24.13
British Columbia	\$20.75	n/a
Manitoba	\$20.73	\$22.29
Nunavut	\$20.50	\$25.36
Ontario	\$19.00	n/a
Saskatchewan	\$18.00	n/a
Northwest Territories	\$15.20	n/a



<sup>1</sup> Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC & Early Childhood Educators of BC. (2023). Early Childhood Educator Wage in British Columbia. Recommendations for a Wage Grid of at least \$30-\$40 per hour. A Cross-Canada Scan of ECE Wages and Wage Grids. Retrieved from: [https://www.ecebc.ca/application/files/5516/8919/8966/10aDay\\_ECE\\_wages\\_and\\_grid\\_July\\_12\\_web.pdf](https://www.ecebc.ca/application/files/5516/8919/8966/10aDay_ECE_wages_and_grid_July_12_web.pdf)

## EXISTING WAGE GRIDS IN ONTARIO CHILD CARE

In public sector child care programs, ECEs and child care workers are largely unionized and have benefited from the processes of gender-neutral job evaluation, pay equity and collective bargaining. As a result, wages tend to be more decent in college lab schools and in directly-operated municipal programs.

For example, in 2022 the wages for child care workers and ECEs in community colleges organized by OPSEU started at \$26.21 for an Early Childhood Assistant, \$33.05 for an Early Childhood Educator and \$35.83 for Program Leads. Wages in municipally-operated child care vary across the province but are also generally higher than non-profit or for-profit child care. In Kenora ECEs start between \$28.02-\$31.53. In the City of Toronto's ELCC programs an ECE Level 2 (diploma) makes between \$32.69-\$35.42. In Peterborough, ECEs in directly-operated child care make between \$32.89-\$34.81.

## A SALARY SCALE FOR EARLY YEARS AND CHILD CARE IN ONTARIO

Ontario should implement a province-wide salary scale for RECEs and workers in early years and child care programs. To be competitive and effective, wages in the scale need to be at least \$25 per hour for non-RECE staff and at least \$30-\$40 per hour for RECEs, with annual increases and steps to reward years of service.

The scale should be based on five guiding principles:

- 1. Funding the workforce *is* funding quality.** Ensuring quality ELCC programs means creating the conditions that enable educators to form stable, consistent and caring relationships with children. Reducing educator turnover and improving educator wellbeing are therefore key. A salary scale that appropriately values the work and qualifications of educators is the foundation of a quality ELCC system.
- 2. Decent compensation for all,** regardless of role, employer, location or program type. A salary scale must recognize the contributions all staff make to the well-being of children, families, each other and the program.
- 3. Recognition of qualifications, experience and responsibilities. Development of job roles.** A salary scale must envision and support the growth and future of the ECE profession and the ELCC sector.
- 4. Respect for existing decent wages and collective agreements** to ensure that we retain highly experienced staff and leaders in the sector.
- 5. Democratic process that meaningfully includes educators.** The development of a salary scale and work to transform the sector and its workforce must continually engage ECEs and child care workers.

## FUNDING COMPENSATION INCREASES

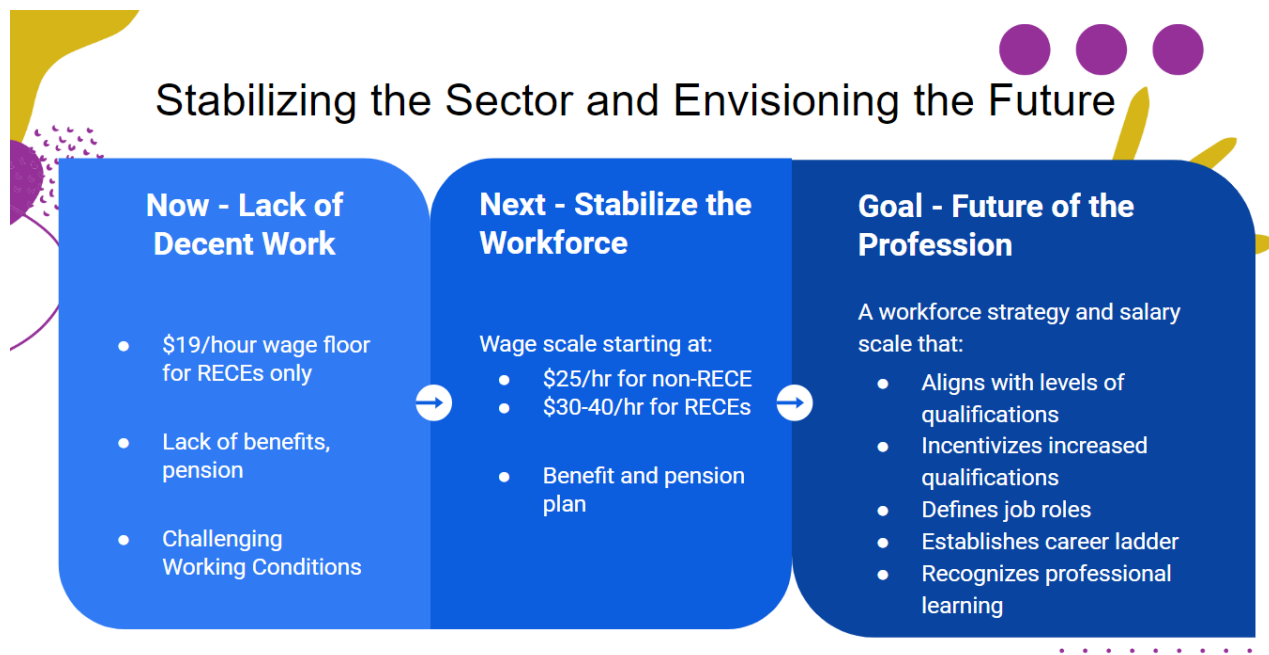
Recent modelling by Dr. Gordon Cleveland suggests that to increase RECE wages in Ontario by 25% would cost approximately \$392 Million.<sup>iv</sup> Additional funding would be needed to increase the wages of non-RECE staff and for additional ECEs to meet expansion targets.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative’s Alternative Federal Budget (AFB) recommends federal funding of an additional \$7 billion over three years starting in 2024-2025 ear-marked for increases in compensation and improved working conditions.<sup>v</sup> The AFB recommends that “all levels of government must work together to develop, fund, and implement comprehensive strategies to address this recruitment and retention crisis.”

In July 2023, the Federal Provincial Territorial Ministers responsible for early learning and child care met in Iqaluit, set the early learning and child care workforce as a shared priority, and agreed that “the early learning and child care workforce needs improved working conditions and compensation that reflects their professional education, experience and responsibilities.... All ministers agreed to develop a Canada-wide, multilateral workforce strategy for the early learning and child care workforce.”

It is critical that this collaboration continue and deepen. Given the importance of solving the workforce crisis to the success of the CWELCC plan, both the provincial and federal governments should work together and share responsibility to fund compensation increases.

## RECOMMENDED STARTING PLACE FOR AN ONTARIO ELCC SALARY SCALE



In the short-term, the Ontario government must immediately implement a salary scale that equitably raises wages to at least \$25 per hour for non-RECE staff, and at least \$30-40 per hour for RECEs. It must respect existing decent wages and current collective agreements. Work must be undertaken to develop benefit and pension plans for the sector. This salary scale is an interim measure. It is crucial that it is done quickly in order to address the acute staffing retention crisis, however, this salary scale is not sufficient for the long-term.

The Ontario government must also immediately convene an Early Years and Child Care Worker Advisory Commission and engage in thorough and transparent sector consultation to begin to develop a long-term solution to the workforce crisis and a salary scale that addresses questions of how qualifications, different responsibilities and job roles, knowledge, experience, and other equity measures will be aligned with compensation mechanisms. The Commission should address questions such as, “How will the salary scale incentivize higher levels of qualifications?”, “What job roles must be articulated to increase leadership opportunities and recognize the unique knowledges and experiences RECEs bring to their work?”

We recommend that the Ontario government begin this work to transform the early years and child care workforce, including developing and evaluating a robust salary scale model, in consultation with the sector as outlined above, by the end of the current Canada-Ontario ELCC bilateral agreement in 2025-2026. Targets for review, revision and further consultation, including a transparent data collection and reporting plan to assess its efficacy in reaching its goals as it is implemented must be built into the next bilateral agreement.

---

<sup>i</sup> College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE). Membership Data Report, Licensed Child Care Infographic 2021. Retrieved from Private Communication.

<sup>ii</sup> See, for example: AECEO. (2016). “I’m more than ‘just’ an ECE”: Decent Work from the perspective of Ontario’s early childhood workforce. Retrieved from [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/930/attachments/original/1477442125/MoreThanJustanECE\\_Sept16.pdf?1477442125](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/930/attachments/original/1477442125/MoreThanJustanECE_Sept16.pdf?1477442125); Powell, Ferns & Burrell. (2021). Forgotten on the frontline. A survey report on Ontario’s early years and child care workforce. Retrieved from [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/2614/attachments/original/1621392971/Forgotten\\_on\\_the\\_frontend.pdf?1621392971](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/2614/attachments/original/1621392971/Forgotten_on_the_frontend.pdf?1621392971)

<sup>iii</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education (2023). Ontario’s Early Years and Child Care Annual Report 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-early-years-and-child-care-annual-report-2022>

<sup>iv</sup> Cleveland, G. (2023, August 17). How much will it cost to raise the wages of early childhood educators.? Retrieved from: <https://childcarepolicy.net/how-much-will-it-cost-to-raise-the-wages-of-early-childhood-educators/>

<sup>v</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2023). Alternative Federal Budget 2024. Retrieved from <https://monitormag.ca/articles/afb-2024-child-care/>