

# POSITION PAPER

## ON A PUBLICLY-FUNDED EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE SALARY SCALE



## Position Paper on a Publicly-Funded Early Learning and Child Care Salary Scale

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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)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

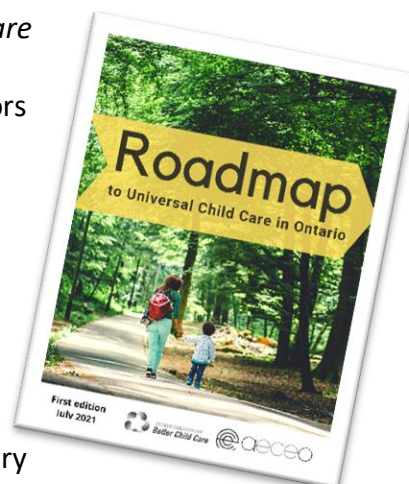
- Ontario has a child care workforce shortage amid an increased demand for child care spaces. Currently many child care programs are limiting enrolment because they cannot adequately staff.
- This workforce crisis is now a major roadblock to the successful implementation of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan in Ontario. It is slowing planned space expansion and blocking access to child care for many families.
- The root cause of the workforce crisis is low and uncompetitive wages. In 2022, among RECEs in licensed child care in Ontario:
  - 32% earned less than \$20 per hour;
  - 46% earned between \$20 and \$25 per hour;
  - 16% earned between \$25 and \$30 per hour.<sup>1</sup>
- Among non-RECE staff in 2022:
  - 76% earned less than \$20 per hour;
  - 21% earned between \$20 and \$25 per hour.
- While Ontario's CWELCC action plan raised the wage floor to \$19 per hour in 2023, this still makes the effective minimum wage for RECEs in licensed child care more than \$4 less than Alberta, \$8 less than Prince Edward Island, and \$13 less than Yukon. There is no wage floor for non-RECE staff beyond the provincial minimum wage.
- Ontario should immediately implement a province-wide publicly funded salary scale for RECEs and non-RECE staff in early years and child care programs.
  - At least \$30-\$40 per hour for RECEs.
  - At least \$25 per hour for non-RECE staff.
  - There should be annual increases and steps to reward years of service.
  - There should be immediate implementation of benefit and pension plans.
- A salary scale should be based on five guiding principles:
  1. Funding the workforce *is* funding quality.
  2. Decent compensation for all.
  3. Recognition of qualifications, experience and responsibilities. Development of job roles.
  4. Respect for existing decent wages and collective agreements.
  5. Commitment to a democratic process that meaningfully includes educators.
- Ontario should convene an Early Years and Child Care Worker Advisory Commission to address long-term transformation of the sector including questions of how qualifications, different responsibilities and job roles, knowledge, experience, and other equity measures will be aligned with compensation mechanisms.
- The Ontario and Federal governments should share responsibility and work together to fund compensation.

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<sup>1</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>

## 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. Following extensive consultation with Early Childhood Educators, child care workers and sector experts, we have developed this Position Paper to 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 describe the root causes of the current crisis and 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

The introduction of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care system (CWELCC) through bilateral agreements and increased federal investment promised long-overdue progress towards building an early learning and child care (ELCC) system that meets the needs of children, families and educators in Ontario. The road to system-building is complex but, through policy and funding decisions, the paths we take either bring us closer to an accessible, affordable, high-quality system for all who need it, or they will further entrench the inequitable, unaffordable, market-based approach to ELCC that preceded CWELCC. While there has been initial success on affordability through federal transfers into the Ontario child care system to reduce parent fees, there continue to be many challenges ahead.

In Ontario, a lack of decent work for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) and child care workers has led to a child care workforce shortage. This situation has worsened to the point that it now presents a major roadblock to CWELCC's successful implementation. Currently many child care programs are limiting enrolment because they cannot adequately staff. Ontario's largest child care operator, the YMCA of the GTA, has reported that, despite long waitlists, they only have 16,000 children enrolled in their 35,000 spaces because of staff shortages.<sup>2</sup> And YMCA Ontario, who represent one-fifth of all licensed child care spaces in the province, reported in January 2023 that across their programs they would need 3,000 additional staff to be able to

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<sup>2</sup> Crawley, M. (2023, March 13). Why a shortage of workers threatens \$10/day child care. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/child-care-worker-shortage-early-childhood-educators-1.6774940>

operate at licensed capacity.<sup>3</sup> In September 2023, Niagara Region reported that across the region child care programs are only at 64% of licensed capacity because of staffing challenges.<sup>4</sup> Similar shortages have been reported by operators large and small all across the province.

Recent data from the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) demonstrate that while RECE graduates from post-secondary programs have increased since 2014, enrolment in the profession has declined by 7.2% a year.<sup>5</sup> Further indicating the impact of compensation and working conditions on educator retention, the CECE reports 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>6</sup> Reports by the Atkinson Centre reinforce these findings, demonstrating only 44% of Ontario's RECEs are working in licensed child care. The CECE also reports only modest growth in membership with the professional college in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, with 5,204 new registrants and 3,580 resignations<sup>7</sup>.

As Ontario looks to expand child care spaces to meet the increased demand for affordable child care, the provincial government must address the workforce crisis. 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<sup>8</sup>. Given the current challenges of retaining and recruiting ECEs and child care workers, and the need to expand the qualified workforce in the coming years, it is clear that the ECE workforce should be a priority policy area for Ontario.

Further, it is a matter of gender, racial and economic justice that issues of compensation in the early childhood sector be addressed. Ontario's early childhood profession is predominantly women; the College of ECE reports membership is 98% women in 2020-221.<sup>9</sup> And while richer demographic data in Ontario is not available, national data demonstrate that 28.4% of the early childhood workforce identifies as racialized and close to one third are immigrants and non-

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<sup>3</sup> YMCA Ontario (2023). Workforce solutions in child care. A YMCA White Paper. Retrieved from [https://www.ymcaneo.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/YMCA-Ontario-White-Paper\\_Child-Care-Workforce-Solutions-1.pdf](https://www.ymcaneo.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/YMCA-Ontario-White-Paper_Child-Care-Workforce-Solutions-1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Somer, S. (2023, September 20). "More daycare centres needed, but not as urgently as staff, says expert." Hamilton Spectator. Retrieved from [https://www.thespec.com/news/canada/more-daycare-centres-needed-but-not-as-urgently-as-staff-says-expert/article\\_422c018e-79ac-5487-89a0-b4e66d6a1b70.html](https://www.thespec.com/news/canada/more-daycare-centres-needed-but-not-as-urgently-as-staff-says-expert/article_422c018e-79ac-5487-89a0-b4e66d6a1b70.html)

<sup>5</sup> College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE). Membership Data Report, Licensed Child Care Infographic 2021. Retrieved from Private Communication.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> CECE. (2023). OMSSA Speaker Series Presentation Slide Deck. Retrieved from [https://www.omssa.com/docs/CECE\\_OMSSA\\_Presentation\\_July\\_2023\\_data\\_slides.pdf](https://www.omssa.com/docs/CECE_OMSSA_Presentation_July_2023_data_slides.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/early-childhood-educator-wages-1.6869410>

<sup>9</sup> CECE. (2021). Membership Data Report - 2021-2022 Fiscal Year. Retrieved from [https://www.college-ece.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2020-2021\\_Membership\\_Data\\_Report.pdf](https://www.college-ece.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2020-2021_Membership_Data_Report.pdf)



permanent residents<sup>10</sup>. According to Statistics Canada data, the early childhood workforce is more racialized when compared to the non-ELCC workforce and 31% of ELCC workers are non-official language speakers, compared to 23% of non-ELCC workers.<sup>11</sup> While this representation and diversity is an asset to the ELCC system, we also know that Black, First Nation, Métis, Inuit, racialized, non-official language speakers, and new immigrants face incredible barriers. They are confronted with racism, they experience more precarious work, lower compensation, and are often silenced in programs. Compensation is a key element of oppression in the ELCC system. Establishing a fair and transparent salary scale is an important step toward racial, gender, and economic justice, and supporting equity-deserving educators is a necessary foundation of building a quality early learning and child care system.

Understanding the root causes of the current workforce shortages is critical to developing appropriate and effective policy responses. For years, RECEs, child care workers and child care advocates have been calling for improved wages and working conditions.<sup>12</sup> RECEs and child care workers identify compensation (wages, benefits, etc.) and working conditions as the primary issues contributing to their wellbeing, and ultimately, their decision to stay in, or leave, the profession.<sup>13</sup> We recognize that these issues do not exist in isolation of other challenges the ELCC workforce faces, such as access to paid professional learning, programming time, and pedagogical security. However, research shows that compensation and working conditions have consistently been identified by RECEs as the driving factor for their employment decisions, including decisions to leave the profession.<sup>14</sup> As such, it has consistently been our position that the Ontario government must urgently increase wages, address compensation related elements, and improve working conditions. These improvements must be made with comprehensive, sustainable and predictable funding and as a part of broader system-building elements; they cannot be addressed alone. For the purposes of this policy brief, we are focusing in on one

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<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada. (2021). Insights on Canadian Society: Child care workers in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2021001/article/00005-eng.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Choi, Y. (2022). "Gender differences in sociodemographic and economic characteristics of early learning child care workers." *Economic and Social Reports*, 2(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202200100001-eng>

<sup>12</sup> See, for example: AECEO Decent Work Task Force (2017). Transforming work in Ontario's early years and child care sector. Workforce Recommendations to the Ministry of Education. Retrieved from [https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/2268/attachments/original/1512010536/AECEO\\_Recommendations\\_FinalReport\\_2017.pdf?1512010536](https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/2268/attachments/original/1512010536/AECEO_Recommendations_FinalReport_2017.pdf?1512010536)

<sup>13</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://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/930/attachments/original/1477442125/MoreThanJustanECE\\_Sept16.pdf?1477442125](https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.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://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/2614/attachments/original/1621392971/Forgotten\\_on\\_the\\_frontline.pdf?1621392971](https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/2614/attachments/original/1621392971/Forgotten_on_the_frontline.pdf?1621392971)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

compensation element, the salary scale, in order to explore in more detail how an Ontario ELCC salary scale can begin to resolve staff retention and recruitment in Ontario.

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## LIMITATIONS OF ONTARIO'S CURRENT ELCC WORKFORCE POLICY INITIATIVES

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. A similar Home Child Care Enhancement Grant (HCCEG) was introduced for licensed home child care providers. The PWEG is available to all program staff, but only for time spent *in ratio*, and *only if* their employer applied for the funding. Furthermore, the PWEG is only available to staff making under a threshold, an hourly wage based on average wages for RECEs working in full-day kindergarten programs in Ontario. Even years into implementation of this policy initiative, we have not seen an improvement to retention and recruitment into the profession. In fact, the workforce crisis has continued to worsen, in particular during and after the COVID-19 pandemic where RECEs and child care workers were refused compensation-related increases like pandemic pay.

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 Ministry of Education estimated that this would benefit 25% of Ontario's RECEs working in licensed child care. The wage floor will increase 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. Further, these wage top-up approaches fail to produce the predictable or stable funding environment that will improve the retention and recruitment crisis in Ontario ELCC programs.

To use an image familiar to an ECE setting, let's imagine the child care sector is a bucket. Every year new RECEs enter the profession, like a child pouring water into the bucket. But within a few short years they are pouring out of holes in the bottom of the bucket. For decades RECEs and child care workers have made it clear, the biggest holes in the bucket are poor compensation and challenging working conditions. In order to meet the needs of the sector now, and in the future, we must plug the holes in the bucket, retain our valuable workforce, reattract qualified staff, and ensure recruitment efforts are not in vain. It is time for real action towards a comprehensive

compensation framework that appropriately recognizes and values the qualifications and the care and pedagogical work of Ontario’s RECEs and child care workers.

This moment calls for collaboration, consensus-building and collective action. Educators and the child care community must present a transformational and well-articulated vision of the future of ELCC and the conditions required for RECEs to be well-supported to engage in complex pedagogical and caring work with children, families and communities. The Government of Ontario must engage, listen to, and respect the value of the RECEs and the ELCC workforce and work collaboratively to develop, fund and implement an appropriate salary scale. The federal government must show leadership in the development and shared funding of a pan-Canadian multilateral workforce strategy.

**CROSS-CANADA COMPARISONS**

Ontario’s wage floor for RECEs in CWELCC child care programs is \$19 per hour in 2023, and it will increase by \$1 a year until the end of the agreement. While this was the first time a wage floor was introduced to child care, it is far too low – it makes the effective minimum wage for Ontario’s RECEs the third lowest in the country. As of July 2023, Ontario’s \$19 per hour wage floor is more than \$4 less than Alberta, \$8 less than Prince Edward Island, and \$13 less than Yukon. Even with Ontario’s planned \$1 annual increases, in 2024 Ontario will still be one of the lowest in the country. And by 2026 Ontario’s wage floor will still be only \$22 per hour, by which time other provinces and territories have planned wage increases that will continue to make Ontario uncompetitive.

RECE wages in Ontario are even worse and less competitive when we consider them in the context of the “all-sector average”, the average wage across a jurisdiction’s entire economy. In this comparison, the effective RECE minimum wage in Ontario is only 55% of the province’s all-sector average, placing Ontario in last place across the country. Across Canada ECEs make 74% of the average wage for all sectors.

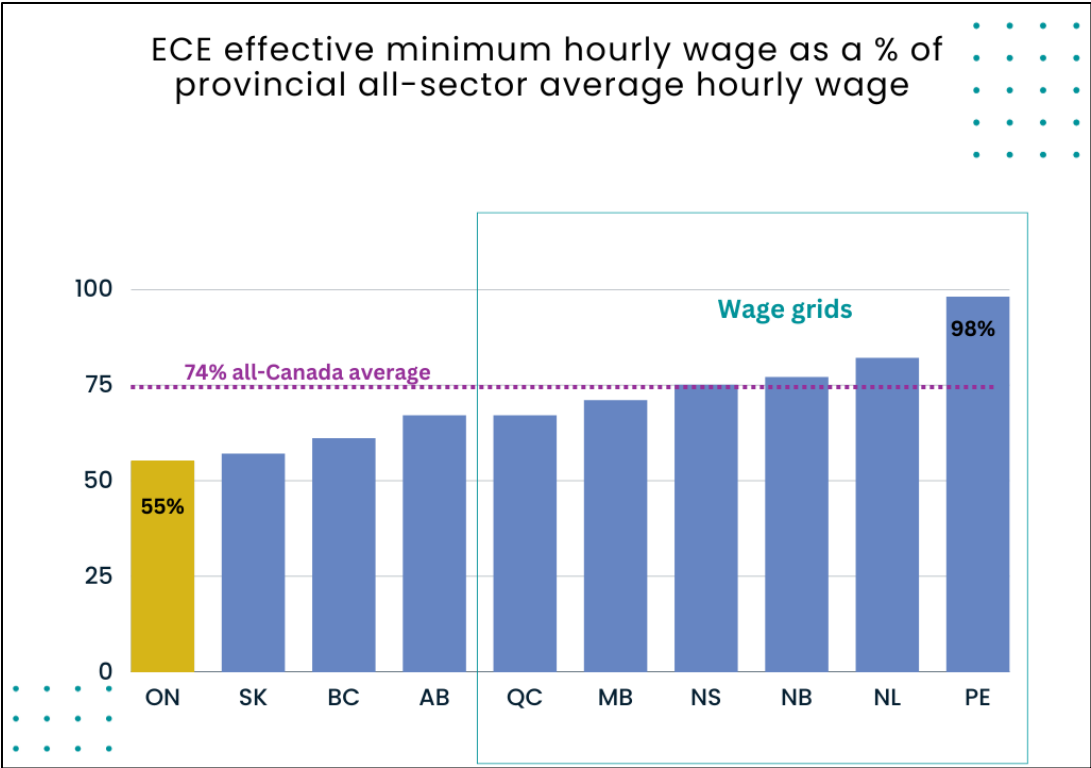
**ECE Effective minimum wage (\$)**

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

Source: Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, 2023



From a helpful analysis by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and Early Childhood Educators on BC in July 2023, we can see that six provinces that have implemented wage grids have improved ECE wages the most in comparison to the average wage for all sectors.<sup>15</sup>



**EXISTING WAGE GRIDS IN ONTARIO CHILD CARE**

While low wages are the norm across the early years and child care sector, there are important examples of more equitable wages. In public sector child care programs – those operated by Ontario’s colleges and municipalities – RECEs 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 RECEs and child care workers 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 RECEs start between \$28.02-\$31.53. In the City of Toronto’s ELCC programs an ECE Level

<sup>15</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)

2 (diploma) makes between \$32.69-\$35.42. In Peterborough, RECEs in directly-operated child care make between \$32.89-\$34.81.

In addition to public sector child care, some non-profit operators have worked over years to raise wages in child care – funded by higher parent fees where the market would bear it and/or significant fundraising. Through a variety of methods some non-profit operators have led the way as decent work employers, but for the sector at large continuing to rely on this type of approach is inconsistent and inequitable. A thorough, publicly funded, province-wide strategy is needed.

## 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.
2. Decent compensation for all.
3. Recognition of job roles, qualifications and experience.
4. Respect for existing decent wages and collective agreements.
5. Democratic process that meaningfully includes educators.

### PRINCIPLES

#### PRINCIPLE 1. FUNDING THE WORKFORCE IS FUNDING QUALITY

The first principle of a salary scale is an explicit recognition that funding the workforce is funding quality. From this premise, a salary scale that appropriately values the work and qualifications of educators is the foundation of a quality ELCC system.

For decades, research has connected quality in early learning and child care directly to the educators in the room. Quality is increasingly understood to be relational and interactive. It is not created by materials in the ELCC setting so much as by the trust, attention, and care created in relationships between educators and children. Significant research also establishes a direct connection between strong, trusting adult-child relationships and interactions and better

experiences and outcomes for children.<sup>16</sup> Once quality is understood in this way, it is clear that 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.

There are multiple factors that influence the degree to which educators are able to establish responsive and caring relationships, such as compensation, working hours, number of qualified staff in the program, access to paid planning time, paid sick days, etc. These factors are moveable; with sufficient funding and good policy we can improve the conditions educators experience, thereby building a system that has quality as its foundation and, ultimately, ensuring children have access to the care and pedagogy they deserve.

We recognize that compensation elements, while vitally important, are only one element of improving educator well-being and improving staff retention. Future papers will explore Decent Work Standards as a way of operationalizing good working conditions in the ELCC sector, embedding them in regulation, providing a mechanism for public accountability and transparency, and connecting working conditions directly to funding.

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## WHAT IS AT STAKE?

If we do not ground a salary scale in the principle that funding the workforce is funding quality, then we will entrench a system that will continue to compromise quality. Decent compensation and qualified staff will continue to be seen as optional and low-priority in comparison to meeting objectives of expansion or cost containment, whether that be meeting only minimum staffing requirements or lowering compensation to keep costs low and/or make profits. This will result in ongoing challenges with retention, high turnover, reliance on supply or unqualified staff in roles that require qualifications, and burnt-out and overworked RECEs. We will build a system that does not ensure RECEs have what they need to provide quality care and education to young children.

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## PRINCIPLE 2. DECENT COMPENSATION FOR ALL

The second principle of a salary scale should be to ensure 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.

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<sup>16</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada. (2019) Defining and measuring the quality of Early Learning and Child Care: A literature review. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/documents/programs/disability-savings/2018-definingquality-elcc-report-en.pdf>

There is currently great variation in the compensation levels of 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>17</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.

While the CWELCC wage floor has brought up the wages of the lowest paid RECEs in the sector, there is still great variation among RECE staff. And non-RECE staff are excluded from the wage floor and annual increase. Addressing these variances and embedding equity across workplaces must be a fundamental principle of a salary scale.

Further to wage inequity, there are also varying levels of access to pension programs and extended health benefits, with low coverage overall. We know that compensation is much more than just wages. While this brief specifically discusses a salary scale, we acknowledge that decent compensation for all requires investments in other compensation elements, and these must be equalized across the province.

These inequities must be addressed, for RECEs and non-RECE staff in licensed child care and ultimately, across the broader early years and education sector. A funding strategy for licensed home child care should be developed that ensures parity for home child care providers. While this brief responds to the implementation CWELCC, we recognize that ECEs work in a variety of

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<sup>17</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>

professional settings that are not currently included in the CWELCC agreements, including Full Day Kindergarten, EarlyON programs, school-aged licensed childcare and Authorized Recreation programs, etc. We must learn from past implementation challenges (e.g., the implementation of Full Day Kindergarten) and address wage inequity across the broader early years and child care sector to interrupt ECEs migration between sub-sectors and to allow ECEs to choose a career path based on their professional interests, talents, and passion, not based only on which parts of sector pay best.

In order to address wage inequities, we recommend a salary scale establish a provincial standard for wages. This ensures that regardless of where they live or work, RECEs and non-RECE staff are paid fairly and transparently. It is a matter of racial, gender, and economic justice that pay transparency and equity is established. A provincial standard allows RECEs and child care staff to predict, plan, and understand their salary and its growth, to know their rights and what they can expect from employers. The International Labour Organization describes that pay transparency “can serve as an effective tool in identifying existing pay differences between men and women, and as such can be vehicles to address the gender pay gap and reduce broader gender inequalities in the labour market.”<sup>18</sup> We know that wages in the child care sector vary widely, pay transparency is inconsistent, and that the market-system has perpetuated inequities. These inequities must not be reinforced with another top-up or one-off wage payment. A salary scale must establish and fund a provincial standard.

This does not mean that regional variances can be ignored. It is true that across Ontario the cost of living differs, and there are varied costs related to working in remote, rural and urban settings. A provincial standard can still allow for regional flexibility, by establishing a transparent mechanism for increases that could be defined provincially and implemented by Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs). A mechanism for regional variances would need to be defined democratically and collaboratively, based on demographic evidence, and have clear points for review and revision.

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## WHAT IS AT STAKE?

If we do not ground a salary scale on the principle of Decent Compensation for All, retention challenges will continue and worsen. RECEs and ELCC staff will continue to be forced to leave the ELCC sector due to compensation-related elements. If we entrench pay inequities, we will also continue to fuel migration within the sector, as staff move between regions, programs and

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<sup>18</sup> International Labour Organization. (2022). Pay Transparency Legislation: Implications for employers’ and workers’ organizations. Retrieved from [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms\\_849209.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_849209.pdf)



positions to attempt to secure decent compensation. The goal of a high quality early learning and child care system cannot be achieved without decent compensation for all.

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### **PRINCIPLE 3. RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS, EXPERIENCE, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND DEVELOPMENT OF JOB ROLES**

As we laid out in Principle 2, everyone working in early years and child care deserves decent work and compensation. At the same time, a salary scale must envision and allow for the growth and future of the ECE profession and the ELCC sector. Principle 3 sets out that a salary scale must be built by creating and recognizing job roles and responsibilities, scope of work and the qualifications and experience needed to carry out that work.

Currently in Ontario an RECE's level of qualification (2-year diploma, 4-year degree, or Master's degree), and their years and type of experience may *or may not* lead to improved compensation, a leadership role, or growth opportunities. In some cases, qualified and unqualified staff do essentially the same work. This staffing model incorrectly suggests that early learning and child care does not require education, skills, and professional competencies – that anyone can do the work. This ultimately undervalues the pedagogy and practice of RECEs. This stagnant and ad-hoc approach stifles growth and ignores the diversity and strength of the profession. As Ontario continues on the journey of system-building, it must be intentional in building a system where RECEs can envision a life-long career with growth and leadership opportunities that inspire, incentivize and give hope, while also ensuring fair compensation, career growth and training opportunities for currently unqualified staff.

The ECE profession continues to adapt, shift, and grow with new knowledges, and understandings, and growing competencies. As such, a salary scale must not only be responsive to the existing diversity in the workforce, but be flexible to respond to further growth, refinement and articulation of professional roles, job titles and credentials as the system adapts.

Further, in order to create an ELCC system that is representative and culturally-safe, that contributes to truth and reconciliation and acknowledges existing systemic racism, the sector must consider what knowledges and experiences are valuable and necessary, yet not currently recognized by formal qualification designations or existing preparatory programs. For example, in order for a system to be culturally-safe and contribute to reconciliation and the joyful futures of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples across Ontario, it should recognize and compensate those who hold cultural and linguistic knowledge. In order to do so, a system for rewarding and recognizing additional qualifications should be developed.

A compensation framework should also recognize and reward challenging schedules or settings. For example, shifts premiums should be considered to help incentivize and recognize those

working non-standard hours, such as split shifts, overnight and evening care. While some providers and organizations provide these incentives, and they exist in some collective agreements, they are not accessible for all educators, and they are not standardized or uniform across the province. Regardless of where you work, you should be recognized for your time, in particular when working outside standards hours. Such an approach would help meet the staffing challenges faced by non-standard hours programs.

We acknowledge there is work to be done to further understand, articulate, and imagine a differentiated staffing model, career trajectories and job ladders (or lattices). Ultimately, this work must be done, and it must be done transparently, collectively, and by centering the voices and lived experiences of educators.

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#### WHAT IS AT STAKE?

If we do not ground a salary scale in the principle of the development and recognition of job roles, qualifications, and experience we risk building an ELCC system with a stagnant profession. If we develop a system where growth opportunities are limited or only available “off the floor” or outside of the child care sector, we will continue to experience retention challenges and lose talented and skilled educators from the profession. Further, if we do not begin to recognize the diverse knowledges and experiences that RECE and non-RECE staff bring to their work, and the significant responsibilities in their work, we risk building a system that makes their uniqueness and skills invisible and continues to devalue them.

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#### **4. RESPECT EXISTING DECENT WAGES AND COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS**

As discussed above, College and municipal child care programs and some non-profit programs have worked for years to improve compensation for RECEs and child care workers. It is essential that these wages be respected. As such, principle 4 requires that a provincial salary scale not include “red circling” - the practice of freezing the wages of employees earning higher than average wages. Red circling is known to lead to disengagement and turnover among highly experienced employees. As Ontario builds our new early learning and child care system it is vital that the skills, experience and sectoral leadership of these educators are retained in the profession.

A provincial salary scale must respect – and learn from - the compensation frameworks that have been collectively bargained and informed by the processes of job evaluation and pay equity. This work leads the way in demonstrating appropriate salaries and improved working conditions are possible. However, it is important to remember that existing collective agreements are snapshots of salaries and conditions that reflect the unique circumstances, histories, bargaining priorities, and funding sources of those workplaces. In developing a provincial salary scale, Ontario must

learn from, but not necessarily duplicate, existing scales. This opportunity, at the forefront of system-building, requires vision, forward thinking and articulating the future we want to achieve, not simply replicating promising models that developed under our old system.

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## WHAT IS AT STAKE?

If a salary scale does not respect legacy wages and collective agreements, more educators will continue to leave the sector. In particular, Ontario risks losing more experienced RECEs from the sector at a time when their rich knowledge and leadership are crucial for supporting incumbent RECEs through peer mentoring and pre-service ECE students in their placement opportunities. Ultimately, they deserve to be recognized and compensated for their years of commitment. If we also do not respect legacy wages and collective agreements, we risk limiting the potential of a salary scale. We risk accepting less in the name of efficiency or incrementalism. While of course it takes time to truly transform a system, we must be bold and responsive, and respect what visionary staff, employers and unions have done through collective bargaining processes in challenging circumstances. If they have achieved growth with the chronic underfunding of the market system, imagine what is truly possible now.

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## 5. DEMOCRATIC PROCESS THAT MEANINGFULLY INCLUDES EDUCATORS

Principle 5 asserts that, while government must take immediate action to increase compensation, the development and implementation of a salary scale and other compensation strategies must be framed and informed by an overarching democratic process that meaningfully includes the voices and perspectives of RECEs, child care workers, sector advocates and experts. Such a process must move beyond ad-hoc or siloed stakeholder engagement sessions. The Ontario Government must engage RECEs and child care workers in formal and transparent consultation and collaboration to ensure that the long-term transformation of the sector sufficiently address existing challenges.

We recommend the establishment of a formal, permanent Early Years and Child Care Worker Advisory Commission, as put forward in Bill 49.<sup>19</sup> The Commission would ensure that the development of the scale and strategy, and emerging issues, would be dealt with democratically and transparently.

A Commission should be composed of members appointed from the following groups:

- Members of the early years and child care workforce;
- Members of provincial or regionally-based organizations and associations that represent the early years and child care workforce;

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-43/session-1/bill-49>

- Designates from labour unions that represent the early years and child care workforce;
- Early years and child care experts.
- The appointment of persons to the Commission shall ensure, to the extent possible, that the Black community, Indigenous community and other racialized communities are represented.

The Commission would develop recommendations on how to support the early years and child care workforce and address staffing shortages in an annual report made available to the public and sent to the Minister of Education. The Minister would be required to meet with the Commission to discuss its annual reports.

The intentionality and efficacy of sector engagement vary depending on government decision-makers, and processes. While the Commission offers one step towards greater transparency, a robust democratic process for the development of workforce strategies and solutions is required. Mechanisms and processes like job evaluation, collective bargaining, and labour-market analysis must be embedded alongside educator and sector voices, to ensure responsive and evidence-based policy development.

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## WHAT IS AT STAKE

Without formal and transparent consultation and collaboration with the sector, the Ontario government risks developing a salary scale that does not meet the needs of the sector and results in critique, resistance, and a worsening staffing and access crisis. If a salary scale is not developed through a democratic process that centres the voices of educators, it is likely that it will not sufficiently address the problem as defined by the sector, and it will not reflect their collective vision of the profession now and into the future. In order for a salary scale to be effective, it must move the sector towards a desired goal. If that goal is developed without consulting educators, and they do not have a voice in articulating the pathway to achieving that goal, it is likely, as we have seen in Ontario, that the policy mechanism will further alienate and devalue the ELCC workforce. Developing a transparent and democratic process that includes educator voices is necessary for developing an effective salary scale.

## FUNDING COMPENSATION INCREASES

Recent modelling by Dr. Gordon Cleveland suggests that increasing current ECEs' wages in Ontario by 25% would cost approximately \$392 Million.<sup>20</sup> Additional funding would be needed to increase the wages of other staff and for additional ECEs to meet expansion targets. The CCPA's

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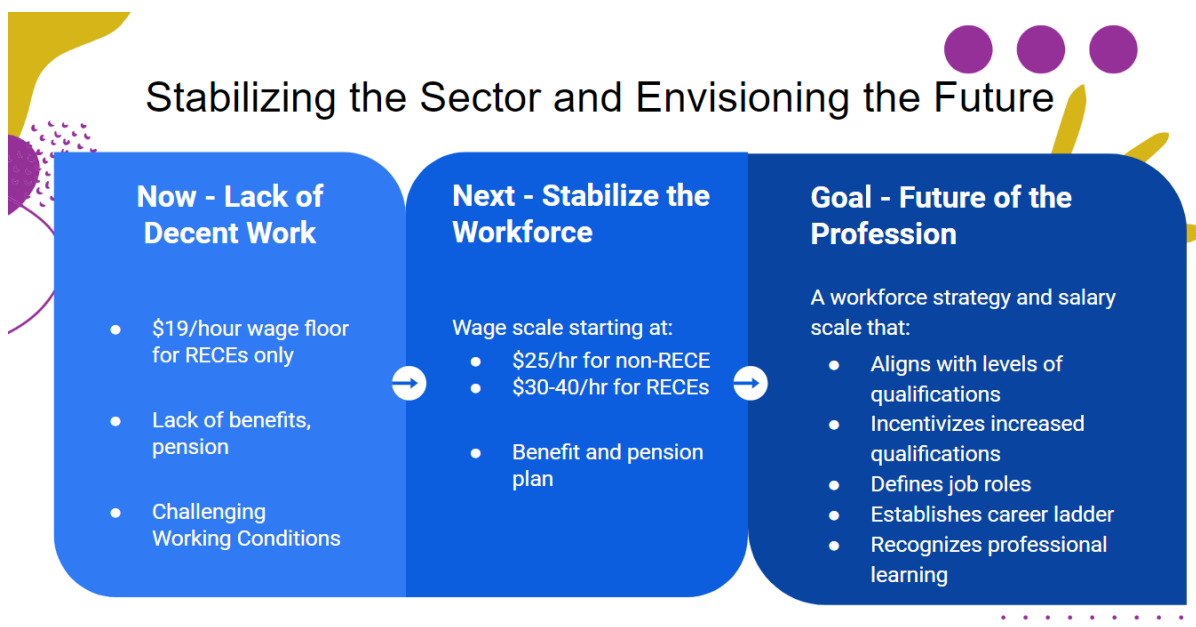
<sup>20</sup> Cleveland, G. (2023, August 17). How much will it cost to raise the wages of early childhood educators.? Retrieved from: <https://childcarepolicy.net/how-much-will-it-cost-to-raise-the-wages-of-early-childhood-educators/>

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>21</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

<sup>21</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2023). Alternative Federal Budget 2024. Retrieved from <https://monitormag.ca/articles/afb-2024-child-care/>



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.

Beginning this transformation is one of the most important steps in system-building that the Ontario government can take. Respecting and recognizing RECEs and child care workers through appropriate compensation not only will help resolve the current workforce crisis, but will help to create a system that enables RECEs and child care staff to be reinvigorated with joy, hope, and capacity to engage in their complex, ethical, caring and pedagogical work to support Ontario’s children, families, and communities.

