



Budget 2026: Ontario still isn't paying its fair share for child care

The 2026 Ontario budget shows that the Ford government still doesn't understand the value of early learning and child care to Ontario's economy. Ontario families, communities, the economy - and the provincial government - are benefiting from federal investment in the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. But Ontario's recent budget shows that the province still won't pay its fair share. While child care remains within provincial jurisdiction, federal investments are now footing the majority of the bill. The Ontario government should boost its contribution by at least \$500 million to match federal investments.

Seeing a commitment in the budget to working with the Federal government to sustain the CWELCC program is promising news, but without an additional allocation of provincial funding, the program will not have the investment it needs meet the Ontario's stated goal "to support access to child care for all families while strengthening early learning services and child care programs."¹

Ontario is missing a critical moment, and falling behind the improvements seen in other provinces and territories. Wage grids for ECEs exist in seven provinces and territories, and benefits plans have been implemented in six. Manitoba has already established a wage grid for ECEs and their recently released 2026 budget includes a 2.9% increase, demonstrating their understanding of the necessity of professional wages for professional work and a recognition of ECEs. PEI's wage grid, pension, and benefits plans are already improving staff retention and morale.² We know that respect and recognition for ECEs, the heart of the early years system, must be prioritized through decent working conditions and professional pay. In order to continue to expand the CWELCC program in Ontario, we must continue to prioritize wages and benefits for ECEs in order to attract them to the sector, and support them to build lifelong careers. Ontario must keep its promise to lower parent fees to \$10 a day and expand access so that all families may benefit from this incredible program. At a critical time where affordability is a top concern, Ontario cannot afford to leave families, children, and ECEs behind.

The second edition of the AECEO and OCBC's [Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario](#) was released in Fall 2025 and outlines 21 policy recommendations to transform Ontario's ELCC sector into a more affordable, equitable and high quality system. Policy interventions address the issues of system building, funding sources and approach, affordability, workforce development, and expansion. *The Roadmap* envisions a system where every child has the right to early learning and child care and knows that there is a caring and joyful place for them to play and learn each day. Where families would know there is a space where and when they need it.

¹ Ontario Budget: www.ontario.ca/budget

² Child Care Now. (2026, March 5). *Prince Edward Island: Case study report – Child Care Now*. Child Care Now. Retrieved March 25, 2026, from <https://childcarenow.ca/2026/03/05/prince-edward-island-case-study-report/#conclusions>



Where educators are respected for their knowledge, skills, talents, and education and provided professional pay, decent work, and benefits and pension plans that honour their work. Where governments work together to create a truly universal, accessible, publicly funded, early learning and child care system.

Join us in the [Care Counts, Wages Matter](#) campaign, as we continue to advocate for additional provincial and federal funding, including the implementation of decent working conditions and a wage grid for Registered Early Childhood Educators that starts at \$35-45 an hour, \$28 for non-RECE staff, and pension and benefit plans to provide the recognition and respect they deserve. Investment to ensure that the broader early years and child care system can support all Ontario families is necessary. It is time to value and fund early learning and child care for all.

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