

Groups embrace plan for \$10 a day child care for Canadian families

Families with children are getting a boost, thanks to measures contained in last week's federal budget.

Ottawa announced a goal of on average \$10 a day child care within the next five years. By building an early learning and child care system, the government will make life more affordable for Canadian families, create new jobs, grow the middle class, increase women's participation in the work force, and drive strong economic growth across the country.

The federal government will work with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous partners to build this Canada-wide, community-based early learning and child care system. The government will invest \$30 billion over the next five years, with a minimum of \$9.2 billion per year on an ongoing basis. By the end of 2022, this new system would reduce fees for parents with children in regulated child care by 50 per cent on average, everywhere outside of Quebec. While Quebec already has shown leadership through a child care system where prices are affordable, they will still receive their share of the funding to allow for further improvements to their system.

Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, spoke at a virtual session last week hosted by the Boys and Girls Club. He clarified the funding and the goals to participating early childhood educators and families in York Region.

Hussen said it's all about building an inclusive system through a comprehensive approach. The government is bringing real options to the table for parents, he said, noting that by building a strong early education system, it will give children the best possible start in life.

It's an investment on the government's part to subsidize child care costs, bringing fees down 50 per cent by 2022 and reaching a \$10 per day cost for parents in five years.

"Child care is a necessity," he said. "No child will be left behind." There's a consensus across the board, the Minister noted, and he firmly believes these goals are achievable.

Owen Charters, President & CEO at BGC Canada, is enthusiastic about the plans. He said he's seen first-hand the importance of high quality, safe and accessible child care programs. He admits that one size doesn't fit all, but this is a positive start.

This investment will create new opportunities for Canadian families and allow parents, particularly mothers, to get back into the workforce, said proponents.

Establishing a Canada-wide early learning and child care system will create jobs and economic growth, increase women's participation in the workforce, and offer each child in Canada a better start in life, it was added.

This is part of a plan to grow the middle class and help people working hard to join it.

"Without child care, Canadian parents can't work. [This] announcement is as much about meeting their needs as it is about setting our children up for success for generations to come. Investing in early child learning and establishing Canada-wide child care will make life more affordable for families, create jobs, strengthen our economy, get women back into the workforce, and grow the middle class. We will get it done," said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

"COVID-19 has brutally exposed something women have long known: Without child care, parents — usually mothers — can't work. The closing of our schools and child care drove women's participation in the labour force down to its lowest level in more than two decades. There is agreement, across the political spectrum, that early learning and child care is the national economic policy we need now. This is social infrastructure that will drive jobs and growth. This is feminist economic policy. This is smart economic policy," added Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

Throughout the pandemic, women's participation in the workforce has been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and public health restrictions, in part because they are the main providers of family care, including home schooling and caring for family members.

COVID-19 has also had a particular impact on the labour force participation of racialized women with young children. For example, under 76 per cent of Black mothers with a child younger than six were active in the labour market in January 2021, compared to over 81 per cent of mothers who did not identify as visible minorities.

Investments in child care will benefit all Canadians. Studies show that for every dollar invested in early childhood education, the broader economy receives between \$1.50 and \$2.80 in return.

As part of \$30 billion in funding, and building on Canada's Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care framework co-developed in 2018, Budget 2021 proposes to invest up to \$2.5 billion over the next five years:

- \$1.4 billion over five years, starting in 2021-22, to create up to 3,300 new high-quality early learning and child care spaces for Indigenous families.
- \$515 million over five years, starting in 2021-22, to support before- and after-school care for First Nations children on reserve.
- \$264 million over four years, starting in 2022-23, to repair and renovate existing Indigenous early-learning and child care centres

\$420 million over three years, starting in 2023-24, to build and maintain new early-learning and child care centres in additional communities.

Budget 2021 also builds on the approximately 40,000 new spaces already created through previous federal investments.

To make immediate progress for children with disabilities, Budget 2021 proposes to provide \$29.2 million over two years, starting in 2021-22, to Employment and Social Development Canada through the Enabling Accessibility Fund to support child care centres as they improve their physical accessibility.

Combined with previous investments announced since 2015, a minimum of \$9.2 billion per year ongoing will be invested in child care, including Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care, starting in 2025-26.

By Mark Pavilons