
QUALITY EARLY LEARNING NETWORK

2021/2022 Budget Consultation Recommendations

The Context

The development of the 2021/2022 Provincial budget is happening at an unprecedented time in the history of Ontario. **COVID -19** has changed everything. **Licensed child care was recognized by the government as an 'essential service' and centres and licensed home child care opened with enhanced health and safety guidelines to provide emergency care for essential workers beginning in April 2020.**

The Early Learning and Child Care sector is nowhere near recovery; programs are operating at approximately 50% of capacity and the workforce shortage issues we faced before the pandemic are only being exacerbated by the continuing COVID pandemic. We do not anticipate a full recovery until late 2022 at the absolute earliest.

Our educators, home child care providers and staff are on the front line of the war against COVID-19, recognized rightfully and appropriately as essential not only to the physical, mental, social and emotional health of young children but to the well being of our province as a whole.

Our 2021/2022 budget recommendations focus on the two issues that continue to jeopardize the continued viability of the Early Learning and Child Care sector:

1) Pandemic Recovery

- a. Include child care professionals in the pool of essential workers who qualify for the additional pandemic pay supplement and fund this retroactively to when centres reopened following the provincially mandated closure. Child care professionals are on the front lines of the pandemic, at risk every day, working in close and daily contact with young children and their families.
- b. Recovery of the Early Learning and Child Care sector requires **increased, ongoing, predictable funding that recognizes the increased costs inherent in maintain safe and healthy environments for young children and the child care professionals who engage with them everyday.** Increase general operating funding will address ongoing issues of affordability and sustainability while also supporting the continuation of COVID driven health and safety measures.
- c. COVID specific investments to support educators to understand and mitigate the impact of the pandemic, including but not limited to:
 - i. Training for educators about the impact of the pandemic on young children, both developmentally and from a mental health perspective.
 - ii. Development and implementation of training and support for educators to embed trauma -informed practices in early learning environments.

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This is important everywhere but especially in communities highest hit by the pandemic – racialized and low-income communities.

2) Workforce Shortage

- a. Ensure sufficient permanent funding to allow for child care professionals in the licensed not-for-profit child care sector to be compensated at the same level as child care professionals employed by Boards of Education.** Recruitment and retention in the ELCC sector have been an increasing crisis for several years; low wages and heavy workloads are often the reason cited for RECEs/ECA's leaving the sector. This would allow significant increases in wages without a corresponding increase in costs charged to parents. Agencies who currently compensating educators at this level through increased parent fees must also be eligible for the funding.