

Increasing Access to Quality Childcare in Alberta

Issue

The recent childcare funding agreement between the federal and provincial governments is expected to raise demand for childcare. The childcare industry has conversely experienced a decline in labour supply that will need to be addressed to meet the increased demand.

Three things can be done to help increase supply of childcare workers. First, restoring a living allowance for childcare workers in remote areas will help increase talent supply in areas that have a hard time attracting workers. Second, introducing a one-year certificate as the minimum educational requirement for workers in Early Learning and Care (ELC) programs will increase the quality of care given to our children. Third, creating more professional development opportunities for ELC workers will continuously improve the quality of childcare provided in those programs.

Background

The Canada-Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Agreement is expected to increase the demand for childcare in Alberta. However, recent events have caused the ELC labour supply to shrink. In the first year of the pandemic, roughly 20% of early childhood educators moved on to another industry with low enrolment caused by the pandemic.¹⁵

Quality of learning is also vital in ELC environments. Studies show that children's ages in ELC environments are the most formative years in their development. Despite this importance, ELC workers do not receive the same developmental support that educators in schools do.

There are three ways the Alberta Government can rectify these issues to increase the supply of quality childcare.

First, they need to restore the living allowance to remote communities like the one that was removed in March 2020.¹⁶ While maintaining a supply of ELC workers is a struggle all over

¹⁵ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. "Alberta lost one in five licensed early childhood educators during 1st year of pandemic, data shows", accessed February 27, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-child-care-educators-federal-covid-19-1.6139406>

¹⁶ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. "Fort McMurray child-care workers protest loss of northern living allowance", accessed February 26, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/fort-mcmurray-northern-allowance-1.5493179>

Alberta, it is even harder to attract workers in remote communities. The \$1000/month allowance evened the playing field for the ELC industry against other, higher-paying industries in these communities. Without it, many workers passionate about ELC outcomes are forced to seek employment in other sectors. Restoring a living allowance in remote communities would increase access to quality childcare for Albertans in these communities.

Second, the Alberta Government can increase the quality of care by introducing a one-year early childhood education certificate as the minimum educational requirement for staff in licensed ELC programs. The certification will equip ELC workers with the knowledge and competency needed to fully support children's early learning and care in the most crucial stage of their development.¹⁷ It will improve the quality of childcare in Alberta. The existing workforce also needs to be supported financially with a provincial bursary to meet the new educational requirement.

Third, the quality of childcare would increase with investment in the professional development of ELC workers. Offering more professional development opportunities to ELC workers would equip them with the knowledge to improve outcomes for the children in their care. ELC workers enjoy fewer opportunities for professional development than teachers.¹⁸ Teachers use these opportunities to hone their craft and improve their knowledge of childhood development.

As the demand for childcare grows, these three initiatives will increase the quantity and quality of ELC services in Alberta and ensure our children have the support they need at the most crucial time in their development.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends the Government of Alberta:

1. Reinstatement of a living allowance to Child Care workers in prescribed remote and rural communities;
2. Introduction of a one-year early childhood education certificate as the minimum educational requirement for staff in licensed ELC programs; and,
3. Creation of a bridging program to support educators currently in the field without an ELCC certificate that blends foundational skills and knowledge while considering prior work experience in the field.

¹⁷ The Muttart Foundation. "Advancing the Educational Preparation and Professional Development of Alberta's Early Learning and Care Workforce", Accessed February 14, 2022, <https://muttart.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Alberta-Summary-Report-102015.pdf>

¹⁸ Ibid.