

SHAPING THE ECE WORKFORCE FOR CANADA'S FUTURE



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The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan is designed to create more affordable and accessible spaces for children under the age of 6 years. Expansion, however, needs to be anchored by a professional workforce.

Establishing professionalism is difficult in a sector where educators are paid less relative to workers with similar qualifications or doing similar work. A [new report](#) by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) reveals the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the child care workforce. The number of quarterly job vacancies for ECEs had increased by 100 per cent. And while wages for most other sectors have increased post-pandemic, ECE earnings remain stagnant.

Addressing recruitment and retention challenges is essential to building sector capacity and supporting quality care and learning environments for young children. Changing the dial on the value of early childhood work includes better wages and working conditions for staff. Many governments acknowledge this and have acted by putting wage grids in place that recognize training and

experience, providing pension and health benefits, and expanding opportunities for professional development.

While many of these measures are too new to be evaluated, the CSLS study calculates that a 25 per cent wage increase for qualified educators could attract 58,192–103,746 additional ECEs nationally, helping to address critical staffing shortages.

But the uneven implementation of workforce measures between provinces and territories, and within jurisdictions, adds to labour instability. Protections offered to staff in unionized settings establish standards that secure positions while contributing to improved wages and benefits. Lessons from teachers' and nurses' unions show the value of sector-wide representation to advance professional rights through collective bargaining and advocacy.

Québec is an example of sector bargaining applied to the early childhood sector. The Federation of Health and Social Services union represents over 12,000 early childhood educators working in Centres de la petite enfance (CPEs), the publicly managed arm of Québec child care. The union negotiates directly with the government on behalf of staff. A contract covering all CPEs outlines working conditions, creates transparency and therefore accountability, and adds to workforce consistency.

While not eliminating ECE shortages in Québec, the union's ability to mobilize its members for better working conditions has improved compensation—and importantly, it has also raised the status of educators among the public. When employers apply a consistent approach to human resources, educators can focus on creating environments rich in play to support the development of young children's social and emotional competencies.