FROM INVESTMENT TO ACTION

Building a Canada-wide Child Care System

May 25, 2021
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- Convening candid dialogues on research subjects
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On April 19, 2021, the federal government put its stake in the ground on child care. The 2021-22 federal budget committed $30 billion over five years, and $8.3 billion per year on top of existing funding starting in 2025-26 totaling $9.2 billion, with the ultimate goal of supporting a child care system that offers an average charge to parents of $10 a day. This commitment delivers on over 50 years of advocacy work across the country. However, many details still need to be worked out to realize a high-quality, affordable and accessible Canada-wide early learning child care system.

In partnership with YMCA Canada, the Public Policy Forum undertook a research project to examine how to achieve a child care system that centres on quality, affordability, accessibility and inclusion, while also addressing key policy trade-offs to attain this goal. Through this research, it became abundantly clear that two main issues remain at play: jurisdiction and quality. In order to achieve the promised system, two foundational questions need to be settled: how can the federal government best act as a partner in child care, and what is necessary for the operation of a high-quality child care system across the country?

Through roundtable discussions and interviews, this report is informed by more than 200 experts, advocates and practitioners.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop and fund a comprehensive, national early learning and child care workforce strategy informed by labour force trends.

- Ensure long-term predictability, stability and accountability of expanded funding to the provinces.

- Extend direct wage support to ensure high-quality child care agencies withstand financial challenges exacerbated by COVID-19 and to maintain highly trained staff and quality spaces over the next 18 months.

- Support the expansion and increased capacity of in-person and online early childhood education college programs across Canada to effectively build up the workforce in early learning and child care, and ensure curriculum continues to be reflective of the demands and realities of the role.

- Harmonize tax-based support with the $10-a-day vision as it rolls out to ensure those with persisting access issues receive necessary support.
INTRODUCTION

Advocates across the country have been making a case for increased investment in child care for decades, however, child care has remained mostly outside of Canada’s core investment of social infrastructure. Indeed, child care rests within provincial jurisdiction, resulting in a patchwork of offerings across the country. Although it has been 50 years since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women highlighted the need for child care services to enable women's social and economic equality, any federal attempt at a broad overhaul has been halted in its tracks. However, COVID-19 has spotlighted not only the value and necessity of child care but, at a more local level, the gaps within the various systems across the country.

Although the challenge most clearly cited during the pandemic has been a disproportionate exodus of women from the labour market, the correlation with child care is not new. With a highly subsidized system, Quebec has had the highest rate of women in the labour force in Canada over the last two decades, primarily due to its child care system.

Now, unlikely allies, including business leaders across sectors and organizational sizes, have bought into what advocates have been saying for decades: A widely accessible child care system is not only a social policy, it contributes directly to the productive capacity of the labour market.

The federal government in its 2020 speech from the throne committed to ensuring high-quality child care was accessible to all. It followed up in its Nov. 30, 2020, fall economic statement with a promise of $420 million in 2021-22 for provinces and territories to support attraction and retention of early childhood educators (ECEs), a firm nod towards the pressing issues of access and quality. Going further in the 2021 federal budget, the government committed $30 billion over five years — and $9.2 billion a year on an ongoing basis after that — with the goal of building a system centred on $10-a-day child care within five years and expanded access to high-quality, regulated early learning and child care spaces. These commitments have been applauded, but the devil will be in the details and a co-ordinated approach with the provinces and territories, as well as the child care sector, must be forged to achieve a successful implementation.

Importantly, the workforce participation of women or primary caregivers is not the only outcome consideration for a modern child care system. Child care is not merely a place to drop off pre-school children. High-quality early learning environments are critical to child development and will set them up for future success. A high-quality child care system focused on education represents a sustained investment in today’s labour market and produces a long-term competitive advantage for Canada. Several provincial governments have acknowledged this dual approach as they move to offer publicly funded pre-primary programs, including, most recently, Nova Scotia. Such systems cost more in the short and medium term,
with payoffs pushed into the future. For a child care system to be truly successful, it must hit four notes simultaneously, being: affordable, accessible to all, inclusive and focused on high-quality early learning.

As the current federal government endeavours to be the first to act materially on the promise of child care for all, questions of quality, affordability, accessibility and inclusion will stand in line behind jurisdictional bargaining.

In partnership with YMCA Canada, the Public Policy Forum undertook a research project to understand what it will take to achieve a Canada-wide child care system that prioritizes high-quality learning, affordability, accessibility and inclusion, while also addressing key policy trade-offs to attain this goal. Through this research, it became abundantly clear that the two main issues at play are the question of jurisdiction and the question of quality.

In addition to a literature review and interviews, this report is informed by two expert roundtables hosted by PPF, and a consultation of child care leaders from across the YMCA federation, hosted by YMCA Canada on April 14, 2021. The first roundtable, titled The Jurisdictional Question, was held Feb. 23, 2021. The second, titled The Quality Question, was held March 16, 2021.

This report is approached from the basic assumption that any parent and child in any corner of the country should enjoy affordable access to high-quality child care when they want or need it. With that in mind, in order to achieve such a system, two foundational questions need to be considered: how might the federal government be a partner in child care; and what is necessary for a high-quality child care system across the country?
THE JURISDICTIONAL QUESTION

Although the federal government’s declaration on child care has sparked a great deal of interest, delivery is fundamentally within provincial jurisdiction. Indeed, education is enshrined in section 93 of the Constitution, and child care is covered within that section. Further, of all the areas of jurisdiction that provinces have aggressively protected over the last 150 years, education is a top one, if not the top. In reaction to the 2021-22 federal budget, various premiers have signaled their preference and willingness (or lack thereof) to negotiate on child care. Still, child care remains largely outside of the core system of public social infrastructure investment in most provinces.

With a pandemic-induced spotlight on the challenges of the existing child care system and the essential role of child care on the economy, the federal government has declared its intention to support a Canada-wide system. But the first question to ask to move forward is simply what can the federal government actually and practically do with the promised $30 billion over five years and sustained $9.2 billion thereafter? It is clear that expectations have been set high. Many advocates, for various reasons, do not particularly care to accept the realities of jurisdiction and are looking for a complete redesign of the system. It is unlikely that a national redesign will happen and, indeed, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland has already stated that bilateral agreements with each province will be the largest instrument for delivering funding. Therefore, an understanding, in the context of jurisdiction, of where the federal government might act and how is essential.

EXPANDING BILATERAL FUNDING AGREEMENTS

Most of the newly committed federal funding will flow through bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories. To inform recent child care bilateral agreements, including the ones that currently exist, the federal government has used the Multilateral Early Learning and Child care Framework, which was negotiated by federal, provincial and territorial ministers most responsible for early learning and child care to set out targets and metrics in which funding is tied. However, each province has their own tailored agreement. Individual agreements do allow for more flexibility to recognize the diversity and need of each provincial system, but one thing heard during our expert roundtable The Jurisdictional Question is that the existing framework allows for easy cancellation and does not create the conditions for system change. This is particularly true if the desired system change involves a longer-term funding commitment, like space creation or wage increases, because provinces have no assurance that funding will actually be in place once the bilateral agreement expires. Most provinces negotiated their first three-year bilateral agreement in 2017 with a recent one-year renewal that does not include the commitments outlined in the 2021 federal budget. Any new bilateral agreement should be both long term and flexible to allow amendments when the system requires it.
Further, during The Jurisdictional Question roundtable, various references were made to the abrupt post-election cancellation of the 2006 child care bilateral agreements-in-principle developed under former prime minister Paul Martin. Members involved or aware of the 2006 agreements shared the deficiencies with the bilateral model: “The 2006 bilateral agreements were cheap to cancel. Providing a permanent block transfer would dissuade governments from saying we can’t move on things or turning their back on it.”

Roundtable participants were clear that any successful bilateral agreement should be difficult to cancel and large enough to address the real systemic challenges within the child care sector.

If both points are worked into future agreements, systemic change may be possible, one province at a time. Otherwise, the uncertainty makes it difficult to make big change. It also makes it difficult to address the areas of concern raised by child care providers — that many solutions require a long-term commitment. The 2021 federal budget promise may provide a pathway for long-term commitments, but provinces and early childhood education providers will remain skeptical of system change until agreements are signed and money is flowing.

UNIVERSAL STANDARDS

A call for federal funding also created a renewed call for the federal government to develop a universal standard for child care across the country. The precedent for this call is sometimes rooted in the Canada Health Act (CHA) — the federal government lays out what basic parameters are necessary in funding health care, even though health care is also a provincial jurisdiction. However, the CHA is built in response to Medicare and now informs the Canada Health Transfer. These underpinnings do not squarely exist for child care. As part of a Canada-wide early learning and child care system, tying funding dollars directly to substantial national standards may have a larger window of success in effectively moving the needle. However, standards would be heavily challenged based solely on the issue of jurisdiction. At this time, the Multilateral Early Learning and Childcare Framework is generally sufficient and can be built upon.

TAX-BASED SUPPORTS

The federal government has historically used the tax system to support parents with the cost of child care and does indeed have the jurisdiction to do so. Two tax-based mechanisms that currently exist are the Child Care Expense Deduction (CCED) and the Canada Child Benefit (CCB). It is possible that the federal government may consider delivering some of the recent commitment through tax-based supports. In the recent report Aggressive Incrementalism: Strengthening the Foundations of Canada’s Approach to Childcare, Jennifer Robson and Ken Boessenkool argue for a replacement to the CCED in favour of a more
generous and progressive tax credit. Amendments to the CCED may be warranted, however, tax credits do nothing to increase quality or availability of child care. During our roundtable discussions, expansion of quality spaces remained a top priority. The rollout of a $10-a-day system may reduce the need for some tax-based supports, but low-income parents — those who may benefit most from financial support to pay for child care — would not see child care as more affordable through any tax deduction model. It is worth noting that many provinces have their own programs to support affordability of child care for low-income parents, including the New Brunswick Daycare Assistance Program for those with a net income below $55,000. If the objective is to support affordability of child care, leaders responsible for the direct delivery of child care told shared that tax-based incentives should be reconsidered in favour of up-front targeted support to those with persisting challenges accessing child care.

The second tax-based support, the CCB, replaced the former Universal Child Care Benefit in 2016. The CCB moved to a more generous and targeted tax-free benefit that families receive each month based on their level of income. Some version of this type of direct support has existed for decades in Canada. The programs consolidated to form CCB were indeed meant to support child care. The CCB may continue to support child care costs, so long as affordable, high-quality child care spaces are actually available to families.

Any federal support through the tax system should focus on targeted, up-front measures that address affordability of high-quality child care for those who need it.

EXTENDING COVID-19 WAGE SUPPORT

The child care sector has benefitted from the supports offered by the federal government during the pandemic. Although child care providers will argue they were in crisis before COVID-19, it is abundantly clear that the pandemic has amplified and created new challenges.

A report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives highlights that, during the pandemic, enrolment in child care has declined substantially, while COVID-19 protocols have forced child care providers in some instances to raise their fees or shut down.

Further, in most jurisdictions, child care educators and support staff were not immediately deemed a priority for vaccination. Still, the child care providers we spoke with were clear: the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) has been and remains a lifeline. In addition to the CEWS, the Safe Restart Agreement funding and uninterrupted operating grants provided by most provinces have helped to maintain some levels of stability in child care. With much uncertainty in when Canada will return to at least pre-pandemic levels of care, the federal government should protect quality child care spaces by extending wage subsidies
for child care providers beyond the 2021 federal budget commitment of Sept. 25, 2021, to bridge the sector over the next 18 months.

DIRECT FUNDING TO INSTITUTIONS

Through COVID-19-related support, the federal government has been essentially directly funding child care providers. Direct funding to institutions is a way the federal government has manoeuvred around jurisdictional challenges in other areas, including in education. For example, the federal government has adopted a model of directly funding infrastructure. The Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Infrastructure Fund launched in 2016 by the federal government provided up to $2 billion directly to institutions, with a 50-percent matching formula. Other programs have included investing in ventilation upgrades to schools and long-term care facilities during the pandemic. The federal government may seek to invest in infrastructure for child care facilities to support upgrades and expansions in order to increase spaces. Indeed, this may be a welcome investment by child care providers so long as it is part of a larger effort.

Another pandemic-specific example of direct funding to institutions is the CEWS as referenced above. In nearly every conversation had to inform this report, wages were a top, and often the top, concern. However, the 2021 federal budget commitment remained largely silent on wages, likely due to the assessment of jurisdiction.

OTHER AREAS OF CONSIDERATION

Data, key performance indicators and national research play a critical role in accountability, supporting best practices and strengthening early learning and child care programs in Canada. However, Canadian data on the early learning and child care labour market — and accessibility, quality, affordability and inclusivity of programs overall — continues to be unavailable or incomplete. In the absence of this, it is difficult to determine the current state of the sector, evaluate the effectiveness of public policy measures, measure progress and forecast future trends. The 2021 federal budget identifies opportunities for data collection and reporting as part of a Canadian-wide system. Better data collection should be implemented as well as further research to ensure that the system is led by the best and latest evidence on quality early learning and child care.
Additionally, while this paper does not look specifically at quality and accessibility for Indigenous children and families, or diversity and social inclusion more broadly, it is acknowledged that other approaches may be necessary to ensure early learning and child care programming are equitable and inclusive. Indeed, the 2021 federal budget commits $2.5 billion directly to Indigenous child care, building off the 2018 Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework. Ensuring all Indigenous children have access to high-quality, culturally relevant care should also be prioritized. Through their work in communities across Canada, YMCA child care leaders and experts in diversity and social inclusion recognize that culturally relevant care and offering opportunities for children and families to participate in their first language cultivates a sense of belonging that respects and affirms diversity and supports the development of positive self-identify.

Initiatives that improve competencies to create safer, more inclusive programs for diverse communities including Indigenous, newcomer and BIPOC children and families should be identified and explored.

There are many ways in which the federal government may seek to engage in child care, however, it has become abundantly clear that an investment in workforce development is the linchpin to any and all elements of an expanded child care program.

Without well-trained and fairly compensated staff, a quality learning environment is unlikely. Further, without enough staff, spaces cannot be created and, in turn, the demand outpaces supply and increases cost. The federal government has a variety of tools it may use to support workforce development.
THE QUALITY QUESTION

As the federal government endeavours to establish a Canada-wide child care system in partnership with the provinces and territories, quality should be core to expansion. Recognized in the Multilateral Early Learning and Childcare Framework, there is a direct link between quality of an early learning and child care system and short- and long-term social and economic gains. For instance, Statistics Canada data captured prior to the COVID-19 pandemic shows a lack of high-quality child care caused women with children to leave the labour force or reduce their hours to take on unpaid care responsibilities at home.

Additionally, research shows that participation in high-quality early learning and care programs has a significant impact on children’s cognitive, social, emotional and physical development and well-being, all of which are fundamental to their achievements throughout life. By contrast, research demonstrates that children receive no benefit or are more likely to have language, social and additional development challenges in early learning and care environments that lack focus on early learning.

At a time when labour shortages in child care total 15,000, positive outcomes for children, an equitable recovery for women, and economic growth following the pandemic depend on high-quality early learning and childcare programs available for families. The federal government must make quality and workforce development a top pillar of its $30-billion commitment.

Without addressing labour shortages through well-trained child care educators, promises of affordability, accessibility and inclusion will not be met.

WORKFORCE AS THE QUALITY LINCHPIN

Early learning and child care educators and support staff are the most critical factor in determining the quality of child care. Responsible for the direct delivery of curriculum and program standards, educators ensure children are kept safe and play an influential role in children’s growth during their most formative years. Through stimulating and nurturing daily interactions, educators shape children’s development and social well-being and promote skills that support school-readiness such as literacy and numeracy. However, attracting, training and retaining qualified ECEs and child care support staff to work in the field is a challenge across Canada. As a result, high turnover in early learning and child care negatively impacts quality and children’s growth and wellness while also dictating available spaces.
“Quality of care ultimately boils down to the quality of the relationship between the childcare provider or teacher and the child. A beautiful space and an elaborate curriculum — like a beautiful home — can be impressive, but without skilled and stable childcare providers, they will not promote positive development.”

- ‘From neurons to neighbourhoods’ study

Canada has long faced a labour shortage of professional ECEs willing to work in the early learning and child care sector. As reported in the 2020 fall economic statement, there are currently about 200,000 ECE and child care support staff working across Canada, 96 percent of whom are women and about one-third of whom are newcomers. Pre-pandemic, the labour shortage was estimated to be 15,000 ECEs. However, as heard from child care leaders from across the country, COVID-19 has added to the shortage.

Pre-pandemic, Canada’s licensed early learning and child care system provided spaces to about 25 percent of children ages 0-12. The creation of additional spaces will be required to ensure families have access to high-quality child care spaces when they need it. However, Canada must first address the labour shortage and effectively increase the workforce of qualified educators through a multi-pronged workforce development approach.

EDUCATION AND ENTRY INTO THE FIELD

Across Canada, 95 public colleges presently offer over 200 ECE programs to students each year, many of whom are international students.

While most of these college programs reach full enrollment annually and have hefty waitlists, there is a persistent labour shortage and a significant gap between the number of students pursuing their ECE accreditation and those entering employment in the field.

This point was amplified during the roundtable The Quality Question, where data from the Government of Nova Scotia showed they have a sufficient number of qualified ECEs in the province but a shortage of those willing to work in early learning and child care. Furthermore, for the YMCA — Canada’s largest non-profit provider of early learning and child care — ECEs account for about 53 percent of its 10,000 early learning
and child care staff across the country, representing a significant drop in recent years. We asked child care leaders responsible for the direct delivery of child care for their perspectives on this disconnect, and it was noted that, in their experience, many students entering ECE programs intend to pursue higher levels of education, have little desire to work in the field due to compensation or have a limited understanding of the demands of the profession.

To try to bridge this gap, colleges and the early learning and child care sector have been actively pursuing innovative learning initiatives. This includes the experiential learning model of Manitoba’s Red River College to connect ECE students with employers during their training, which has been shown to have a positive impact on graduation rates and students entering the field. Additionally, in Nova Scotia, the introduction of virtual and part-time learning opportunities has helped educators pursue professional development and their ECE qualification. Online learning models have been successful because they allow students to maintain their job and income while studying. Indeed, Holland College on Prince Edward Island created an ECE program specifically built around working hours. Another model is the YMCA Bridge to Work ECE program developed by YMCA of Hamilton | Burlington | Brantford to connect newcomers to job opportunities in child care and support them with training to work in the field. Additional support should be given to innovative programs focused on training and upskilling people who pursue a career in early childhood education.

While these initiatives are important points of entry into the sector, the current capacity of Canada’s college programs will not be sufficient to address the current labour shortage, let alone to supply the required workforce expansion to reach ratios required for additional spaces. Depending on the pace of expansion, it is estimated as many as 20,000 early learning and child care educators and support staff would be required annually. Furthermore, educational and training requirements across the country are inconsistent, resulting in barriers to recognizing credentials across provinces, territories or other countries. The lack of harmonized education requirements further compounds the staff shortage in Canada.

COMPENSATION, WORKING CONDITIONS AND RECOGNITION

During The Quality Question roundtable, participants were asked: What do we need to fill the existing 15,000 ECE shortage? The top answers were unanimously improved compensation (wages, benefits and pension), better working conditions and recognition of the profession. Average weekly earnings in the early learning and child care sector continue to be below the average earning for Canadians. On average, earnings in the sector equated to $640 per week or about $35,000 annually in 2019. Additionally, long hours and limited access to health benefits and pension plans are common within the early learning and child care sector, leading to low job satisfaction. Educators regularly leave early learning and child care for positions with higher compensation packages and improved working conditions in other learning and care sectors such as school boards. Roundtable participants noted that, in their experience, approximately 66 percent of
the child care workforce will transition in any given year. Additionally, research shows low wages in early learning and child care impact quality by “preventing qualified and committed individuals from considering working in child care or early education in the first place.” However, as mentioned, the 2021 federal budget and earlier investments to support recruitment and retention in the fall economic statement were largely silent on wages, although it is routinely cited as a top issue in the sector.

Outside of wages, working conditions — including staff-child ratios, group sizes and physical aspects — also impact job satisfaction for child care educators and support staff. Enhanced staff-child ratios, smaller group sizes and rich learning and play environments with ample physical space lead to better working conditions, allow educators to provide more time and attention to children, reduce stress for staff and create better learning and care environments for children. Together, low wages and poor working conditions correlate with the perception that working in the early learning and child care sector is not a highly valued or essential profession.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ECEs and child care support staff have been providing essential services to families and communities and supporting the overall economy. However, child care agencies have seen increasing rates of burnout among their staff caused by long hours, additional tasks associated with public health guidelines, limited relief staff and the ongoing anxiety of the virus. One-time recognition pay provided by most provincial governments has been helpful, however, permanent and competitive compensation packages and better working conditions would support job satisfaction and work motivation, improve recognition of the profession and support positive care and teaching interactions with children.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Professional development, mentorship, and career growth opportunities support positive employee engagement and retention in early learning and child care. The 2021 federal budget identified professional development as an area of investment to grow and support the workforce. Professional development opportunities help to ensure educators and child care support staff are up to date with the latest evidence and best practices for delivering care and learning programs for all children. Ongoing training can also support improved cultural competencies that create safer programs, respect and affirm diversity, cultivate a sense of belonging, and support the development of positive self-identify. As part of its acclaimed national curriculum, YMCA Playing to Learn™ and YMCA A Place to Connect™ (developed by the YMCA of Greater Toronto), child care educators receive regular training on the latest research on child development, provincial standards, developing respectful and responsive relationships with children and communicating with families, which support high-quality programming. Programs like these and others should be considered a gold standard and further developed to ensure wide availability to all ECEs and child care support staff.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were informed by expert consultations and recognize that every parent and child in any corner of the country should have affordable access to quality child care when they want or need it. They also address this report’s two foundational questions: how can the federal government be a partner in child care, and what is necessary for a high-quality child care system across the country? By implementing these recommendations, the federal government will be a meaningful partner in child care while also supporting a quality-centred system.

Develop and fund a comprehensive, national early learning and child care workforce strategy informed by labour force trends.

- This strategy should be co-ordinated with provincial and territorial efforts and focus on recruitment and retention of educators and support staff. As part of the strategy, initiatives should include establishing fair and competitive compensation, improving working conditions and enhancing access to education through bursaries and income support, as well as ongoing professional development and training opportunities to support career advancement. Efforts that improve wages, benefits and pensions for educators and support staff should be immediately prioritized. As a predominantly female workforce, these endeavours would support ongoing efforts to address the gender pay gap, while also enhancing recognition of child care educators as a valued, high-status profession.
Ensure long-term predictability, stability and accountability of expanded funding to the provinces.

- To promote meaningful system change, any funding agreement, whether multilateral or bilateral, needs to signal to both provinces and child care providers that long-term system change will be supported and measured against desired outcomes. These considerations of predictability and stability should be especially prioritized for compensation and benefits within the sector. A five-year agreement tied to the current funding commitment with clear objectives should serve as a starting point.

Extend direct wage support to ensure high-quality child care agencies withstand financial challenges exacerbated by COVID-19 and to maintain highly trained staff and quality spaces over the next 18 months.

- Direct wage support such as the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) has played a vital role in the sustainability and operation of the early learning and child care sector during the COVID-19 pandemic and would help to bridge the sector through the next 18 months. Additionally, the CEWS should be examined as a model the federal government could use to create a permanent, sector-specific mechanism to increase wages in early learning and child care.

Support the expansion and increased capacity of in-person and online ECE college programs across Canada to effectively build up the workforce in early learning and child care, and ensure the curriculum continues to be reflective of the demands and realities of the role.

- Additional supports should be available for newcomer students looking to build their language and communication skills prior to entering the field. Additionally, identify and fund innovative solutions that support entry into the field, which can be effectively scaled up.

- Consideration should also be given to supporting the harmonizing of credential recognition of ECEs, both cross-provincially and internationally.

Harmonize tax-based support with the $10-a-day vision as it rolls out to ensure those with persisting access issues receive necessary support.

- The challenge of child care affordability should be addressed by targeting support to those families who need it most. Tax credits and deductions may offer a reduced tax burden for families whose income is high enough to benefit from tax credits of deductions. It does not help parents pay for child care, nor does it increase the available of child care spaces. Some families will continue to have challenges with child care affordability or availability and these challenges should be prioritized in any tax-based support.
CONCLUSION

Although the investment may now exist, much work needs to be done to achieve a truly affordable and accessible high-quality Canada-wide child care system. To achieve such a system, both orders of government will need to prioritize workforce development when navigating jurisdictional challenges.

Without a robust, highly trained and well-compensated workforce, a $10-a-day child care system simply will not be possible. The provinces hold the jurisdictional authority over child care; the federal government has come to the table with the financial support, but provinces will need to implement the system.

A country like Canada can and should assert that any parent and child in any corner of the country should have affordable access to quality child care when they want or need it — and take the steps to build such a system.

More work needs to be done, but there is hope that a path forward exists.