

As the professional association for Registered Early Childhood Educators in Ontario, the AECEO is deeply concerned about the health and well-being of early childhood educators as the COVID-19 situation unfolds. In addition, the lack of decision-making and leadership from the Ministry of Education in providing clear direction to the child care and early years sector, subsequent to the closure of Ontario Public Schools, is highly problematic.

We are concerned that increased demand for the care of children who cannot attend their regular program/school may fall disproportionately to underpaid early childhood educators and other low-waged care workers. This also highlights the devaluation of care work and the incohesive ‘system’ that continues to make care an individual as opposed to collective responsibility.

The lack of decent work for early childhood educators amplifies pressures to attend work despite feeling ill, emergent need to care for family members, or other reasons related to COVID-19. In order to care-well for our communities, we need structures in place which ensure that early childhood educators and other early years staff are safe, healthy, and experience well-being through decent work.

As such we call on the Provincial Government to immediately:

- Make a clear decision and consider all best measures to ensure public health and well-being, including early childhood educators and early years staff.
- Ensure all early childhood educators and early years staff have protection for lost wages and work due to COVID-19
- Protect child care and early years programs and parents from lost income due to COVID-19.
- Ensure income and job protection for educators and parents affected by COVID-19
- Provide the early years and child care sector clear next steps.
- Implement adequate paid sick days for all workers.
- Restore 10 days of job-protected emergency leave days for all workers.
- Prevent employers from asking workers to provide doctors’ notes when they access paid sick days or job protected emergency leave.

As well, we call on the Federal Government to implement emergency measures to increase access to Employment Insurance (EI) and create an emergency fund for those experiencing a loss or interruption of earnings, and for those who cannot access EI.

In a recent memo, the Ministry of Education has clarified that, “*The Ministerial Order does not apply to child care ... Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David Williams is asking that all licensed child care centres actively check children, parents, staff and visitors for any symptoms and ask about recent travel history that may be related to COVID-19. It is critical that we keep COVID-19 out of our child care spaces.*” The AECEO acknowledges the collective responsibility of all citizens to protect community health. However, downloading responsibility to combat COVID-19 to individual early childhood educators, childcare workers, and programs, is highly negligent and inappropriate.

We urgently call on the Ontario government to take full responsibility for ensuring public well-being, including that of early childhood educators and early years staff.