



From Reopening to Recovery: A Child Care Plan for Ontario

Child care programs across Ontario have been temporarily closed in response to Covid-19. To achieve a safe reopening, we need a new plan for child care, with adequate funding and support. With this plan, a strengthened child care system could form the core of economic and social recovery.

The challenge

- **Health and safety:** We need robust health and safety protections to keep children, families and educators safe, and reassure them about reopening. Evidence suggests that to reopen safely we must greatly reduce the number of children per group and have fewer children per staff.
- **Financial viability:** Before the pandemic, the child care market relied on high parent fees and full enrolment to ensure that centres could stay afloat. Since we will need to reduce group sizes and many families are struggling financially, we cannot rely upon this model any longer.

The solution

- **Expand Ontario's current Emergency Child Care (ECC) programs.** ECC programs have been operating successfully in communities across Ontario, serving a higher risk population of health and essential service worker families. Reopening by expanding this model will inspire the confidence of parents and educators, and keep children as safe as possible. Best practices from these programs include:
 - **Enhanced staff to child ratios and smaller group sizes.** For example, two staff to a group of six children. Keep groups of staff and children separate from other groups.
 - **Base funding and no parent fees.** ECC programs are fully base funded by the provincial government, including increased funding for enhanced staffing levels, PPE, etc.
 - **Licensing and public health** approve the reopening plan of each program prior to reopening, including the use of physical space, staffing, and decent work conditions.
 - **Slow and staged reopening** including provincial guidelines on eligibility of families.

Funding the system

- Based on the current cost of Emergency Child Care, we estimate that this approach will mean tripling the current child care budget – an increase of \$2 Billion. The Federal and provincial governments must work together to ensure that the necessary funding and policy is in place.
- With this plan, Ontario will gain a real child care system that will support: parents in the workforce; children's learning and development; and decent work for educators.
- It will be a system that is prepared and nimble to control outbreaks, respond to a second wave of Covid-19, and grow to meet demand as we move forward to economic and social recovery.

Our full report *From Reopening to Recovery* lays out 27 detailed recommendations for moving forward. The full report is available at: childcareontario.org/from_reopening_to_recovery_a_plan

