



ONTARIO AUDITOR GENERAL EXPOSES **SYSTEMIC FAILURES** IN CHILD CARE

Atkinson Centre Statement on the Ontario Auditor General's Report on CWELCC

The Atkinson Centre recognizes the Ontario Auditor General's report on the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program as an urgent reminder of the need for stronger public accountability. The report highlights critical gaps in Ontario's approach: the Ministry of Education has not defined what an affordable child care system should look like, has failed to set performance measures to track equity and access, and has no province-wide strategy to recruit and retain early childhood educators. This workforce shortage is particularly concerning, as the Auditor General estimates Ontario will need up to 10,000 additional Registered Early Childhood Educators to meet expansion targets by 2026. Despite billions in federal funding, enrolment among low-income families has dropped, significant numbers of licensed spaces remain vacant or unutilized, and families continue to face long and opaque waitlists. The report also points to an unclear expansion strategy - Ontario has not set out how many new spaces are needed or where they should be located to meet demand fairly. Compounding this, there are no system-wide performance measures to determine whether CWELCC is successfully expanding access, particularly for underserved or marginalized communities. Together, these findings make clear that federal monitoring of bilateral agreements is essential if provinces and territories are to meet the goals of Canada's national child care plan.

The timing of the report is especially important. Ontario and the federal government are now negotiating a five-year renewal of the Canada-Ontario child care agreement, which expires in March 2026. The Auditor General's findings underscore the need for this renewal process to set stronger accountability requirements, ensure transparent use of public funds, and embed clear commitments on workforce and equity. Without these safeguards, Canada risks entrenching the very gaps that the national plan was meant to address.



The report also draws attention to the growing role of for-profit operators. In 2023, 43% of Ontario's CWELCC centres were run on a for-profit basis, up from 36% just the year before. The Ministry has not assessed how this high level of participation might affect access, quality, or equity, nor has it prioritized funding decisions based on need. Instead, expansion risks favouring areas where for-profit providers are concentrated rather than underserved communities. This finding is consistent with the [Québec Auditor General's report](#), which found insufficient subsidized spaces, weak oversight by the ministère de la Famille, and underrepresentation of low-income children in high-quality centres. Together, these reports demonstrate the systemic failure of market-driven models to provide what is fundamentally a public good.

For Canada's child care plan to succeed, governments must go beyond expanding the number of spaces. They must define clear outcomes, strengthen system-wide data collection, develop a comprehensive workforce strategy, and ensure public dollars are directed to equitable, high-quality, not-for-profit provision. Without these measures, the promise of affordable, accessible early learning and child care for all families will remain out of reach.

Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development