



ONTARIO COALITION FOR
Better Child Care



Rising Up for Child Care Workers and Early Childhood Educators

CUPE Ontario and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care
Lobby Toolkit–2020





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Introduction

The future of Ontario hinges on the ability of Ontarians to participate in the economic recovery from COVID-19. Yet, parents are increasingly reporting concerns about the provincial government's massive funding shortfalls hindering the safe re-opening of child care and early learning centres, the lack of adequate resources to operate programs safely, and the need to invest in a universally accessible public and not-for-profit child care and early learning system.

The child care and early learning sector was in crisis long before the pandemic but the Ford government has now put the sector on the brink of total collapse:

- **Child care and early learning programs are in financial devastation:** Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, most child care and early learning centres relied on high parent fees and full enrolment to ensure that they could stay afloat. With reduced group sizes in light of COVID-19 we cannot rely upon this model any longer. We also need adequate PPE, enhanced cleaning, training, and increased staffing. The Ford government has promised support for these measures but most municipalities have yet to receive the funding to flow to programs. The burden is on program operators to go into debt to cover these costs. Some child care centres have already announced that they will permanently close due to their inability to front these costs, such as the Early Learning Centre at Sault College.
- **Massive shortfall in funding:** In the first few months of the pandemic, several child care and early learning programs used the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) and provincial grants to cover the remaining 25% of salaries. However, the Ford government said in May that they were going to claw back provincial grants, putting programs into debt for money they spent to retain staff. After public backlash, the provincial government said that they'll fill in the gaps where municipal and federal funding falls short, but they have never indicated how much they'll provide and when.
- **Lack of planning:** On June 8, 2020, with only 3 days' notice, Premier Ford announced that child care programs across the province would be allowed to reopen. Parents were deeply confused by the government's lack of notice, weak guidelines for new health and safety protocols, and many were afraid to send their children back to their programs without time to undergo health and safety training to minimize the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak.
- **Reduced capacity:** If every child care and early learning program reopens the sector will only be at 90 per cent capacity due to new space restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19. There is currently no plan to immediately expand spaces. Even before the pandemic began, Ontario's child care and early learning system could only accommodate 30 per cent of children. Now parents face a lottery system for recently reopened spaces, as well as ever-expanding wait lists to enrol their children in programs.

The dedication of frontline child care and early learning staff has been completely ignored by the Ford government. Emergency child care staff were excluded from the government's \$4 top-up "pandemic pay" and there were vast disparities in compensation across regions—emergency workers in Peterborough earned \$30 per hour while those in Halton, who were doing the exact same jobs, only earned \$18 per hour. In addition, the Province's "Child Care Sustainability Funding Approach" does not allow for provincial funds to be used to pay RECEs and child care staff who worked from home supporting families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic or top-up laid off staff. We know that the Ford government has the resources to build a universally accessible child care system—they just choose to continue underfunding and undervaluing child care.

In May 2020, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC), that CUPE Ontario is a member of, and the Association for Early Childhood Educators (AECEO) released a new report, [From Reopening to Recovery](#), to lay out a roadmap of a new COVID-19 adapted child care and early learning system. The report's survey of over 4,000 staff found that they concerned about: access to adequate PPE, cleaning, and screening supplies to protect themselves and children; having enough staff to implement new health and safety protocols; and their ability to ensure a high quality early learning and care experience for young children given the new protocols.

The COVID-19 has been hard on us all but we should celebrate our critical victories in the last year:

- In 2019 we helped secure the continuation of the \$2 per hour wage enhancement for RECEs and child care workers.
- Following the 2019 provincial budget, child care and early learning was facing over \$80 million in funding cuts. Our members and allies sent thousands of messages to their MPPs, collected petitions, held a day of action, and banded together with municipal leaders to push back against the cuts. After a two-month campaign with the OCBCC, the cuts were cancelled and cuts were put on hold for a year.
- In January 2020 we successfully put pressure on Peterborough city council to save their before and after school programs and two municipal child care centres. Their decision saved over 200 child care spaces in a city with a waitlist of over 1,000, along with 30 child care jobs for members of CUPE Local 126. CUPE 126 members reached out to parents, child care advocates and allies, and organized multiple rallies when the cuts were being debated by council.

We have momentum, but our work is far from over. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had serious effects on children and in order to support their recovery child care and early learning must be treated as a priority. **Now, more than ever, we need to seriously commit to universally accessible child care and early learning system.** This tool kit will provide you with the resources that you need to demand your MPP to take action now.



Why meet with your MPP?

Meeting with Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) is one of the most effective advocacy tactics at our disposal. By meeting with your MPP, you put a human face onto issues in early learning and child care. This can change the politician's perception of the issue from being about spaces, grants and regulations to being about the real-life challenges that families, educators and programs in their local community are facing, especially during such a difficult time as the COVID-19 pandemic.

We need you to share your stories, experiences and knowledge about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected you as a worker and community member so that our elected leaders know how important this issue is to people in their communities. With your permission, your MPP may even bring forth your story to the legislature. Sometimes when speaking to politicians we fear that we are not articulate enough or that we'll freeze. But most people find that when they feel passionate about an issue it's surprisingly easy to talk about it once they get started. We also may fear we won't be able to answer politicians' questions. That's okay. You're allowed to be unsure about some things. Just be honest and tell them that you'll get back to them, and then be sure to follow up.

Likewise, you may ask your MPP a question that they don't have the answer to. They'll often ask central party staff to research and prepare an answer for you. This makes them better aware of the issue that you are raising.

Meeting with MPPs also gives you a chance to listen to the MPP's position and concerns, which can help us adapt our strategy for future advocacy. MPPs in different regions tend to compare notes about constituency meetings to help them identify when there is widespread support or opposition across the province on different issues.

No matter which party your MPP represents, it is worth having a meeting with them. We need to build all-party support for a universally accessible child care system that meets the needs of all parties involved in the sector.

We need to meet with all MPPs we can to raise our concerns amid the COVID-19 crisis but our effort now is not about having a one-time meeting. Rather, we should aim to become the MPP's link to the child care community, a resource person that they can come to when they have questions, and a trusted local constituent who can speak about ongoing issues facing our sector.



How to Secure a Meeting

1. **Find your MPP:** If you are unsure about who your MPP is, visit here: <https://www.ola.org/en/members/current>
2. **E-mail the MPP's constituency office to set up a virtual or telephone meeting.** See *our sample letter to send to your MPP*. If you don't receive a response within a week, follow up with a phone call.
3. **In your e-mail or phone message, be sure to mention that you are a local constituent.** If you are part of a local child care and/or early learning program, mention this too, as well as other local parents and educators who are joining you.
4. **Be flexible in the times that you can meet—offer a few dates to meet.** During the summer months, MPPs are in their communities as the Legislature is not sitting. However, be sure to emphasise the urgency of the issues you would like to discuss given the current circumstances of COVID-19.
5. **If the MPP is unavailable for a meeting, request a meeting with a member of their staff.** Staff often have more time to meet, can answer many questions and can raise your concerns with the MPP. If you still would like to meet with your MPP ask the staff if a follow-up meeting is possible.

MPP Meeting Checklist

BEFORE THE MEETING

- ☐ Review the materials in this toolkit, along with OCBCC and AECEO report From Recovery to Reopening, to get a clear understanding of the issues and what we are asking for. If you are able, you can add notes about the specific situation in your community related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Do you believe that the Ford government is equipped to support the full reopening of child care and early learning programs? What do you need to support workers during the recovery from COVID-19?
- ☐ Know how long your meeting is.
- ☐ Decide who will say what in your team and how you'll stay within the allotted time. Decide who will take some short notes.
- ☐ Have the necessary documents ready to e-mail to the MPP: Our photo sign and the 1-page summary document geared towards MPPs.
- ☐ Ask the MPP which program they prefer for virtual meetings and if they will set up the meeting or if they would like you to set it up.
- ☐ Ensure that all of your technological devices are functioning properly and fully charged. Plan to be ready for the virtual or phone meeting 10-15 minutes early.

DURING THE MEETING

- ☐ Introduce yourself and your group.
- ☐ Take the lead. You asked for the meeting, so you can lead the conversation.
- ☐ Listen to your MPP but don't let them talk so much that you don't get a chance to respond.
- ☐ Treat all questions calmly and seriously. You can learn a lot from the questions they ask.
- ☐ If your MPP asks a question you do not know the answer to, do not make up a response on the spot. Tell them you will respond back via email or phone call with an answer.
- ☐ For the note taker: write down if the MPP commits to something or refuses to commit to something.
- ☐ Ask if the MPP will take a photo with our sign and if CUPE Ontario and the OCBCC can share it on social media. Also ask them if they would be willing to post the picture on their social media account and tag CUPE Ontario and the OCBCC.
- ☐ Do not prolong the meeting beyond the allotted time, unless your MPP indicates that they want the discussion to continue.

AFTER THE MEETING

- ☐ Take a group photo with the MPP and staff you're meeting with. Send any notes and photos to cgilligan@cupe.ca. Indicate if we can share the photos on social media. By sharing photos on social media, we can help ensure public accountability to commitments and comments made during meetings.
- ☐ Debrief with your group right after the meeting.
- ☐ Flag any questions from the politician that you could not answer and information that was requested.
- ☐ Flag any commitments that were made to you by the politician.
- ☐ Continue your contact after the meeting! Send the MPP a thank you letter or email. In that note, offer to help put the MPP in touch with other members of your local and child care and early learning community, or assist them with holding a virtual local town hall meeting or roundtable on the current issues.

Speaking notes to guide your MPP meeting

INTRODUCTION

- Introduce yourselves: say what you do, where you are from, and your CUPE local. Be sure to mention if you are a local constituent.
- Thank the MPP for meeting with you today. Confirm how long you have for the meeting.
- Indicate what you want to discuss in the meeting: To share your perspective on child care and early learning in Ontario during the COVID-19 pandemic and to ask for their personal commitment to learn more about these issues, and supporting a universally accessible child care and early learning system.
- One person in your group should share a short, personal story about their work experience, which explains the current challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Keep it brief but powerful - under 3 minutes.

EXPLAIN OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- After sharing a story, you can transition to explain our recommendations for the sector.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

IMMEDIATELY INJECT NEW FUNDING FOR CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING

The provincial government needs to provide adequate funding for child care and learning workers and programs in order to ensure a safe and effective reopening. Program operators were already strained from losing parent fees when they closed—if these programs do not receive adequate funding for PPE, training and staffing, they may need to increase parent fees or permanently close.

We estimate that the recommendations in the OCBCC and AECEO report From Recovery to Reopening will mean **tripling** the child care and early learning budget—an increase of \$2 billion. We need the federal and provincial governments to work together to ensure that the necessary funding and policy is in place. Recently the federal government announced \$625 million to municipalities as part of a relief package but this funding needs to stretch across all child care and early learning programs in Canada!

Our demand: full base funding for all existing programs to cover the costs needed to reopen child care and early learning. In particular, we need enhanced staff-to-child ratios to hire more staff for learning, cleaning, and screening.

RECOMMENDATION 2: ENFORCE ENHANCED HEALTH AND SAFETY REGULATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

The current health and safety guidelines are a huge concern for workers. Explain the need for clear regulations as well as the importance of creating these regulations in consultation with experts in the field.

There has been no discussion in regard to sector-specific health and safety training by local public health authorities. Explain the importance of you and your co-workers feeling confident in your ability to use PPE and maintain health and safety procedures for staff, families, boards, and operators.

Our demand: sector-specific training on public health and safety guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION 3: PROVIDE FAIR COMPENSATION FOR ALL CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING STAFF

The government needs to address the persistence of low wages and gaps in pay across regions. For example, emergency child care workers in Peterborough earned \$30 per hour while those in Halton, who were doing the exact same jobs, only earned \$18 per hour. In addition, the government's "Child Care Sustainability Funding Approach" did not allow provincial funds to be used to pay RECEs and early learning and child care staff who worked from home supporting families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic or top-up laid off staff.

Our demand: \$25 per hour provincial starting wage for all child care and early learning staff.

Early learning and child care is an impactful sector that acts as a base support to many. Workers' engagement with children, families, and communities is essential during the transition to reopening and recovering from COVID-19. Therefore, it is necessary that RECEs and child care and early learning workers are provided with professional pay and safe working environments. **Our demand: increased paid sick/emergency leave days for RECEs and child care and early learning staff for a minimum of 21 days per year.**

RECOMMENDATION 4:

BOOST CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING TO BOOST ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND COMMIT TO A UNIVERSAL AND ACCESSIBLE SYSTEM.

COVID-19 has made the fragility of Ontario's child care and early learning system even more apparent. The ability for women, single parents and low-income families to re-enter the workforce is compromised without accessible and affordable child care—boosting the sector will boost the economy by increasing labour market participation, retaining professionals and creating new jobs.

Parent fees continue to climb due to chronic underfunding. In 2019, a full-time child care space in Toronto costed \$1,774/month or \$21,288/year. By contrast, parent fees in Québec for all age groups were set by the province at \$179/month. We can have low parent fees like Québec if our provincial government commits to substantial public operational funding and set fees as a matter of public policy. The experience of FREE 24-hour emergency child care for frontline workers for the first few months of the pandemic has shown us that accessible child care and early learning is possible with political will.

Evidence is mounting that for-profit child care—treated as a market commodity to generate profit—simply doesn't deliver the quality care and public oversight that the public system provides. If public and not-for-profit programs close as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, the sector will be dominated by for-profit programs. Economist Armine Yalnizyan warns that child care could face the same health crisis as long-term care homes: cuts, privatization, and deregulation led to extremely low-quality care. Child care should not be managed by the private sector—it's in the public interest, so it should be delivered by a public and not-for-profit system.

The benefits of investing in child care and early learning at an early age far outweigh its upfront costs. Children who have access to early learning are more likely to remain in the school system and succeed. But child care spaces are especially challenging to secure for infants and children with disabilities and those in rural, Indigenous, and Northern communities. Space shortages and long wait lists are preventing those children from reaching their full potential. **We need to increase child care and early learning space availability by opening new, publicly-funded and operated programs.**

IF THE MPP IS: CONSERVATIVE

We both know that child care and early learning is a good investment. A strong path forward will revive Ontario's economy and support social recovery during, and after, the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ford government needs to immediately inject new funding for child care and early learning.

Child care and early learning isn't a partisan issue. Ontario cannot work without it, and providing safe, high quality early learning in a decent work environment is essential.

A full base-funded model was put in place to operate emergency child care programs in Ontario. This funding model must be expanded to child care and early learning programs across the province in order to support families facing economic constraints.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had serious impacts on the economy and is disproportionately impacting women, single parents and low-income families. In order to achieve economic recovery women's employment must be prioritized.

IF THE MPP IS: NDP

Thank you for the NDP's continued support of child care and early learning in the legislature, especially understanding the need to support public and non-profit programs. We need the NDP to continue to make child care and early learning a defining issue.

As the Official Opposition, please continue to use every tool available to protect existing programs that families rely on, enhanced wage support for RECEs and staff, and continue to put forward a vision of universal and accessible child care and early learning.

We want to create a unified front with local advocates, municipal leaders and the Opposition to explain the importance of investing in child care and early learning programs. Ask: can we work together on this?

IF THE MPP IS: LIBERAL

The previous Liberal government's investments in the child care and early learning sector were game changing. They were making Ontario a leader. Please continue to make child care and early learning a defining issue.

We want to create a unified front with local advocates, municipal leaders and the Opposition to explain the importance of investing in child care and early learning programs. Ask: can we work together on this?

CLOSING THE MEETING

- Ask the MPP if they will commit to the recommendations in the OCBCC and AECEO report and advocate for further investment in the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ask if they will have their photo taken with the sign indicating that they are a #RisingUpForChildCare.
- Remind them that you are part of a broad coalition, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, to build a movement of parents, advocates, and child care workers to create a better child care system in Ontario
- Thank them for meeting with you and email them the 1-page summary document and the From Reopening to Recovery report. Offer to help put the MPP in touch with other members of your community or assist them with holding a virtual local town hall meeting or roundtable on the current issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

MPP Meeting Report Back Form

MPP's Name: _____

MPP's Constituency: _____

MPP's Party: _____

Names of attendees in your group (please indicate if they are CUPE members):

Did the MPP take a photo?

YES NO

If yes, please e-mail the photo to cgilligan@cupe.ca and also post it on your social media accounts using the hashtag #RisingUpForChildCare and mention the handles @CUPEOntario and @ChildCareON. Be sure to also tag the politician.

Did the MPP commit to advocating for immediate funding and further investment during the COVID-19 pandemic?

YES NO

Did the MPP make any other commitments or refuse to make commitments? Why?

Did the MPP ask any questions that you need to respond to? If yes, what were they?

Other issues or notable discussions:

Who will be responsible for following up with the MPP?

What needs to be included in your follow up email/phone call? (always include a thank you!)

- A request for information the MPP promised you
- Answer(s) to questions the MPP asked you
- Request for another meeting or event
- Other: _____



ONTARIO COALITION FOR
Better Child Care



I AM RISING UP FOR CHILD CARE





Rising Up for Child Care Workers and Early Childhood Educators

CUPE Ontario represents more than 12,000 members working in child care and early childhood education. We know that the future of Ontario hinges on the ability of Ontarians to participate in the economic recovery from COVID-19. A strong child care and early learning system will revive Ontario's economy and support social recovery during, and after, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Child care and early learning isn't a partisan issue. Ontario cannot work without it, and providing safe, high quality education in a decent work environment is essential. A strengthened system could form the core of economic and social recovery. **Now, more than ever, we need to seriously commit to universally accessible child care and early learning system.**

Our Recommendations

Immediately inject new funding for child care and early learning: The Ford government has promised support for PPE, training for staff, and increased staffing, but most municipalities have yet to receive the funding to flow to programs. Right now, the burden is on program operators to go into debt and cover these costs, with no clear promises of how much funding they'll receive and when. We need full base funding for all existing programs to cover the costs needed to safely reopen and operate. In particular, we need to hire more staff for enhanced cleaning and oversight to minimize the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak.

Enforce enhanced health and safety regulations: We recommend sector-specific health and safety training by local public health authorities. We need robust health and safety regulations to keep children, families and staff safe.

Provide fair compensation for child care and early learning professionals: Early learning and child care is an impactful sector that acts as a base support to many. Therefore, it is necessary that RECEs and child care and early learning staff are provided with professional pay and safe working environments. We are asking for a \$25 provincial starting rate to close gaps in compensation across regions and a minimum of 21 paid sick/emergency leave days per year.

Boost child care to boost economic recovery and commit to a universal and accessible child care system: Programs relied on skyrocketing parent fees and full enrolment to ensure that they can stay afloat. Now parents face a lottery system for recently reopened spaces, an ever-expanding wait lists, and the possibility of increased parent fees if programs don't receive the financial support they need. Since we need to reduce group sizes and many families are struggling financially, we simply cannot rely upon this model any longer.

In addition, the ability for women, single parents and low-income families to re-enter the workforce is compromised without accessible and affordable child care—boosting the sector will boost the economy by increasing labour market participation, retaining child care and early learning professionals and creating new jobs.



ONTARIO COALITION FOR
Better Child Care



Sample e-mail letter to request a meeting with your MPP

The Hon. [Your MPP's name]
Constituency Office Street Address
City/Town, Postal Code

Date

Dear Hon. [Your MPP's name],

My name is [your name] and I am a member of your riding. I work at [your workplace] and I am a member of [your CUPE local] and also a part of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC). I am writing to you to request a meeting to urgent issues concerning our child care and early learning community.

As we come closer to September, parents, staff and operators of child care programs are increasingly worried about the transition to reopen programs. We would like to discuss with you the need for robust health and safety regulations to keep children, families and staff safe as programs continue to reopen as well as the immediate and long-term funding to accommodate our new reality amid COVID-19.

I invite you to meet with [indicate with whom the MPP will meet: your co-workers, parents of your child care centre or program, and other members in your child care community]. We are available to meet on [indicate a few dates and times that your group is available]. We would love to determine a time to meet soon to see how we can work together on these priorities. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[Personal signature if available]
Name

Address
City/Town, Province
Postal Code
E-mail
Phone Number

Sample e-mail letter to thank your MPP for meeting

The Hon. [Your MPP's name]
Constituency Office Street Address
City/Town, Postal Code

Date

Dear Hon. [Your MPP's name],

On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to thank you and your staff for setting up a meeting with us. I have attached here a summary document outlining our recommendations for the sector, as well a report by our partners in the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) and Association of Early Childhood Educators (AECEO) which contains recommendations to ensure a safe and healthy reopening and recovery from COVID-19.

[You can discuss answers to questions raised by your MPP or discuss potential actions with your MPP to advocate for support on concerns that you raised in your meeting – for example, you can suggest holding a virtual town hall with child care workers and parents]. We are looking forward to working together on urgent issues facing the child care and early learning sector.

Again, we thank you for taking the time to meet with us.

[Personal signature if available]
Name

Address
City/Town, Province
Postal Code
E-mail
Phone Number