

Alberta Extends CWELCC Agreement with 5,000 Additional Spaces, But Broader Affordability Gaps Remain

CALGARY, AB, CANADA, December 12, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Association of Canadian Early Learning Programs (ACE) acknowledges Alberta's announcement of a one-year extension to its Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) agreement, including 5,000 additional childcare spaces for licensed for-profit programs and additional infrastructure investment for non-profit centres. ACE commends Premier Smith and Minister Nicolaidis for their leadership in

advocating for parental choice and responsible stewardship of the significant public funding supporting this program. Their commitment to ensuring that families, not federal ideology, guide childcare decisions remains essential as Alberta works to secure a system that reflects the province's diverse needs.



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*Krystal Churcher, Board Chair
of ACE*

"We appreciate that Alberta secured additional spaces in these negotiations," said Krystal Churcher, Board Chair of ACE. "This expansion will help some operators and families who have been waiting for access. However, today's announcement does not address other significant gaps that continue to impact flexibility, affordability and accessibility for many Alberta families."

Since Alberta's May 15 announcement that its 26,200 for

profit space cap had been reached, hundreds of licensed centres were cut off from the Affordability Grant program. Parents enrolled in these centres are paying \$1,000 to \$1,500 per month while others pay \$15 per day, a difference of up to \$13,000 annually per child. Alberta could direct affordability funding toward these existing centres, reducing waitlists and utilizing available infrastructure.



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Beyond the space cap, the system is strained by the loss of Alberta's targeted subsidy this spring, which disproportionately affected lower- and middle-income families. The universal flat-fee model provides \$15-a-day daycare to all families regardless of income while many with the greatest financial need remain on waitlists. With billions of taxpayer dollars invested in CWELCC, it is reasonable to re-evaluate whether funding is directed where it has the greatest impact.

Separate from full-time daycare, other licensed early learning environments are also facing pressure. Preschools, part-time programs, and home-based care options are disadvantaged under the current flat-fee model, even though they provide vital, flexible care that many families rely on. These programs are critical in rural communities and for families with non-traditional work hours or children who thrive in smaller environments. Without provincial action during this extension, Alberta risks losing these valuable models and moving further toward a one-size-fits-all system that does not reflect the diverse ways families use early learning and care.

"Alberta's childcare sector is 56% for-profit, yet the federal agreement favours non-profit expansion," Churcher noted. "Every licensed operator in this province meets the same provincial standards for health, safety, curriculum, and staff qualifications. We support Alberta's advocacy for a model that reflects this reality, one that directs affordability funding based on family need and program quality rather than ownership type or federal preference."

Alberta faces significant constraints under the federal CWELCC framework, which imposes a rigid, ideology-driven funding model that limits provincial flexibility and fails to reflect the diverse, real-world needs of families and communities. The province estimates a \$5 billion funding shortfall between 2026 and 2031 and was one of only two provinces, alongside Ontario, to decline the five-year extension accepted by eight others. Instead, Alberta negotiated a one-year extension to continue pressing for a more flexible and sustainable approach that aligns with family choice, community realities, and long-term system viability.

"We recognize the province's challenges under the federal system, but the one-year timeline creates urgency rather than certainty," Churcher said. "We are calling on the province to support the licensed operators who have been left without access since May 15. These are quality providers ready to serve families immediately. Operators need sustainable, long-term funding commitments and equal access based on quality and compliance, not program type or ownership structure."

About ACE:

The Association of Canadian Early Learning Programs represents licensed childcare providers of all types across Canada, advocating for sustainable, accessible, high-quality, and affordable childcare.

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