

Quality Child Care Is Not A Frill

Quality child care is an essential service for Albertans and their families.

It supports our economy, our businesses, our communities and our quality of life.

In early 2020, 109,000 Alberta children were enrolled in 2,900 licensed or approved child care programs staffed by a workforce of 18,000.

Then COVID struck.

Licensed programs shut down, and more than half were forced to lay off all their staff. Parents scrambled to make other arrangements—abandoning careers and income to stay home with their kids. Businesses lost their workforce. And Alberta's economy collapsed.

Governments stepped in to help. But for many parents and many early learning and child care programs, the support that came was too little, too late.

Even before COVID-19, Alberta's child care system was in trouble. Today, it's a system in crisis.

Before COVID, child care programs had just been notified of significant funding cuts. Many were already operating on shoestring budgets, and some have now shut their doors for good. Others are struggling to survive the devastating impact of lost enrolment fees, workforce challenges and increased sanitation costs.

Non-profit programs in vulnerable, low-income communities are among the hardest hit. Programs in rural and remote communities are having to close their doors, leaving parents with no other child care options. And out-of-school care programs can't make ends meet when schoolchildren are learning online instead of in class.

Although Alberta's early learning and child care programs re-opened after the COVID shutdown, they were operating at 50% capacity—leaving many families without child care.

It's not just a matter of spaces.

A well-functioning early learning and child care system provides accessible, affordable high-quality programs. The availability of program spaces is just one component.

Access to spaces is determined by the cost of care. Parents can't send their children to programs they can't afford. Although fee subsidies are available to families earning less than \$75,000 a year, the subsidy does not cover the full cost of care. Child care remains unaffordable for many middle class families.

Consider this example from a recent study. In Edmonton, a two-parent family earning \$75,000 a year pays \$23,400 in child care fees for an infant and a preschooler: child care uses up 31% of their family income. In Calgary, the same family pays \$28,500 in child care fees, or 38% of their family income. Mortgage payments, rent, insurance, utilities, food, clothing, transportation and other essentials can quickly use up the balance, leaving families in a precarious position.

Spaces cannot be filled without qualified early childhood educators to staff them. Even before COVID, Alberta's Occupational Outlook forecast a shortage of 4,600 early childhood educators by 2028. The child care sector has always experienced high staff turnover rates. And the pandemic has made things worse.

For too many years, early childhood educators (ECEs) have put up with low wages, long hours and lack of respect for the important work they do. With the added uncertainty of a COVID economy, many experienced ECEs are leaving the field. Many new ECEs graduating with specialized diplomas and degrees are abandoning their career goals and exploring other options. They can't afford to stay in the child care sector.

Without qualified early childhood educators providing quality care, Alberta's child care system will collapse.

AECEA Association of
Early Childhood
Educators of
Alberta

Join us in speaking out for qualified early childhood educators and quality care.

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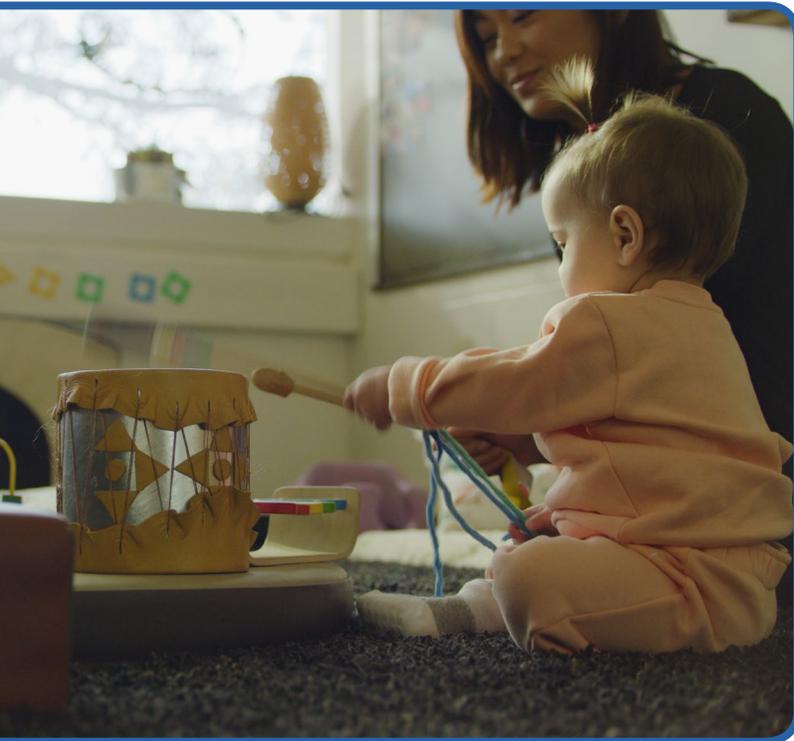
Why should we care if the system collapses?

Here's what will happen if it does.

ALBERTA'S FAMILIES WILL PAY A PRICE.

Quality early learning and child care meets children's physical, social, developmental and emotional needs. It helps children develop skills and provides them with rich, nurturing learning experiences. It encourages creativity, curiosity and exploration. It creates an inclusive environment that allows all children to learn in their own way and at their own pace. It builds children's confidence and helps them feel good about themselves. And it lays the foundation for health, well-being and success in life.

Without quality early learning and child care, Alberta's children will not have the support they need during their crucial early development years.



ALBERTA'S FAMILIES WILL PAY A PRICE.

For many Albertans, affordable, accessible, high-quality child care makes it possible to balance family and work responsibilities. It allows parents to build their careers and earn enough to support their families.

Without quality early learning and child care, many parents will have no options. They will be forced to give up careers and income so they can stay home with their kids.

LOW-INCOME, MIDDLE-INCOME AND SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES WILL FACE AN IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE.

For many parents, staying home with their children is simply not an option. They have to go to work—to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads.

Without affordable, high-quality child care, these parents face an impossible choice. Do they leave their children home alone? Or do they settle for any type of unregulated, inadequate or out-of-system care they can find?

Poor-quality early learning and child care can impair children's ability to deal with new or changing circumstances. It can be a risk factor for delayed language and cognitive development—particularly for children from low income families.

PARENTS WILL PAY A PRICE.

Early learning and child care programs are more than places to drop off kids. In many communities, they are meeting places and learning spaces where parents are engaged and supported as partners in their children's learning and development. Early learning and child care programs help to build intercultural bridges. They connect families with community-based supports. They provide parents with knowledge, skills, encouragement, individualized support and even basic necessities to help them create better lives for themselves and their families.

Without quality early learning and child care, Alberta's parents will lose a vital support system.

WOMEN WILL LOSE THE MOST.

Women constitute 98% of the child care workforce. These women will lose their jobs if the sector collapses.

Women in general will lose their hard-earned gains in labour force participation. The wage gap will widen once again. Families will lose a significant portion of their income. And women will lose an essential human right—the right to pursue rewarding careers.

Before the pandemic, Canadian women earned 42% of household income. When COVID struck, women's labour force participation dropped from a historic high to 55%—a level not seen since the 1980s. Family incomes plummeted in sync.

Without quality early learning and child care, women will continue to leave the workforce, and Alberta's economy will continue to shrink.

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ALBERTA'S ECONOMY WILL PAY A PRICE.

A healthy economy depends on a healthy business community, robust public services and an active non-profit sector. When parents have to stay home with their children, businesses, schools, hospitals, care centres, community agencies and other sectors lose the workforce they depend on.

Alberta can't re-open and the economy can't recover unless parents go back to work.

But parents can't go back unless someone looks after their children. They can't go back if they can't afford child care. And they won't go back unless they know their children have the quality child care they need and deserve.

Without a quality child care system, Alberta's economy can't recover.

EVERYONE WILL PAY A PRICE.

Alberta needs to invest in a publicly funded, high-quality child care system.

This is not a luxury. And it's not an option. Alberta's future depends on it.

A recent Environics poll found that 78% of Albertans support universal, public child care so that parents, especially mothers, can more easily go back to work and earn wages.

AECEA believes that a qualified workforce is the foundation for a high-quality early learning and child care system.

We believe that early childhood educators need specialized education to provide children with quality early learning experiences. We believe that the educators who look after our children deserve fair wages, satisfying work and supportive working conditions. We believe they should be valued and respected for the important work they do.

AECEA is committed to working with government and community partners.

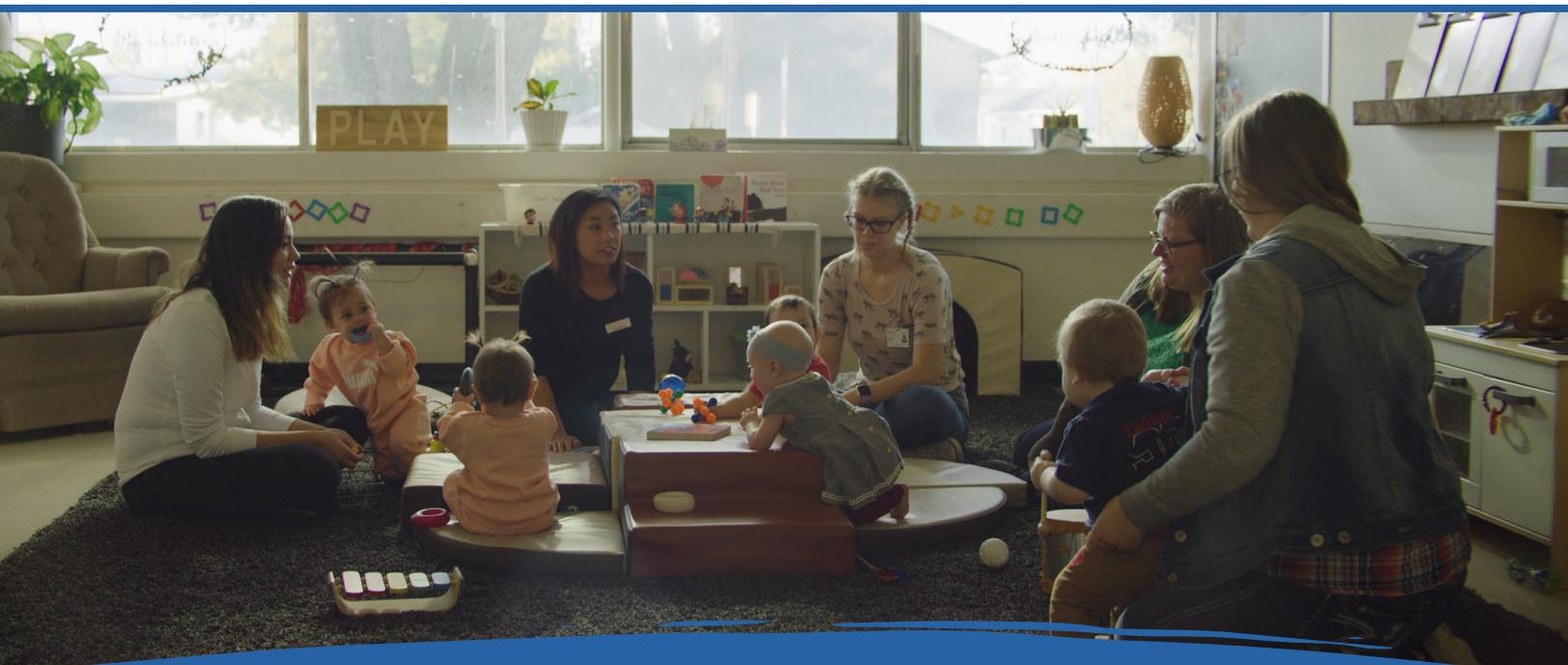
Together, we can build a future in which well-educated, well-supported early childhood educators are part of an affordable, well-funded, quality-driven early learning and child care system.

Learn more about AECEA's work to support qualified educators and quality child care.

Check out the videos and publications on www.aecea.ca/quality

Join us in spreading the word that quality child care is not a frill.

This document was produced in cooperation with the Alberta Early Learning and Care Leaders Caucus, with funding support from the Canadian Child Care Federation.



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