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NEW CHILD CARE SURVEY RAISES MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

For Immediate Release

ONTARIO—March 4, 2021— A new Angus Reid poll indicates that Canada’s licensed child care sector is on the path to recovery, but doesn’t shed much light on whether a majority of families with young children actually support the concept of a national child care program, say members of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO).

“Certainly, we were pleased to hear that so many families have been able to return to their pre-pandemic child care arrangements, or have found suitable alternatives,” says Andrea Hannen, ADCO’s executive director. “That’s a good sign, in that it means that a lot of parents are finally able to get back to work.” There have been some changes, though. Centres that are normally full may now have spaces available. Additionally, many child care centres are reporting increased demand for part-time child care or child care during non-traditional hours because for a lot of families, the world of work has changed. Parents may be working from home more, working reduced hours, freelancing or working as part of the gig economy. “All of these things change how families use child care. The trend is toward needing more flexibility, as opposed to just the 7:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday to Friday licensed care arrangements they had before.”

This calls into question how the Trudeau government’s promised “national child care program” could be made relevant to families. “Education, health and social services are all areas of provincial responsibility, which means there is no clear path beyond funding for a new national child care program to be rolled out,” says Hannen. “Even if there were, the starting point for each province is different, so would the program look different in every province? Would it be universal, or just for families with middle and lower incomes? Would it involve funding for existing licensed centres, so they can lower their fees? Or is it children being shifted to public sector institutions as soon as parental leave ends for mom and dad? Would that mean it becomes mandatory for all children like school is? And, how much are families willing to pay for that system in terms of fees, taxes and intergenerational debt? At this point, there are a lot more questions than answers.”

“The takeaway from the most recent poll seems to be that some families feel they need some additional help either finding or paying for child care,” says Hannen. “The solutions to these challenges will vary from family to family, and depend a lot on whether they’re in an urban or rural setting, what their usual hours of work are, and of course, on the parents’ personal preferences and on the individual temperaments of the children involved. Child care is never one-size-fits-all. The most practical and affordable path forward is probably to provide a higher level of funding support for parents, so they can choose the care solutions that best suit their needs.”

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ADCO is the industry association for Ontario’s independent licensed child care centres. Independent licensed child care centres are those that are not run by public sector entities such as municipalities or school boards, or by large multi-service agencies such as YMCAs. While independent licensed child care centres may be run as businesses, not-for-profits or co-ops, their core business is licensed child care. Independent licensed child care centres account for more than a third of Ontario’s licensed child care spaces. Many are run as small businesses, owned and operated by women.

For further information, please contact:
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