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CHILD CARE OPERATORS SAY IMMIGRATION MISMANAGEMENT IS THWARTING EXPANSION

December 16, 2024 – Mismanagement of immigration by both the provincial and federal governments is undermining the growth of the licensed child care sector, says the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO). ADCO represents both commercial and not-for-profit child care centres and is the oldest child care industry association in the country. “Even within each level of government, it’s like the right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing,” says Andrea Hannen, ADCO’s executive director. The recently released [Ontario Early Years and Child Care Annual Report 2024](#) reveals that the number of Registered Early Childhood Educators as a percentage of staff working in licensed centres across the province dropped from 58.9% in 2022 to 56% in 2024.

“When the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program (CWELCC) was introduced in 2021, there weren’t enough qualified staff to keep all existing licensed centres running at full capacity, let alone expand to meet the increased demand for child care. Many centres still have rooms closed or have cut back on their hours, not due to lack of demand for their services, but due to the lack of qualified staff,” says Hannen. In recent weeks, the federal government has cut back on the number of international students eligible to receive a work permit after completing their studies. It also opted not to include child care centres as among the industries for which exceptions would be made. [The federal government also neglected to exempt child care employers from changes it made to the Labour Market Impact Assessment \(LMIA\) rules.](#) This prevents those in the GTA and other regions with unemployment rates of six percent or more from accessing the LMIA program.

But the federal changes aren’t the only challenges Ontario’s child care employers face. The [Office of the Auditor General of Ontario’s recent Performance Audit of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program](#) (OINP) points to a number of other issues impacting Ontario’s supply of qualified child care staff. The Office of the Auditor General noted that “The federal government (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) does not have an arrangement with Ontario or any other province to allow the province to identify labour market priorities, with a focus on occupations that the federal government should consider when it selects economic immigrants.”

The report also flagged other critical issues impacting Ontario’s licensed child care sector. They include the fact that while the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development requests input from other provincial Ministries about jobs and skills needed in industries they are responsible for or involved with, “there is no formal structure or defined information to be provided in responses from other Ministries, resulting in responses that contain inconsistent and anecdotal information.” These and other gaps meant that documented vacancies for early childhood educators and assistants in Ontario increased by over 500% between 2019 and 2023, growing from 525 to 3260, with only about 200 nominations processed by the OINP. In other words, while early childhood educators and assistants made Ontario’s top ten list of job vacancies from 2019 to 2023, they ranked 49th in terms of the OINP nominations during the same period.

“Child care employers have long flagged specific barriers for qualified foreign workers seeking to pursue child care careers in Canada, but this is the first time we’ve seen the impact of these government-created challenges quantified,” says Hannen. “We hope that the Province of Ontario will implement the Auditor General’s recommendations about the OINP and that the federal government will also do its part to make it easier for qualified individuals and international students seeking to build careers in Ontario’s licensed child care sector to do so.”

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ADCO is the industry association for Ontario’s independent licensed child care centres, both commercial and not-for-profit. 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. Most are small businesses, owned and operated by women. For further information, please contact: the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO) at admin@adco-o.on.ca or Andrea Hannen at 1-877-685-4288, ext. 1.