

Ministry of Education
Minister Responsible for
Early Years and Child Care
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Ministère de l'Éducation
Ministre responsable de la
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May 4, 2017

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett
Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
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The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos
Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
140 Promenade du Portage,
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Dear Ministers Bennett and Duclos,

I am pleased to share with you important information from Ontario's 2017 Budget regarding our government's commitment to expand access to child care and early years programs for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and families.

In September 2016, our government announced a major child care expansion plan to help 100,000 more children in Ontario aged 0-4 access high-quality licensed child care. This commitment will begin in 2017 and roll out over five years. It will double the current provincial capacity of the 0-4 age group, creating spaces for about 40 per cent of children province-wide. As announced on April 26, 2017, and in the provincial 2017 Budget, we are moving forward immediately to deliver on this historic commitment, beginning with providing 24,000 more children up to four years old with enhanced access to child care in 2017-18. This includes an investment of \$200 million in 2017-18 to increase accessibility and affordability of licensed child care throughout the province.

We recognize the importance of culturally appropriate child care and early years programs for First Nation communities and are committed to engaging with our First Nations and federal partners to better understand child care needs on reserve, including demand for licensed spaces, and to co-developing a responsive and sustainable approach for First Nations child care.

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We will seek to engage First Nations on this commitment through existing processes established with Provincial/Territorial Organizations (PTOs) and Independent First Nations, working with our colleagues at the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and the Ministry of Indigenous Relationships and Reconciliation (MIRR), in order to support alignment across programs and initiatives for children and families and reduce burdens on First Nations partners. We look forward to exploring opportunities for collaboration with Canada on our respective child care and early years initiatives.

We are encouraged by Canada's 2016 Budget commitment of \$100M in 2017/18 for early learning and child care on reserve, and plans to establish a national Indigenous early learning and child care framework. It will be important to understand how the federal funding commitments will support child care needs on reserve, as we move forward with our First Nations partners.

I am also pleased to share with you further details regarding my ministry's early years commitments under *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*, which was released on May 30, 2016. The *Journey Together* sets out the province's plan to work with Indigenous partners to help address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings and Calls to Action. It includes a commitment to work closely with First Nation partners to enhance existing provincially-funded child and family programs on reserve, and to make culturally relevant child and family programs available in more communities. Off reserve, Ontario has committed to help increase the number of licensed child care spaces and culturally relevant programming for children and families, to be delivered by Indigenous organizations working with municipal child care services.

The Ministry of Education will invest up to \$93.5M in new funding over the next two years for these *Journey Together* early years commitments. This includes:

- On Reserve – Up to \$23.5M over the next two years for new and enhanced child and family programs delivered by First Nations, with up to \$12M in ongoing annual operating funding beginning in 2018-19.
- Off reserve – Up to \$70M over the next two years (including capital investments) for child care and child and family programs delivered by Indigenous-led organizations, with ongoing annual operating funding of up to \$30M beginning in 2018-19.

Since the release of the *Journey Together*, ministry officials have been working with PTOs and Independent First Nations to co-develop a plan for moving forward with these early years commitments on reserve. Our government is providing capacity funding to support PTOs and Independent First Nations to conduct needs assessments, liaise with the ministry, and support the development of proposals for child and family programs for children aged 0-6 that are responsive to community needs and opportunities. The needs assessments will support decision-making with respect to the *Journey Together* on reserve commitment, and will also help to inform discussions and plans regarding the expansion of child care on reserve.

Likewise, our ministry has worked closely with provincial Indigenous organizations to co-develop a process for implementing the *Journey Together* early years commitments off reserve. Currently, local Indigenous organizations and service system managers are collaborating to identify local needs and develop joint proposals for culturally relevant early years programs. Capacity funding has been provided to these partners to support their ongoing involvement in this important initiative.

These investments in the early years are an important element of our provincial commitment to working with partners to help build a strong and prosperous future for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and families in Ontario. I look forward to ongoing collaboration with Canada as we move forward in partnership with First Nations to strengthen the child care and early years system on reserve.

Thank you,



Indira Naidoo-Harris
Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care

Resources:

- www.ontario.ca/childcare
- www.ontario.ca/page/quality-child-care-more-families
- www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/FamilyPrograms.html

Cc: Deputy Grand Chief Denise Stonefish, Political Confederacy Social Services
Portfolio
Members of the Political Confederacy
Hon. David Zimmer, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Hon. Michael Coteau, Minister of Children and Youth Services
Hon. Mitzie Hunter, Minister of Education
Bruce Rodrigues, Deputy Minister of Education