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FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL AGREEMENTS UNLIKELY TO SOLVE FAMILIES' CHILD CARE WORRIES

For Immediate Release

ONTARIO—September 17, 2021— Child care has emerged as a key issue in the 2021 federal election, yet child care providers remain divided on which party's platform is likely to deliver the best outcome for families. "It really boils down to whether you believe complicated, multi-year, government-run schemes are likely to produce better results for families than empowering families themselves," says Andrea Hannen, executive director of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO).

"There are several challenges with the federal/provincial agreements signed so far," says Hannen. "People shouldn't expect that they're going to automatically lead the country to a national \$10/day child care system that will be accessible to all families." One of the biggest challenges is that the language in some of the agreements specifically limits child care growth to the public and not-for-profit sectors. This puts the cost of any future expansion firmly onto the backs of taxpayers. Historically, provinces that have tried this approach have tended to have the longest waiting lists for child care, because governments simply can't create spaces fast enough to keep pace with the population's needs. Even Quebec has long been dependent on the commercial sector to create licensed spaces.

The prospect of having to deal with yet another level of government bureaucracy, especially one that is committed to limiting their growth is also likely to force many of Canada's existing licensed centres to close. In hot real estate markets, this is likely to happen long before any new federal/provincial agreement will result in a sufficient number of new spaces being built. "Families will be left scrambling," says Hannen, "particularly in provinces that have large numbers of licensed centres run as small businesses. If provinces like Ontario and Alberta were to sign onto the federal government's proposed public and not-for-profit only scheme, the owners of these centres aren't going to wait around to see what other sanctions the government is going to impose on the centres and staff teams they've worked so hard to build. A lot of them will simply close their doors."

"Providing funding directly to families is a less risky approach," says Hannen. "It doesn't carry the risk of harming any province's existing child care system and it builds on what is already working in neighbourhoods across the country. It's also a lot more equitable. As an organization that represents licensed child care owner/operators we'd love to be able to serve every family and every child. But the reality is that the majority of Canadian families are using other options, such as care by a parent, relative, neighbour or home caregiver. It isn't always a question of accessibility or affordability. Sometimes it's a need for greater flexibility. Sometimes it's a need for a more homelike setting or simply a matter of personal preference. Families shouldn't be penalized for that, or forced to pay higher taxes to subsidize child care centres they don't use. All families deserve respect and support."

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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:
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