

Premier Rachel Notley unveils funds for new \$25/day childcare centres ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

\$10-million investment in Alberta's childcare system aims to create 1,000 new affordable daycare spaces.

It's the first step in overhauling the province's childcare system - 18 new early learning and daycare centres across the province, with flexible hours, per-day fees capped at \$25 and support for children with diverse needs.

Affordable childcare was one of the key planks in the NDP's election platform. Premier Rachel Notley said Tuesday the move would create 230 jobs in the childcare sector.

She made the announcement at MacEwan University's Early Learning and Child Care Lab School in a room of small, chatty children more focused on Play-Doh.

The premier said lessons from the pilot project will guide the development of a new childcare system; one of quality care, affordability and a high level of access.

As Alberta's finances improve, universal \$25-a-day childcare remains Notley's goal.

Affordable care is "critical," she said, because it has a profound impact on families, women, children, the community and the economy.

As for the plan's \$10-million financial commitment, she said the "art of government is about meeting more than one priority at one time."

"For too long, the needs of young families, of children, of young mothers, the needs of communities that require high-quality, affordable childcare have not been enough of a priority," she said.

"Ensuring we have a successful group of projects that lay out the road map for how to go forward with this kind of model is really critical to us."

The consensus from adults in the room Tuesday morning was that the plan sounds good.

Allison Fieldberg's four-year-old son Graham is heading to kindergarten next year.

That means the plan won't benefit her family personally, but the Edmonton mom said if it helps others in the community, it will, by extension, help her.

"I think the place to start strengthening our communities is with families and with having supports," she said.

"I think this is a good step forward and I hope it works."

Terri Butler was another mom pleased with the plan.

"I think it's great for everyone - working moms, families," she said, her five-year-old son Eric hanging from her arm.

In particular, Butler was impressed with the emphasis on quality daycare.

Each new centre will implement an early learning childcare curriculum and provide support for children with diverse needs. Her son has a disability. Finding care for him proved tough when he was younger.

Grants for the 18 new centres will be decided through an application process open to existing not-for-profit organizations, licensed programs and those in the process of becoming licensed.

Each new centre will receive up to \$500,000 in operating funding in the first year, with the opportunity to receive two more years of funding.

The locations of new childcare centres, targeted to where demand is greatest, will be announced early in 2017.

Notley hopes there will be interest from all over the province, in both rural and urban areas.

-reprinted from the Edmonton Journal

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