

Universal child care system needed: lobby group ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Tory government needs to address critical wait times for child care as soon as possible, Manitoba Child Care Association executive director Pat Wege said Monday.

Referring to a Probe Research her organization commissioned on the issue, Wege recommended the province employ a universal child care system to ensure every child that needs a licenced space gets one.

"Right now, there are more than 15,000 children waiting for child care space and the 14-15 month wait time is a long time, especially for a parent wanting to return to a job or one who just got accepted into a training program," Wege said. "It has a huge economic impact.

"The province needs to address this issue quickly."

Almost 3,100 parents who use child care participated in the poll, conducted Sept. 15-Oct. 1, with 62% saying they have to wait for space for almost 15 months. The vast majority of the participants reported the stress and anxiety of trying to find quality child care was the biggest problem. As of Sept. 30, there were 15,273 children in Manitoba on the online child care registry waiting list.

The survey said 41% of parents with children on the waiting list have delayed a return to work, 30% have actually been forced to turn down jobs, and 24% turned down educational opportunities.

There are about 34,000 licenced child care spaces in Manitoba — 91% located in child care centres and 9% in licenced home child care. The number of unlicensed child care homes in Manitoba is unknown, but 83% of those surveyed much prefer a licenced one.

Wege presented the findings to provincial government reps last week.

"To me, a response is a plan and we don't actually know what the government is going to do with this information," Wege said.

Families Minister Scott Fielding said the province is working on it.

"Our government is committed to increasing accessibility for Manitoba families to early learning and child care options through a broad-based strategy that includes support for licenced family child care spaces and reduced barriers to the creation of new child care spaces in home-based facilities," Fielding said in emailed statement. "We recognize that too many families are still waiting for child care spaces and we continue to work with our partners in the federal government towards a national Early Learning and Child Care Framework."

The feds have committed \$500 million to the issue across Canada in 2017, Wege said.

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