

Daycare crunch: Toronto looks to province to boost subsidized child-care ^[1]

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Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 10 Jan 2017

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

If they build 100,000 new daycare spaces, who will be able to afford them?

That's the question one Toronto city councillor is asking about Premier Kathleen Wynne's landmark child-care promise.

The Liberals have pledged to create 100,000 child-care spots across Ontario over the next five years — an investment in daycare that Wynne calls "historic" — but have been vague about the funding they'll provide to subsidize the running costs.

Councillor Janet Davis is leading a charge at Toronto City Hall to pressure the Wynne government to allocate more funding to daycare subsidies.

"It is excruciating the stress that families go through to find child care and to pay for it," Davis said Tuesday in an interview with CBC Toronto.

"In Toronto ... we have the highest fees in the entire country and we have the longest waiting list in the country."

'No one will be able to afford those spaces'

While Davis says she welcomes the Wynne government's promise of 100,000 new spaces, she's concerned about the cost of daycare.

"No one will be able to afford those spaces if we don't increase the number of subsidies available," she said.

Studies put the median price of daycare in Toronto at \$1,100 a month per child, but some families face paying as much as \$2,100 a month for infants.

The province's daycare plan "will absolutely include subsidies to help families with the cost," said a spokesperson for Indira Naidoo-Harris, the associate minister of education responsible for child care.

"We are currently holding consultations across the province on how to improve Ontario's child care and early years system, as well as how best to ensure the 100,000 new spaces help those families who need it most," the spokesperson said in an e-mail to CBC Toronto.

Provincial government funding for daycare currently stands at \$1 billion annually. Municipalities are allowed to allocate the funding toward operating or subsidizing daycare as they see fit.

Annual provincial funding to Toronto for daycare is \$300 million, a 57 per cent increase since 2003, according to the government.

'Subsidy dollars spread thinner'

Davis argues that the funding is not adequate given the growth in demand.

"The subsidy dollars have been spread thinner and wider in order to make available subsidies for all of these new spaces," said Davis.

"What the city of Toronto needs is operating money and fee subsidies to make sure that families can actually access that new licensed child care."

City figures show 18,000 children waiting for a subsidized space. "There are thousands who have given up trying to get on the list or whose children have aged out of the child-care system without getting a subsidy," Davis said.

City staff are putting together a proposed five-year plan for daycare, with the aim of presenting it to the province in the spring.

-reprinted from CBC News

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: subsidies ^[4]

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