

# Home-based daycare declines under Tories, despite election promise <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Annable, Kristin

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The number of home-based child care spots available in Manitoba has declined since the Progressive Conservatives were elected, despite a campaign promise to license 550 child care spots lost under the NDP.

Official numbers provided by Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care show the province lost 17 licensed, home-based child-care spots between April and December of 2016 — a symptom of a decade of decline in the home-based child care market, explained University of Manitoba professor Susan Prentice.

She argues the province needs to abandon any model that focuses on home-based child care if it wants to slay the growing 14,000-plus wait-list for child care in the province.

"The number of family home child-care providers has been dropping in every province and it has been dropping steadily for a decade," said Prentice, a professor of sociology who has written extensively on child care policy.

"If Manitoba really wants to take care of the child-care crisis, they can't really rely on the family child care model to do it and they going to need to think about how to expand the centre-based supply of services."

## Missed target worse than reported

The Tories announced last year on April 7, if elected, they would fund 550 new home daycare spaces in 2016, aided with a boost of \$1.5 million to Manitoba's home-based child-care program.

In December, CBC News reported the Tories would miss that target. However, it turns out the province didn't just miss the 550 target, it lost more spaces than it gained.

In total, more home daycare centres closed shop than opened in 2016, leaving 3,040 spots in the province at the end of December, compared to the 3,057 spots recorded in 2015-16. The most recent figures go to the end of December.

There are myriad reasons why home daycares close, explained Pat Wege, executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association. The pay isn't great, the tax paperwork is intense, there is no paid vacation time and money can be inconsistent, she said.

"Providing home child is hard, the work days are long, work providers work 10 hours. They are working alone and in isolation from others," she said. "What the government didn't realize when it was thinking of home daycare is that there isn't people flocking to do this — it is a long, hard day."

Wege and Prentice both agree that the focus should be on increasing community and school-based child-care spots, but both are more costly to the government. The government covers 40 per cent of the capital cost, up to \$600,000, for community-based projects such as the Campus Day Care Centre at the U of M. It covers 100 per cent of the cost of a school-based centre.

## \$6.2 million for new spaces

The government recently announced it was investing \$6.2 million to create up to 739 new licensed centre-based child-care spaces, which Wege said is a move in the right direction.

Families Minister Scott Fiedling told CBC News Monday that the Tories' plan for school-based child care is "coming soon," but didn't give a precise timeline. Plans for up to 150 new spaces announced by the NDP in four schools in Manitoba (R.F. Morrison School, Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology, Rivers Collegiate and Strathclair Community School) remain under review, explained Fielding's spokesperson.

Fielding said it is about balancing between home and centre-based care, as well as reducing red tape. He didn't offer a plan to tackle the

issue of keeping the home child-care spots open for the long-term.

"Number one, we think (it's about) creating a more efficient and effective system and addressing the red tape," Fielding said, noting there was a 29 per cent drop in home child care under the NDP.

St. Johns MLA Nahanni Fontaine, the NDP's families critic, said she isn't surprised to hear the numbers are declining in home-based care.

"I've repeatedly said that home daycare is a lot more difficult to fill the backlog that we have," she said. "The best way to address the growing demand for child care is through investing in a publicly funded, non-profit daycare centres. So instead of doing four kids at a time, you can do 30 or 40."

-reprinted from CBC News

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