

\$25 daycare will get more women in workforce, advocates say ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Alberta government's pilot program offering a \$25-per-day daycare program has the potential to allow more women to enter the workforce, a Calgary NDP MLA says.

Craig Coolahan, who represents Calgary-Klein, made the comments Monday as the province gave members of the media an inside look at one of the 22 Early Learning and Childcare Centres selected to take part in the \$10-million pilot.

"I think what we're going to find is that, if you invest in early learning and child care, the developmental outcomes are much more positive," he said at the daycare inside the Louise Dean Centre in northwest Calgary.

So far 13 grants of up to \$500,000 have been allocated under the program.

Expansion is the goal

Coolahan says he's hopeful the program will prove successful and help make life more affordable for families throughout Alberta.

"The main goal is to get to \$25-a-day child care across the province," he said.

"Society benefits from children [who] are placed in good-quality child care, that's just the way it is."

At the Louise Dean Centre, which caters to pregnant and parenting teens, the money for the pilot program will eliminate the cost that Grade 12 student Varia Pylypchuk pays to have her baby in care.

That's because the daycare operated by the school is already subsidized, so its new grant under the pilot project will allow the daycare to waive the entire fee for clients like Pylypchuk.

"It's really exciting, because now we're able to do more things with our children and afford more things than otherwise we could," said Pylypchuk, who currently pays a subsidized rate of \$400 per month.

"Now that there's a little bit more money, it's very helpful."

The province first announced the project late last year, saying the locations would be spread out in rural and urban areas in accessible places such as hospitals and public buildings.

Taxpayer group critical

Paige MacPherson, Alberta Director of the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation, says while it's admirable the government wants to make childcare more affordable, a universal approach is not the way to do it.

In Quebec, a government-run low-cost daycare system for all families wound up making it less attainable for low-income families because too many wealthier people also took advantage, she said.

"So, we think that a voucher-based system would be a better solution so looking at families that actually need the help — low-income families, perhaps students who are low-income or have special needs."

MacPherson also said it's unnecessary to create a whole new system in Alberta, given that a subsidy program for low-income families already exists.

"So if there's a need there and that's not being addressed, then the government should simply expand upon what it has now," she said.

'Kids are our biggest resource'

Last month the province said the pilot-program will offer 1,296 licensed child care spaces, create about 120 new jobs and allow an estimated 357 Albertans to enter the workforce.

Patricia Jones, CEO of the Louise Dean Centre, says the pilot is a good investment of public resources.

"There will be much opportunity for more young women to access our child care centre," she said.

More broadly, if the government is able to implement Alberta-wide \$25-per-day daycare, the province as a whole will be better off, she said.

"I think more, to be frank, women will be able to enter the workforce and be a contributing member, because there's a lot of mental health around working, and every child in Alberta will have access to quality, evidence-based child care," she said.

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