

Nova Scotia NDP pledge \$15-a-day child care beginning next year ^[1]

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Source: City News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 15 May 2017

AVAILABILITY

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Nova Scotia New Democrats are promising to bring in \$15-a-day child care beginning next year if they win the May 30 provincial election, a pledge the other parties quickly dismissed as likely beyond the province's means.

Party leader Gary Burrill also said Tuesday that his party would provide free child care to families whose net income is less than \$30,000 annually and create 400 new spaces across the province.

Burrill says average monthly fees for licensed care currently are in the range of \$825 for a toddler and \$781 for a pre-schooler, and parents need more assistance.

"We know that parents face few struggles as widespread and difficult as the struggle to find affordable, quality child care for their kids," he said.

He says the program would lead to the creation of about 800 jobs either as a result of the direct hiring of child care workers or as a result of parents being able to work.

The program's annual cost would gradually rise over the next four years to \$70 million per year by 2021.

The Liberal party has promised a free, universal program for four-year-olds, which by 2020 would see 9,000 children being cared for at an annual cost of about \$49 million.

Liberal Premier Stephen McNeil said Tuesday that his plan would live within the province's means.

"One of the biggest differences (between the proposals) is we actually know how we're going to pay for it," said the premier.

There are currently about 18,885 licensed child care spaces in a system that is a mix of not-for-profit centres and profit-based daycares, with a wide range of fees.

The existing system provides subsidies for low-income families, with about one quarter of the families receiving assistance. Families with a net income of \$35,000 or less receive the lion's share of the assistance.

The average daily rate for infant care is \$42 daily in Halifax, and the maximum subsidy for poor families would cover about \$29 of that, said a department spokeswoman.

Tory Leader Jamie Baillie offered few details Tuesday on what his party is planning for early childhood education, saying he'll work with the child care providers to determine the way forward.

"We're very keen to work with daycare providers on ways to ensure there's affordable daycare for young Nova Scotia families," he said.

"Having said that I can't help but wonder about the NDP plan to throw to just throw so many mountains full of money at these issues without any idea of how to implement it or pay for it."

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