

Hold on child care support money for kids with special needs will cost family, says Winnipeg mom ^[1]

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A Winnipeg mother of a child with autism says she's at a loss after learning the province has put a hold on new funding for a child care support program for kids with special needs.

Rebecca Chambers 4½-year-old son Henry was set to start daycare this summer after four years on the provincial wait list.

But earlier this month, Chambers was told money to provide him with the aide he needs wasn't available because all program funding had already been allocated.

Without an aide, Chambers said she doesn't feel Henry would be safe at daycare. He flourishes with one-on-one guidance, she explained, but otherwise he's a flight risk.

"Without the one-on-one, he may run in circles around a classroom, he may act out, he may bite his hand and hurt himself," she said. "He can't yet figure out what his role is in a group of children without one-on-one support."

Chambers pulled Henry out of his daycare spot, and had to give up spots for her other two children, too. She said the family can't afford to pay for private nanny care for Henry and provincial daycare for his siblings at the same time.

Chambers said the experience has been extremely stressful and will end up costing her family more money.

"We called nanny agencies, we were in contact with the daycare where the boys were supposed to go and we were in contact with another daycare centre to ask if they had been experiencing similar problems and they said yes," she said.

"We've tried every scenario over the sun, but there's not much we can do without that funding."

Province recommends affected families ask for review

According to the province, funding for the inclusion support program in this year's budget is consistent with previous years at \$12.5 million.

A spokesperson said the province recommends affected families "work with government to see if their file can be reviewed."

"The department is able to consider placements on an emergency basis," the spokesperson wrote in an email.

The province is reviewing the program for sustainability and access and plans to ask the federal government to explore ways to improve it, according to a written statement sent to CBC News by the spokesperson and attributed to Manitoba Families Minister Scott Fielding.

"When families face challenges finding adequate child care, our officials continue to provide assistance to the best of their abilities," the statement reads.

The statement also says Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care is working with child-care agencies to better coordinate supports and "identify other ways a child could be safely supported without additional staff."

Chambers said being a parent to a child with special needs can already be a drain on money and energy, and an added barrier to an essential like child care will take its toll.

"The more people that I've talked to, the more I've realized this is happening a lot," she said. "I know several other families that are in this predicament and we don't know what we're going to do."

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