

New Liberal plan for improved daycare services remains unclear

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New Brunswick spends \$15M per year subsidizing the cost of daycare for lower income parents

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Premier Brian Gallant laid out more details Tuesday on how daycare in the province will be changing in the years ahead but he offered no insight on one particular issue: what happened to a long-delayed promise to boost daycare help for young families.

That promise was expected to materialize come Jan. 1.

"We will unveil details soon about how we will financially support low-income and middle-class families that are struggling the most with the cost of child care," said Gallant, even though an earlier government announcement indicated support should have begun last week.

New Brunswick spends \$15 million per year subsidizing the cost of daycare for lower-income parents in order to help them enter the workforce.

But provincial Liberals have long called that amount inadequate and have been promising to double assistance since the 2014 provincial election — a pledge that has been put off twice in the last three years.

Expanding daycare subsidies is meant to help parents like Amanda Stackhouse and her partner William MacDonald who make a lot of their economic decisions around on the cost of child care. She's anxious to know what the government plans to do — and when

"I'd probably enrol my kids back into daycare as soon as it happens, to be honest," she said.

Costs are high

Stackhouse has three children under five and just took a new job managing a Saint John school cafeteria. But that then forced MacDonald to quit his job.

All of his paycheck was needed to finance daycare — more than \$2,200 per month for three spots in a licensed facility — and the two decided that made no sense.

"We would both definitely be working full time if they gave people coverage for daycare," said Stackhouse.

"I got paid a little bit more than what he was going to get paid so he quit his and I worked. If I only had one child I could definitely afford it working two full time jobs in my household but once you have more kids, it's just unreal.

"I know a lot of people don't work because there's no point. He just got offered a full time job and we're debating if we should do it if it's even going to be worth it."

Currently, New Brunswick daycare subsidies for parents cover a percentage of the fees they are charged depending on their income.

Assistance declines sharply when combined household income exceeds \$30,000 and no subsidies are available to parents after household income passes \$55,000.

In the Liberals 2014 campaign platform the party promised to double subsidies beginning in April 2015 but that date was abandoned after the election.

A second startup date of Jan. 1 this year was announced by Finance Minister Cathy Rogers in her budget address last February but now that start date has come and gone with no change.

"By Jan. 1, 2018, in keeping with our platform commitment, we will have doubled the budget of the daycare assistance program," said Rogers to applause from government MLAs.

Money was approved by the legislature to expand the subsidy program on Jan. 1, but so far no improvements have been made.

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