

Ottawa, province contributing \$35 million more to child care ^[1]

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Every Nova Scotian deserves a good start in life.

Espousing that theory, the federal and provincial governments announced a \$35-million bilateral agreement Wednesday to make child care more accessible for Nova Scotia families by creating more than 1,000 new daycare spaces.

“Education is the great equalizer, no matter what the socio-economic circumstances you are born into,” Premier Stephen McNeil said before signing the agreement that allocates \$35 million in federal funds to Nova Scotia’s child-care program over a three-year period.

“With a great start in life, every Nova Scotian can achieve their dreams,” the premier said at St. Joseph’s Children Centre in Bedford, after he and federal and provincial cabinet ministers joined a table of three- and four-year-olds who were creatively molding Play-Doh figures.

Zach Churchill, the provincial education and early childhood minister, said only one in four children can take advantage of regulated child-care services in the province. He said the \$35 million, which is part of a federal, provincial and territorial framework signed in June, will increase the number of child-care operations and spaces in the province and make them more affordable.

The province said 550 more children will receive the maximum child-care subsidy because the federal money will allow the province to increase the family income eligibility threshold from \$25,000 to \$35,000.

Churchill said child care for a single child usually costs parents about \$8,000 to \$10,000 annually. He said the cost to families, depending on income, will now be about \$2,500 to \$3,000 per child. The difference — between \$5,000 and \$6,000 per child — will be subsidized by the province, with the help of the federal funding injection. An additional 375 children in part-day programs will be eligible for the subsidy for the first time in the province.

“We recognize that there are certain barriers to accessing child care in the province,” Churchill said. “Affordability is one. Geographical access is another one.”

The funding will allow the province to create 500 new child-care spaces across the province, primarily by opening 15 new regulated child-care centres in communities where the need is greatest.

“They will be going in the areas of the highest needs, where there are child-care deserts,” Churchill said.

The bilateral agreement will also allow the province to provide 90 new home-based child-care sites and half of those will be designated for infant care. Churchill said each home-based site should accommodate about six children, creating a total of more than 1,000 new regulated spaces across the province.

The announcement also provides for \$3.5 million in additional annual funding through an inclusion incentive to create and sustain inclusive daycare environments.

The premier said the nearly \$12 million in annual funding from the new announcement is a top-up to \$53 million that the province currently pays to deliver child-care programming. The subsidies will leave \$5 million in the pockets of Nova Scotia families, he said, and the child-care program will serve as a complement to the universal pre-primary program for four-year-olds introduced by the province last year.

“This is an exciting day for our province, this is an exciting day for families and for children in our province,” McNeil said. “I think we will look back at huge dividends for the children and the future economic health of the province.”

Jean-Yves Duclos, federal minister of families, children and social development, touted the Trudeau government’s record in lifting Canadian families out of poverty.

“Today’s agreement between Canada and Nova Scotia is a big step in making sure that Nova Scotian children get the best start in life and that parents can succeed in the workplace,” Duclos said. “If we are serious about gender equity, we also have to be serious about child

care.”

Duclos said the federal government is committed to creating a distinct Indigenous framework for early learning and childhood that will be achieved through collaboration with First Nations and by recognizing their unique needs.

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