

# Parti Québécois courts families with promise of attractive new daycare policy <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Author:** Authier, Philip

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## EXCERPTS

The pre-electoral battle to woo Quebec families continued Thursday with the Parti Québécois pledging to bring back a flat public daycare rate of \$8.05 a day.

And low-income earners — making less than \$34,000 a year — would get free childcare services.

The party made the announcement at the close of a two-day caucus meeting that will dovetail into a weekend party meeting Saturday and Sunday focused on the politically vote-rich theme of making family life easier in Quebec.

If the PQ forms the next government in October, it would scrap the current sliding scale system whereby daycare fees and credits are calculated based on family income. Although the system widely benefits the vast middle class, rich Quebecers can pay as much as \$21 a day upfront for public childcare.

It was the Liberals who introduced the sliding scale system in 2014 to charge higher fees to people who make more than \$50,000 a year.

The PQ calls the additional amounts, charged via Line 404 on Quebec's income tax forms, a "family tax." Part of the additional amounts are reduced through a federal tax credit.

The PQ estimates it will cost the government about \$320 million to go back to the old system, but says it would phase in the new fees during a four-year period depending on the state of the province's books. Part of the financing would come through the elimination of current child tax credits.

The subsidy will mean a family with one child will pay a fee of \$8.05 a day, the second child's fee would be half that. The third and subsequent children would pay no fees. The whole system would be indexed yearly based on the cost of living.

The new plan was made public by PQ Leader Jean-François Lisée and his newly appointed point person for the family, Joliette MNA Véronique Hivon.

## PQ proposes more CPE daycare spots

Last March, the PQ had promised to make the rate \$7.30 a day, but revised that in favour of its "third child-free" formula, Lisée said at a news conference.

The PQ is also proposing to increase the number of daycare spots in the subsidized system, known as les Centre de la petite enfance (CPE), but did not specify how many.

Lisée was ready with an answer when asked why a PQ government would give such a generous benefit to all Quebecers, including the rich who can afford to pay more.

"We're in the field of child education," he said. "If you go that route, then they (the rich) should pay more for elementary education and secondary education. That's not our view of the world.

"I think in these basic functions of the state, where we're all in this together, for equality of chances, everyone should have a stake in the public system.

"What we're doing today is lifting more obstacles for having more children in Quebec go into quality daycare."

Hivon said the plan reflects the fundamental difference in philosophy between the PQ and the Liberals. While the Liberals have encouraged more private daycare, the PQ believes a public subsidized system provides superior service.

And studies show low-income families are under-represented in the CPE system as a result, added Camil Bouchard, the PQ's new family

policy adviser.

### CPE studying all proposals

On hand for the announcement, Louis Sénécal, CEO of the Association québécoise des CPE, said the PQ's plan is good news after 10 years of government spending cuts to the CPE network, which he estimates total about \$500 million.

There are about 90,000 CPE daycare places in Quebec. Overall, the province has about 300,000 spots.

Sénécal, however, said his association is examining what all the parties have to offer before deciding which plan is most attractive.

"It's too soon to say which is the best (offer)," Sénécal told reporters. "But this is a celebration of quality."

The PQ's plan is the latest of a series of tax relief measures designed to woo families launched by a political party.

Earlier this week at its own caucus, the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) announced plans for a single, flat province-wide school tax rate that would lower fees for nearly all citizens.

Premier Philippe Couillard has said he wants to find ways for families to spend more quality time together by increasing the number of paid vacation days. Those new measures are expected in the spring budget.

-reprinted from Montreal Gazette

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