

Daycare operating grant gets its first increase in a decade ^[1]

'This is long overdue'

Author: Joannou, Ashley

Source: Yukon News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 6 Feb 2018

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

The Yukon government is increasing the amount of the direct operating grant given to licensed daycares and day home operators for the first time in a decade.

For the first time, rural daycares and day homes will also get extra cash beyond what is given to facilities in Whitehorse.

That's part of a new bilateral agreement signed this morning between Yukon and the federal government.

The territory is getting \$7.3 million over three years until March 2020 to improve early learning and child care.

Whitehorse operators will see their operating grants increase by 14.5 per cent while facilities outside of Whitehorse will see an increase of 34.5 per cent.

"This is long overdue," Yukon Health and Social Services Minister Pauline Frost said at the announcement in Ottawa.

"We most certainly agree, and Yukoners agree, this funding will help owners and operators of licensed child care facilities run their businesses, pay early childhood educators and increase funding received for the children and families who use these services."

Frost said the increase is anticipated to stabilize fees and help rural communities manage.

The increase is retroactive to April 1 of last year. Cheques covering the retroactive increase should start coming out to operators by the end of February, said health spokesperson Pat Living.

In Whitehorse that means day homes will receive anywhere from \$800 to \$3,000. Whitehorse daycares will receive as much as \$55,000 retroactively, she said.

Living did not have information on how much rural facilities will be getting.

The direct operating grant is based on the number of children in a facility and the level of training of staff.

This year's grants under the new program will go out in mid April, Living said.

Frost said the money from Ottawa will also be used to create a new culturally-appropriate curriculum for children up to five years old.

The Yukon government has also promised to increase the number of grandparents who qualify for support if they are caring for a child and provide education bursaries for students looking to be trained in early childhood education.

Details on those promises were not available in time for today's deadline.

The government has already had some meetings about the plans, Frost said. More are planned for the spring, she said.

Living said the government wanted to sign the agreement now so it could take advantage of money the federal government had earmarked for the current fiscal year that ends in March.

"We didn't want to lose that one year of funding," she said.

The territory has the option to amend its plans in the future, as long as Ottawa approves.

Frost, along with Canada's other health ministers, signed an early learning and child care framework with Ottawa last June.

It was then up to the individual jurisdictions to sign their own specific agreements with the federal government.

Canada has promised a total of \$7.5 billion over 11 years.

Talk of increasing the Yukon's direct operating grant, which hasn't been updated since 2008, came up most recently last year when the only daycare in Watson Lake shut down. Owners there said they had to close their doors in part because they couldn't attract qualified

staff to take the jobs.

The Watson Lake daycare remains closed.

One of Whitehorse's largest daycares closed earlier this year after running into problems with the Canada Revenue Agency.

A new daycare has since opened in its place.

-reprinted from Yukon News

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