

Alberta Party promises 'ambitious' \$1B child-care program ^[1]

Lower-income families would receive free or greatly-discounted licensed child-care

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EXCERPTS

The Alberta Party is proposing a child-care plan it calls the most "ambitious" in the province's history.

Speaking at a west Edmonton daycare Wednesday morning, leader Stephen Mandel said if elected the party would make child care more accessible and affordable.

The party would introduce a voucher program that would provide a subsidy of up to 100 percent of child-care costs, he said.

The program, part of the party's Children First plan, means lower-income families could receive free or greatly-discounted licensed child-care, while those earning up to \$110,000 would pay up to \$30 per day for child-care.

Parents enrolled in post-secondary education and those earning minimum wage would be fully subsidized for their child-care costs.

The program would cost \$1 billion to establish. Accessible and affordable child-care would mean more opportunities for parents to contribute to the workforce, Mandel said.

"It's proven time and time again that when you have a good child-care program like this is, we believe, it creates employment for parents, they go out and they work, they pay taxes, they raise their income, they pay more taxes and eventually they don't have a subsidy," he said.

"But ... we have to start somewhere and it starts with children."

The current NDP government's \$25-a-day child-care pilot program covers 7,276 spaces for infants to kindergarten-aged children. Mandel says the Alberta Party's proposal would apply to 260,000 children up to the age of six.

The party also plans to review Alberta's child-care legislation to make it easier to create licensed and affordable child-care spaces for parents to have more choice.

It also would establish a new Ministry of Early Childhood and provide a caregiver tax credit.

"This is something that's going to help families and children be successful, and that's what we're all about," Mandel said.

"Changing the direction in which we're going in this province to build a future for all of us, not just a few of us."

Anita Turna, spokesperson for the Alberta Association of Childcare Operators, said she's excited to see a policy that would create more spaces to allow parents more choice in choosing a quality child-care provider.

Affordability and accessibility is a big issue for parents and operators alike, she said.

"This could help a lot of parents in the immediate access to supports that they need to pay childcare fees."

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