

Expanding \$25-a-day child care good for Alberta workers, economy ^[1]

Notley announcement of \$1.5 billion child care investment to boost economy \$9 billion

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EXCERPTS

EDMONTON, Alberta, March 27, 2019 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- The Alberta Federation of Labour applauds the NDP government announcement to subsidize all child care spaces in Alberta at a cost of \$1.5 billion over five years. This will be not only good for Alberta workers, making life more affordable for many Albertans, but it will also be good for the economy. The Conference Board of Canada finds that for every \$1 spent on expanding early childhood education (ECE) and care enrolment of children under 5 years of age to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average would yield close to \$6 in economic benefits. This means that the NDP announcement to invest 1.5 billion in child care over five years will yield returns of \$9 billion in economic benefits.

The Notley government recognized the importance of high-quality early childhood education and care with their pilot program of 122 non-profit Early Learning and Child Care Centres, in which fees were capped at \$25-a-day, along with a strong curriculum, staff training, wage top ups and other improvements to ensure high-quality care. During the same time Alberta reduced child poverty by 50%, despite the recent economic downturn.

Parents who have gotten their child into a \$25-a-day child care space have described it as “winning the lottery”, reducing their child care costs by hundreds of dollars every month. Not only has more affordable child care saved these families money, but it has also allowed both partners to participate in the workforce which increases a household’s financial security. The program has also provided wage top-offs to ensure hard-working child-care providers are more fairly compensated, so that those who work in child care can make enough money to have their own children in care.

Child care fees are the second highest spending category for families after housing. In Edmonton, the median toddler care fee in 2018 was \$875 per month, in Calgary the median toddler fee was \$1,130. There is also a drastic shortage of licensed and high-quality child-care spaces, particularly in rural Alberta and in lower-income communities. Edmonton and Calgary also have the highest number of child care centers in Canada charging fees just for being on the waitlist for a spot. Unaffordable and inaccessible child care costs often pressure women to stay home, putting their careers on hold for the sake of the family. It has been estimated that it takes women who have children 12 years to reach the same income level as women who do not have children. Not only does this hurt future household earning potential, it perpetuates the gender pay gap and societal pressure on women to stay home.

“Getting affordable child care shouldn’t be just for some and it certainly shouldn’t be like winning the lottery. All families should have equal access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education and care.” says Gil McGowan, president AFL. “This is a strong next step in creating an affordable and universal early childhood education and care system in Alberta.”

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