

Alberta's \$25-a-day childcare pilot program will continue — for now ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Alberta parents and childcare operators concerned that a pilot program will soon be cancelled now have some reassurance from the province.

After receiving many inquiries from concerned operators, the provincial government has sent letters out confirming the \$25-a-day childcare program will continue — for now.

“The pilot program was meant to be for three years,” said Rebecca Schulz, Alberta children’s services minister, on Tuesday. “Nothing has changed.”

What that means is the 22 centres in the first wave of the program will have guaranteed funding until the end of March 2020.

The remaining 100 centres — approved in the second wave — will be funded for another year after that, thanks to an agreement reached with the federal government.

Officials at the Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Association were pleased with the news. They were one of the first centres in the province to be part of the pilot project, and as a result of the funding, said they were able to add space for more children.

“We were relieved to hear something. We’ve been waiting with bated breath,” association executive director Kate Stenson said.

Stenson is still worried, however, about what will happen if the funding doesn’t continue after that.

“The future beyond that is still uncertain for us,” she said. “I would hope that [the province] would look especially to the most vulnerable that are accessing a program like this and see how meaningful it could be.”

It’s a concern echoed by parents with children at the centre.

“It’s great that people can get access to affordable childcare at \$25 a day,” Tyler Chalmers said. “It’s a bit concerning what is going to happen afterwards.”

Lisa Couillard agreed.

“I’m thrilled it will be extended until then,” she said. “I hope it will be extended beyond then. I have two kids and I certainly benefit from the reduced fees.”

Schulz said she understands how beneficial it has been. She explained that centres were able to provide quality childcare before and they will again if the program ceases to exist.

“I think we owe it to Alberta families and parents to make sure we get this right,” Schulz said. “Both be fiscally responsible with taxpayer dollars but also make sure that the programs we create are providing the supports for those who need it most.”

The province has committed to a full review of the pilot program, and Schulz said operators and parents will be given a heads up when and if changes are in the works.

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