

Manitoba PCs pledge child-care subsidy, while NDP says waitlists grew under Tories ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Manitoba's Progressive Conservatives are pledging measures they say would boost private-sector delivery of child-care spaces if they're re-elected next month, but the NDP say waitlists have grown under the PC government.

The Progressive Conservatives announced Sunday that they would create a \$500-per-month subsidy for 3,000 lower-income families, which they say could be used for whichever child-care choices a family makes.

Candidate Heather Stefanson also says a PC government would issue grants for private early-learning and child-care centres to spark the creation of more spaces.

But the NDP says Tory Leader Brian Pallister's government froze funding for child-care centres, allowed waitlists to climb and only created 200 of their 500-space target of home-based daycare spots during its first term.

The NDP says Pallister's lack of action hurt children as well as women, who they say are most likely to be affected by cuts to childcare.

The PCs say their rollout of the Child Care Centre Development Tax Credit has already created 74 spaces in Winnipeg's Sage Creek neighbourhood, showing how the private sector is willing to partner with government.

"The private sector is underrepresented in Manitoba's childcare sector compared to other provinces," Stefanson said in a news release Sunday, noting private spaces make up less than five per cent of Manitoba's childcare system, versus 58 per cent in Alberta and 49 per cent in British Columbia.

In 2017, the Manitoba government increased funding for licensed, home child-care providers to try to create more daycare spaces. The move was welcomed by the Manitoba Child Care Association, which said improving the income of home-based providers would help recruit new people to the field, retain existing licensed providers and reduce wait times.

But earlier this year, the association said child-care centres were struggling to retain staff because they couldn't afford to pay competitive wages. It delivered a petition to government with 26,000 names calling for more funding for daycare spaces and early childhood educators.

The waitlist at the time for licenced child-care spots was 16,000 children.

"Brian Pallister's government sat on their hands for three long years as families struggled to find quality, accessible, reliable child care," the NDP said in a news release Sunday.

The Manitoba Liberals and NDP also made policy announcements on health care over the weekend, with the Liberals promising they would improve wait times for hip and knee surgeries.

The Liberals said they would also restore coverage for outpatient physiotherapy, which they say was cancelled by the Tories — something the Liberals said is needed by people recovering from procedures like knee replacements.

"I spoke to a constituent who could not afford private physiotherapy and was having to rely on YouTube videos after knee replacement surgery," Liberal Leader Dougald Lamont said in a news release.

NDP Leader Wab Kinew, meanwhile, said his party would improve weekend access for ACCESS Centres, which offer health and social services at community locations.

Kinew said an NDP government would open the ACCESS Centre in Fort Garry on Sunday as a pilot project. He said the centre is now open Saturdays, but said it's done by stretching the resources from the weekdays to cover the extra day.

Kinew said the NDP would restore full weekday funding, and have medical staff on duty on the weekends.

The election takes place Sept. 10.

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

Tags: spaces ^[4]

funding ^[5]

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