

# Manitoban's childcare struggles highlight need for improvements to the system, say experts <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

It's a challenge for many families across the country — finding affordable and convenient childcare options.

All four of the major parties have made commitments to provide more spaces, but it's an issue that experts say still needs more attention.

Alison Anderson is a parent to two boys and finding childcare has been a struggle over the school breaks.

"It's been a challenge every summer basically," she said.

"In previous years I've had to travel all the way from North Kildonan to Pembina and McGillivray for childcare so that added three hours to my commute every day."

Anderson splits time with her ex for her older son. This year she had to trade weeks to ensure he had someone available to watch him while she went to work.

"I don't get to see him for three weeks now because I don't have enough vacation to stay home," she said.

"Six weeks without daycare this year and I only had three weeks of vacation. So you can imagine what my vacation is like every year — it's childcare. I don't actually get a vacation. It's just mommy duties and house work."

Jodi Kehl, Executive Director of the Manitoba Child Care Association, said these issues highlight the need for significant changes.

"What we're hearing is that the wait lists are long, and [parents are] sometimes choosing programs that aren't geographically convenient for them," she said.

"But if there's a space available and if it means you have to drive half-an-hour to drop a child off at their program and then go to work, that's what they're doing," she said.

"Manitobans care about childcare and Manitoba can't work without quality childcare."

Manitoba does have some of the lowest daycare rates in the country.

A report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found Winnipeggers were paying an average monthly fee of \$451 for daycare costs for a child while places like Vancouver saw \$1,000, Edmonton at \$835, Toronto at \$1,150 and Halifax at \$867. In Montreal, the rates were the lowest at \$175 per month.

Kehl said the costs of wages for childcare staff should be higher (she cites the starting wage at \$15.50 an hour) but that childcare costs should remain low.

"Although we have the second-lowest childcare fees in the country, could we look at a subsidy system that looks at what families' gross incomes are?"

Meanwhile, just a few weeks until Manitobans go to the polls, the parties have outlined their promises for childcare.

The NDP are looking to boost funding for licensed, not-for-profit centres and build 600 new spaces each year. They also plan to eliminate wait lists and have fixed fees of \$15 a day within 10 years.

The Greens are promising to create 2,000 spaces each year and only charge families a max of 10 per cent of their net family income for daycare.

The Liberal plan includes increasing childcare and early childhood education funding by \$33 million per year with the plan of eliminating provincial waitlists.

The Conservatives are promising subsidies of \$500 per month for low-income families and the addition of new childcare spaces.

**Related link:**

**Region:** Manitoba <sup>[3]</sup>

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