

'There was no warning': stay-at-home childcare subsidy cut following Alberta provincial budget ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A government subsidy aimed at helping stay-at-home parents has been cut following the provincial budget.

The subsidy was available to families with at least one parent that works or goes to school less than 20 hours per week, and cares for children aged six and younger.

The stay-at-home subsidy provided up to \$1,200 for an academic school year to help cover pre-school costs.

Parents who received the subsidy were notified with a letter from the Ministry of Children's Services earlier this week.

"The province's fiscal situation has required the government to make difficult decisions on how to best move forward in providing access to affordable and quality childcare for children and their parents," the letter read.

"There was no warning for it, there was no replacement, no options," Andrea Reid said Friday.

Reid has two children, her oldest is four years old. She used the subsidy to cover tuition for her daughter at the Learn and Play Preschool in northwest Calgary.

The preschool offers programs for children between the ages of three and four-and-a-half years old to help prepare them for kindergarten.

"This is something that we were able to give our children, an education," Reid said.

"Some people are going to have to choose, am I going to have to take away my child's pre-school because I can't afford it anymore?"

The subsidy program will be scrapped on Jan. 1, 2020.

The kin childcare subsidy, which allowed parents to pay a family member to look after their child, is also being cut.

According to budget documents, the operating budget for the Ministry of Children's Services is getting a \$94 million boost, to \$1.6 billion. The budget also included an increase in funding for supports for families accessing childcare subsidies of \$13.4 million for a total of \$296 million.

"We are focusing child-care subsidies to assist low-income families entering the workforce or attending school, through accessing licensed childcare," ministry spokesperson Lauren Armstrong said in a statement to Global News. "It should be noted that the stay-at-home subsidy was used by less than one per cent of Alberta parents."

However, the loss of the subsidy also came as a shock for Rosangela De Vincenzo, who owns and operates Learn and Play Preschool.

She said she had a new student get approved for the subsidy three days prior to finding out the program was cut.

To help parents who rely on the subsidy, De Vincenzo said she is making financial adjustments and will be taking a pay cut, because many parents were relying on the subsidy until June.

"The government essentially promised them the 10 months, they've guaranteed them the 10 months, now they've taken it away from them and I can't do that for them," De Vincenzo said. "So I will cut myself to make sure they can still have their education."

The preschool also covers tuition for four kids per year for families that are low-income and can't afford the program, but De Vincenzo expects to add between 10 and 15 families to that list.

"I think the government should actually honour their word and their guarantee to the rest of the families all over the province of Alberta and honour that subsidy up until the end of June and then take a look at it and decide if this is something they actually should be cutting," she said. "We'll figure it out, because I cannot leave anyone behind."

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