

'I find value in working': Parents react to end of \$25-per-day daycare pilot project ^[1]

Many families will either have to pay a lot more for childcare or stay at home

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EXCERPTS

Many Alberta families are not happy about the \$25-a-day daycare pilot program ending this summer, and some say it will force them to quit their jobs.

The first phase of the project had 22 daycares selected to take part in the \$10-million pilot project — with funding set to end in March 2020 by the previous NDP government.

Another 100 daycares were part of the second phase and will receive funding through 2021.

"We are extending the program for those 22 centres until June to ensure a smooth transition to child-care subsidies through the summer," Children's Services Minister Rebecca Schulz said Wednesday in a statement.

Schulz says the UCP government is working with the federal government on a "bilateral funding agreement" for daycare.

In 2018, Public Interest Alberta released an Alberta child care survey and found the pilot programs were 15 per cent more likely to serve infants and 12 per cent more likely to offer services to children with disabilities, compared with other child-care operators in the province.

As well, the programs were also more likely to have highly qualified staff and professional development opportunities.

Mothers react

Billie MacFarlane says that once \$25-a-day daycare ends, she'll have to quit her job since she doesn't clear enough money to justify the regular cost of daycare.

"That's really disappointing because as a full-time employee getting benefits makes a big difference," she told the Calgary Eyeopener on Thursday. "Having a company with benefits that means that I don't have to use the government for benefits and taking more money out of the taxpayers."

The Edmonton mom says she has four kids in daycare — one six-year-old and triplets who are 4½ years old — so her fees will go from \$2,100 to \$4,800 per month, which she cannot afford.

"It's not just about giving people money so that they can go to work, if it affects the economy on a huge scale," she said.

I find a lot of value in working, and a lot of my self-esteem and self-worth comes from being employed. The educational experience that these daycares have, I cannot offer the same thing to my kids."

The \$25-a-day daycare pilot program also provided training to workers on early childcare — making the daycares selected for the program especially sought after.

MacFarlane adds that a lot of families, especially those whose children aren't old enough for school, aren't going to be getting the level of social interaction these daycares provide

"They're not going to be getting the social interaction that they need to be really extra valuable in society," she said.

Calgary mom Lori Bossert is also registered in a \$25-a-day daycare and says the high level of care provided to her children at the facility will help her justify the rise in costs.

"I'm sad that it's gone. I'm happy I'm still getting a high level of care with my centre and hopefully it doesn't get worse because of the loss to the funding," she said.

However Bossert adds that she always felt guilty about paying the low daycare price since it wasn't equitable for everyone in the province.

"I think the decision either has to be everyone or no one, so that's why it came as absolutely no surprise that the UCP said no one rather

than everyone," said Bossert.

She says her and her husband who both work full-time find the new fee standard among daycares.

"We'll have to watch our finances a lot closer in the coming year. I haven't really crunched those numbers yet, like officially looked at what our child care is versus our salaries," she said.

"We can afford to live, but we can't afford to be fancy."

Daycares concerned

Kate Stenson, executive director of the Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Association, says the community's biggest concern is the impact this will have on families.

"If the program is cancelled, what I would really be looking for is where is the evidence to sort of validate that decision. Because I think that this kind of program has the ability to have a positive impact on children and families in a number of ways in terms of development of children," she said.

Stenson adds that it gives families the choice whether to stay home or go to work, as well help those that are low-income.

"This could be something that takes people out of employment, which I think is the opposite of what we want right now for the province," she said.

Ilona Boyce, executive director of Heartland Agency, which runs several predominantly low-income daycares in Calgary, adds that \$25-a-day daycare was like a "back-to-work-program."

"There's a huge financial implication to families to carry full daycare fees," she said.

"The \$25-a-day fee was great because it provided a cap to the fee that was passed to the parents and made it affordable for people to go to work."

Boyce says that it also helps people who were laid off in the oil and gas industry — making it easier for them to retrain for their careers.

"The other partner is out working maybe as a teacher or an educator and drawing an income, but the other person can train and still put their children in daycare to get themselves to that next step," she said.

Boyce says she would like to see the program continue past the pilot.

"I would want our government to see this as a very big priority and important."

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