

Child care in Manitoba must remain public after COVID-19 ^[1]

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EXCERPTED

Child care workers support the closing of centres as part of health officials' call for social distancing. However, Manitoba's non-profit child care workers are deeply concerned that the closures of child care centres, and shift to private home-based day care, will leave them without employment in the future.

"Government support to child care in Manitoba during COVID-19 is important, but the government's approach could lead to undermining non-profit child care centres in the future," said Abe Araya, President of CUPE Manitoba. "We are entering dangerous territory when the government gives granting authority to the Chambers of Commerce to allocate public funds for child care."

Because many child care workers are in lower-wage jobs, the effects of going on Employment Insurance (EI) will be harder for them to care for their families.

Child care is a critical sector in Manitoba and these workers need support across the province.

CUPE is calling on the provincial government for the following:

- Child care staff in Manitoba should have their full wages and benefits covered in the event of closures, quarantines, or precautionary self-isolation due to COVID-19.
- Should child care centres be re-opened for children of essential service workers, staff must be provided full training, health and safety equipment, and resources related to COVID-19.
- The granting of provincial funding for temporary private home-based child care centres must be temporary only, and not used as justification to shift child care in Manitoba away from licensed non-profit centres to private home-based care in the future.
- Child care staff should not be forced to use sick time or vacation for self-quarantine, quarantine, or facility closures.
- Assurances must be made from all child care providers that staff will be recalled to work if laid off, quarantined, or self-quarantined, following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In the event of full closures, the provincial government should continue fully funding child care centres, including the cost of child care fees for families, and provide relief and security for staff.

While the federal government is making EI more accessible, employers, centres, and governments should not use EI as an "out" for their responsibility to support their staff. "At the end of the day, Manitoba's non-profit child care workers need assurance that their livelihoods and futures will be protected," said Abe Araya. "I'm sure all Manitobans recognize the value non-profit child care workers provide to our province, and we all need to offer them support."

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