

77 Manitoba daycares open, but mixed messages lead to 'chaos, confusion': providers ^[1]

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At least 77 daycares opened their doors in Manitoba on Monday, but the executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association says mixed messages about whether to stay open are sowing "chaos, confusion and worry" among local daycare providers.

Jodie Kehl says inconsistent messaging from the province about funding amid the coronavirus pandemic over the past few days has caused a lot of stress in the sector.

The original announcement from the province on Friday was that \$27 million in grants and funding would be funnelled to daycares — provided they remain open to care for children of health-care workers.

That was amended later that evening, with Families Minister Heather Stefanson clarifying that provincial funding would continue to all daycares, whether they stayed open or not.

Kehl told 680 CJOB the fluid situation is causing extreme stress and confusion within the sector.

"The sector is receiving information that is a little bit contrary to what the rest of Canada is hearing," she said.

Kehl said the results of an informal survey she conducted showed that 75 per cent of Manitoba's daycares have closed their doors, while the remaining quarter have loosely self-identified as essential service sites.

A major concern, she said, is the lack of a cohesive government policy that applies to all daycares in Manitoba — although the association has been checking in with the province twice a day to work toward a solution.

"I think if there was some thought to enhanced funding for centres that agreed to stay open, enhanced remuneration for the sector that is willing to provide care to essential service workers as well as proper supplies... those are things we're wanting to continue to speak to the province about," she said.

"I can't stress it enough — the level of extreme stress that directors, the workforce and the home-based providers are feeling is very high."

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