

Alberta offers grants to child care centres, day homes to prepare for relaunch ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The province is offering up to \$17.8 million in grants to child care centres and approved family day homes, through a phased approach, as they prepare to open as part of Alberta's relaunch strategy.

Under Alberta's relaunch plan, daycares and out-of-school care sites were listed as part of Stage 1, restarting May 14, "with limits on occupancy."

"Access to quality child care is going to be an important part of getting Alberta's economy back on track," Children's Services Minister Rebecca Schulz said. "We're providing this money so child care centres will be ready to care for kids as soon as health guidelines allow."

When child care centres reopen, they'll have to adhere to health guidelines developed by Alberta Health and Children's Services. Those guidelines are being worked on and have not yet been released.

That's something the NDP wants clarity on.

"What I've been hearing from child care operators, and from parents and from educators, is they need to know what the health and safety protocols are going to be for the reopening of child care centres," said Rakhi Pancholi, NDP critic for Children's Services.

"This is scheduled to happen in eight days, and right now, parents don't have enough information about what those protocols will be, and child care centres don't."

The province said Wednesday that daycare centres and out-of-school care sites will qualify for phased support.

Phase 1: \$6.7 million

Facilities can receive an immediate, one-time grant to cover up to 25 per cent of overhead costs like rent and utilities.

The government says this covers the remaining portion of expenses not covered by federal programs (like the wage support for small- and medium-sized businesses up to 75 per cent, the Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance Relief Program and the Emergency Business Account interest-free loan).

Phase 2: \$3.2 million

After they've reopened, child care sites can receive a grant for cleaning and sanitation supplies to meet public health guidelines, as well as to help recruit and train staff.

Phase 3: \$6.9 million

Three months after reopening, child care sites will "potentially receive a third grant to offset deferred bills and to address unforeseen operational issues," the province said.

This will be based on an assessment of other federal and provincial support programs.

Approved family day homes will have access to up to \$1 million in grants for the same purposes, the province said.

The Opposition says more concrete details on required health protocols and capacity restrictions are needed sooner rather than later.

"We know that the minister has indicated that those health and safety protocols will look the same as the ones that applied to the centres that reopened for essential service workers, and if that's the case, there's going to be a limit on the number of spots that each child care centre can reopen," Pancholi said.

"That is really important information for child care centres to know because they have to make a determination about whether or not they can viably reopen."

Alberta has kept some child care centres open during the pandemic to support essential workers and their children. Approved family day homes and private day homes have been permitted to stay open throughout the pandemic and in March, the province allowed approved family day homes to care for six children, in addition to their own.

As of May 5, child care centres have reopened in 29 towns and cities across Alberta. There are 183 centres open, with a total of 4,008 spaces available. All reopened centres were provided with a \$500 one-time grant for personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies, the province said.

Those centres receive a daily reimbursement for reopened spaces that aren't filled.

The Opposition wants to know if centres planning to open in just over a week can expect the same reimbursement.

"I've been hearing from so many child care centres that are saying, 'If we don't have the funding to fill those unfilled spaces, and if we're limited in the number of kids we can bring back, we will not be able to afford to reopen,'" Pancholi said.

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