

Childcare guidelines released by province, early childhood educators ask for more funding ^[1]

How provincial childcare facilities will be able to operate has come into a bit more focus following the release of guidelines for childcare providers.

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EXCERPTS

According to the guidelines, the first phase of pre-school and school-aged care will follow the protocols put in place for childcare facilities opened for essential workers. Those include a limit of 10 individuals per room as well as a number of enhanced cleaning requirements and two-metre physical distancing procedures where possible.

Childcare facilities have been open on a limited basis for essential workers but those who have spoken to *CHAT News* say how or even if they will be able to operate into the future is still an open question. And the nearly \$18 million in provincial funding announced last week might not be enough, according to the Association of Early Childcare Educators of Alberta (AECEA).

"Right now the minister of children's services has offered some funding to childcare centres. We don't believe that is going to be enough to spread around," said Jennifer Usher, spokesperson for AECEA. "We believe supply-side funding is required to ensure that these childcare programs remain viable in the long haul."

Usher says that will require public funds to enable childcare centres to operate within the required reduced capacities and to absorb the increased costs associated with the COVID-19 safety protocols.

As for where childcare will be able to be provided – especially for elementary school-age children – Mark Davidson, superintendent for Medicine Hat Public School Division, says public school buildings will be available.

Davidson says for that to happen, there will need to be work done to ensure all the necessary approvals are in place.

"From this point to the end of the school year, our facilities are certainly available for that kind of service and through the summer," said Davidson. "But we would need a service provider to go through the licensing, staffing and that kind of thing."

The city's largest out-of-school childcare provider, Medicine Hat YMCA, says it hopes to have more information on programs once it's able to process the new guidelines.

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