

Childcare could be the lynchpin in recovery efforts ^[1]

Source: End Poverty Edmonton

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

“It’s not a situation where you just turn the tap back on”

— Erick Ambtman

Albertans are anticipating reductions to public health restrictions later this week, but won’t be able to go back to work if childcare isn’t available. EndPovertyEdmonton is calling for increased support for both licensed child care centres and approved family day homes throughout relaunch, including attention to quality standards and subsidy rates.

Information gathered through social media engagements over the past months suggest that many parents are struggling to keep up with demands. Many respondents indicate worsening job performance, poor mental health and having to decrease work hours, leading to financial hardships within the home. Taken together, we’re seeing increases in food insecurity and worsening mental health on a critical scale.

“It’s not a situation where you just turn the tap back on,” says Erick Ambtman, executive director of EndPovertyEdmonton. “Families are facing different situations, they’re having a horrible time juggling the demands of childcare, plus school and work from home, if that’s even an option. Parents, and mothers in particular, are saying it’s affecting their performance at work, and with increasing unemployment, that’s creating even more stress. Alberta families desperately need good childcare to be available with the relaunch.”

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“As we’re hearing it, many child care centres will be unable to reopen because they weren’t able to shoulder the burdens of the necessary shut down and many day homes are struggling because of lowered enrollment with no support to make it through,” says Ambtman. “Subsidies for childcare at day homes haven’t changed during the pandemic, but with school out costs for full time care have, so those using day homes are, or will be, paying more for it and the day home may still be in a precarious position.” Despite remaining open, anecdotal evidence suggests enrollment in day homes has dropped by 30% across Alberta.

Subsidies have continued through the crisis, but have not been modified for changes in circumstance such as an elementary school-age child that now requires full time care. One dayhome agency reports costs of \$575 per month during the school year and \$850 in the summer. With schools closed, parents are being asked to pay the higher rate, but subsidy amounts have not changed. For parents in low-income, this was an unexpected expense they had no chance to plan for. Those same families, and many that now find themselves in similar circumstances, may also lose the subsidy if they don’t meet the minimum hours worked requirements to qualify, increasing costs even further for families facing financial hardship. Giving up the space, however, may result in not being able to find one quickly or go to work when work becomes available. It’s a hard line for families to walk.

Both child care centres and day homes are being offered a one-time grant for personal protective equipment and operating expenses. Daycares are being offered short-term operating grants. “Providers are going to need ongoing support through this relaunch effort to accommodate increased sanitation and personal protective needs, as well as precarious enrollment numbers. They’re going to need help to recall their workforce. Without clear understanding of how grants will address all forms of childcare, Albertans may face increased childcare costs that will just make it impossible for people to go back to work.”

DILEMMA: LOW-PAID WORK IN A PANDEMIC - WORTH THE RISK?

In most cases, childcare workers are in low-paying positions. When child care centres were closed, many centres had to immediately lay-off workers. Those workers face a number of dilemmas now, assuming they haven’t found other work in essential industries, about whether they want to assume the risk of going back to work in the first phase of relaunch, or if the precarity and risks are too much. With

enrollment numbers in flux, it could be hours are reduced or unknown. With a federal wage subsidy for essential workers being distributed to provinces, declaring childcare essential work might be a wise decision to help increase wages in the sector and recall the workforce without raising costs for families. All of this, of course, assumes that child care centres are even around to reopen. An April survey by the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA) showed 70% of programs faced permanent closure within one to three months.

“The last thing we want is for the lack of supply to increase costs or reduce quality, because then the economics in the home just don’t work and inevitably fewer people will go to work. That’s a really big deal for businesses and workers, it’s going to mean a greater number of families in poverty with no opportunity to go to work, and that just slows any recovery effort.” says Ambtman. “We need governments to address the full breadth of options in child care from financial, quality and safety perspectives. Only then will we be assured a strong recovery for all.”

“For me, as a single working parent, affordable and quality childcare means being able to keep my job and put food on the table as well as having shelter and keeping my lights on and other bills being paid on time. Quality means the most though, when it comes to my children...” - Rose “Childcare Lets Me Support My Family” [3]

Region: Alberta [4]

Tags: closure [5]

health and safety [6]

Source URL (modified on 25 May 2020): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/05/childcare-could-be-lynchpin-recovery-efforts>
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