

This essential worker's child-care costs have almost tripled during COVID-19^[1]

Dr. Lindsay MacNeil wants province to offer subsidy to offset higher costs

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EXCERPTS

A Halifax-area veterinarian says she's spending nearly three times the amount of money on child care during COVID-19, and she wants the province to step up and help essential workers who are struggling financially.

Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada that hasn't kept regulated child-care centres open for essential workers. Despite a promise by the premier in early May to reassess that approach, Dr. Lindsay MacNeil said she's still waiting.

"There's really not a lot of help for that and by not a lot, I guess I mean none," MacNeil, who works at Metro Animal Emergency Clinic in Dartmouth, N.S., told CBC's Maritime Noon on Monday.

MacNeil is a single parent and said she's working extra shifts to afford to pay for a babysitter to care for her three-year-old daughter.

Before COVID-19, she said she spent about \$800 a month at a licensed daycare, and a full-time babysitter who comes to her home now costs her about \$2,200 a month.

"It's really made me kind of have to sit down and really watch what we're spending on," MacNeil said. "Having it almost triple is a big hit to take during anytime, especially when there's already a lot of stressors happening."

MacNeil was able to find a babysitter on Kijiji who was willing to only work with her family, and she said she's thankful she was able to find someone she trusts.

The province initially suggested parents who needed to work could still use unregulated child-care operations, which have remained open, but MacNeil said those spots filled up quickly.

"So there's really nobody else that I can rely on," she said. "And there are a number of people that I can think of in my life that are experiencing this and I can only imagine there are even more."

At the beginning of May, Premier Stephen McNeil said his government would evaluate the child-care needs of essential service workers after students at Dalhousie University who were providing child care for health-care workers called on the government to do more.

June 8 reopening uncertain

Licensed daycares have been closed since late March and while the province has set June 8 as a target date to reopen, it's unclear whether that date will be met.

MacNeil said she's not advocating that daycares reopen before it's safe to do so. Rather, she wants the province to provide some form of financial aid to offset the higher costs of daycare.

"I think there's a lot of people in this position and we're kind of asking and reaching out and trying to verbalize that this is a concern and we need more support, but it's falling on deaf ears," she said.

What the province is doing

In a statement from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the province said a group of child-care representatives is working with public health to establish a plan to reopen the licensed child-care sector.

The department also said it's committed to working with essential workers to address their needs.

"To ensure families are not paying for a service they cannot access, the department directed licensed child-care providers to not charge families fees during this time," a statement said.

"Unlicensed childcare providers have continued to operate and provide an important service to fill the child-care needs of families during

COVID-19, including essential workers."

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