

Childcare re-opened but industry still under-funded: NDP critic ^[1]

While new cleaning and capacity regulations are visible impacts on the childcare industry, it's the less obvious impacts that are causing real harm

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EXCERPTS

After more than two months of closure due to COVID-19, child care centres in Nova Scotia were permitted to re-open last Monday, June 15.

But the Nova Scotia NDP's Education and Early Childhood Development spokesperson Claudia Chender says some parents and industry employees thought the opening was rocky.

"I think the childcare re-opening it seems has been a bit bumpy but that's to be expected to some degree," she says.

Chender tells NEWS 95.7's The Todd Veinotte Show that while large child care providers had good communication with the government, some smaller unlicensed facilities weren't as informed.

"I think part of it has been people not feeling super clear on what the rules are, so some unregulated centres are being told to use really intense sanitizing methods," she says.

But while the cleaning regulations and 50 per cent capacity are visible impacts on the childcare industry, Chender says it's the less obvious impacts that are causing real harm.

"The way in which we've talked about re-opening the economy ignored the realities of families and of women in particular," she explains. "We've been saying this for months now, is that when you re-open the economy you need to give attention to what needs to be in place so that everyone can participate in that re-opening."

Chender says not everyone has the same access to child care options, and when options are limited, it's women who are hit the hardest. "We still have thousands of families struggling for child care, and we know that's disproportionately impacting women in the province," she says.

According to Statistics Canada, women's unemployment increased five per cent in May, while men's decreased slightly. "they are having to make the choice of whether or not to stay home," says Chender.

With summer camps limiting attendees and schools closed early, parents with school-aged children have nowhere to send them, even if they had childcare for their younger siblings.

"I know a number of families who have said well if I've got two kids at home I might as well have three, or if I've got one I've might as well have two, from a financial perspective," Chender says.

The NDP spokesperson is calling for systemic change that invests more in allowing everyone to work as the economy re-opens.

"Whether that's a different kind of financial assistance, whether that's job protection or protection for employers who may have employees that are not able to work in the same capacity," she says.

And it doesn't just apply to women with children. Single parents, people with adult dependent children, or those caring for older family members would all benefit from more flexible work.

"We need people to be able to work, and family status is a protected ground under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. So you shouldn't be discriminated against because you have children, or for that matter any other kind of dependent," Chender says.

While the government began their pre-primary program for four-year-olds last year, Chender says it's time to take it a step further and implement universal childcare for all ages.

"There's all those years from zero to four that kids and families are still having to scramble for appropriate childcare options. So absolutely we believe that universal childcare is an idea whose time has long since come," she says.

The NDP representative says this would give equity not just to parents who are working, single parents, and all families, but allow all kids to start on common ground.

“It puts kids on a level playing field, that money isn’t a barrier to early socialization and opportunities for early learning”, she says. “So, absolutely it would be my hope that the government would revisit that.”

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