

Additional funding 'welcome news' for Manitoba child care providers, vacancies still a worry: MCCA ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

This week's announcement of millions in additional funding for child care in Manitoba was welcome news for the head of the Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA), but she worries more is needed as childcare centres deal with increased vacancies during COVID-19.

On Monday the federal and provincial government announced more than \$15 million in additional funding through their Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement.

The money is for early learning and child care investments this year and in 2021, and will also be used to create a one-time, \$1.5-million response grant for facilities that reopened during the pandemic, the two levels of government said.

"The reality is it's welcome news, of course it is, we welcome any sort of new investment into the programs," said MCCA executive director, Jodie Kehl.

But with roughly 21,000 vacant child care spaces open in some 900 facilities across Manitoba, Kehl said the resulting loss of parent fees is making it a tough go for some child care centres.

And there's still the added costs associated with COVID-19, she said.

"Incurred operating costs are going to be very much the same as what the schools are facing, we've just been facing it for the last five months."

On Monday, the province announced \$52 million in new money to help school divisions weather the costs of bringing students back in September, which comes on top of \$48 million school divisions saved during the spring when schools were closed.

While Kehl said she's grateful operating grants have been maintained for early learning and child care centres in Manitoba, she'd like to see more money provided to cover the extra costs.

"We continue to call on the province to increase remuneration for all educators, both in the home and in the centres," she said.

"Families for childcare have the exact same concerns that families from the schools have – they're worried about their children's safety, they're worried about their health."

In a release Monday the province said the \$15 million in joint funding supports its annual investment of more than \$181 million in early learning and child care activities across the province.

"Child care is a priority for the Government of Manitoba and for Manitoba families, especially as we continue to respond to and recover from the pandemic," said Families Minister Heather Stefanson.

"The extension of our bilateral funding agreement provides significant, ongoing support to the sector as we work together to ensure families have access to child care choices that meet their needs."

Symptoms can include fever, cough and difficulty breathing – very similar to a cold or flu. Some people can develop a more severe illness. People most at risk of this include older adults and people with severe chronic medical conditions like heart, lung or kidney disease. If you develop symptoms, contact public health authorities.

To prevent the virus from spreading, experts recommend frequent handwashing and coughing into your sleeve. They also recommend minimizing contact with others, staying home as much as possible and maintaining a distance of two metres from other people if you go out. In situations where you can't keep a safe distance from others, public health officials recommend the use of a non-medical face mask or covering to prevent spreading the respiratory droplets that can carry the virus. In some provinces and municipalities across the country, masks or face coverings are now mandatory in indoor public spaces.

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

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