

Alberta child care operators to receive federal grants to help with costs related to COVID-19 pandemic ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Alberta early childhood education operators will get federal grants in October and November to offset some of the costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the federal government's \$71.8 million Safe Restart Agreement, each centre in Alberta will receive \$2,500 plus \$200 for each licensed space, whether those spaces are being used or not under capacity restrictions, on Oct. 15 and Nov. 15.

Federal Families, Children and Social Development Minister Ahmed Hussen, along with Alberta Children's Services Minister Rebecca Schulz, announced the funding Tuesday and said it can go towards additional staffing, cleaning supplies, PPE and overhead expenses.

"We know that sector has been hit hard by COVID-19," said Hussen.

Schulz said over the past few months, COVID-19 made it clear that childcare is essential to Alberta's economic recovery.

"Most childcare centres across the province and preschools have opened, but many are still struggling to get through these uncertain times as enrolment remains low right across the province," said Schulz.

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As of Sept. 11, 83 per cent of daycares, out-of-school care and preschools are open in Alberta but at just over half capacity.

"That makes it really difficult for child care centres to pay their bills without increasing parents fees. That's what this funding is going to do," said Schulz.

The provincial government does not have statistics on how many child care programs have closed permanently.

The federal funding will run dry in December, and Schulz did not outline a specific long-term plan to keep the sector afloat during COVID-19.

"We need to be prudent, we can't anticipate necessarily where this pandemic is going to go, so we want to be able to be in a position where we're able to respond," said Schulz.

Alberta child care centres suffered more layoffs during the first six weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic than those in other provinces, according to a July report from the Canadian Child Care Federation and Muttart Foundation. The majority of childcare centre staff who received layoff notices in Alberta either applied for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or employment insurance.

After being forced shut for two months beginning in March, child care centres got three phases of restart funding from the province totalling \$17.8 million. When Schulz announced \$45 million in ongoing funding from the federal government in July, she also outlined a revamped subsidy program effective Aug. 1 that will see an estimated 16,000 low-income families pay less than \$25 per day in child care fees, some as low as \$13 per day.

However, the subsidy will only be available to those families who make \$75,000 or less per year in household income.

As the pandemic pushes women's participation in the labour force down, economists and investment leaders say the country's economic recovery is at risk if employees can't access affordable child care to get back to work.

According to the latest numbers from Statistics Canada, Alberta's unemployment is the second-highest in Canada after Newfoundland and Labrador as fewer Albertans look for work.

Region: Alberta ^[3]

Tags: funding ^[4]

economic recovery ^[5]

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