

New details of \$25/day daycare revealed, as Furey promises it will be 'first step' for sector ^[1]

New program to launch in January

Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 14 Oct 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

There are a few new details surrounding the rollout of \$25-a-day daycare in Newfoundland and Labrador, as the provincial government gave a short update to its plan Wednesday morning, while also promising more improvements to the sector.

Cheaper daycare will come to be through the existing government subsidy system of operating grants for regulated daycare centres, a grant system that will expand to include regulated family day homes.

About 70 per cent of regulated centres currently avail of operating grants, Education Minister Tom Osborne said, adding he hopes more centres and day homes register for the system to boost the number of \$25-a-day spots.

"The operating grant program has been a key tool in government's efforts to establishing more affordable child care," Osborne said.

Funnelling the new money into the old system makes it easy to implement by the start date of Jan. 1, he said.

The grant program currently gives participating centres money in order for them to offer child-care rates that vary from \$44-a-day for infants to \$30 for preschoolers.

It's unclear whether the increased operating grants will fully cover the gap between what some other centres and homes currently charge, but Osborne did allay the fears of any parent or guardian currently paying less than \$25-a-day via a subsidy that covers most or all child-care costs for low-income families.

"This will not change," he said.

Consultations to include unlicensed operators

The Liberal government and Premier Andrew Furey have repeatedly touted the child-care plan as a boost to the economy and working parents.

However, early childhood education advocates and people working in the industry have called for an overhaul to the entire system, saying the overall system is broken and affordability is only one issue at stake.

Critics say there are too few child-care spaces overall, and the quality of care varies widely. There are currently about 8,100 regulated spaces in Newfoundland and Labrador, with an untold amount of unregulated spaces, which exist outside government control and therefore cannot avail of the grants.

"Whenever any system is broken, you have to start somewhere. And this is a first step in reinvigorating a bigger, bolder idea with respect to child care," Furey told reporters Wednesday.

Wednesday's event was held outside of New Dimensions Child Care Centre in St. John's. Janice Adams, the volunteer chair of its board of directors, applauded the new measure, saying her centre is on board, but pointed out that demand is high and the centre's six infant spaces could be filled "three times over."

"I'm looking forward to a time when it is universal child care. Because there's still many, many people that can't access it," she said.

Osborne said his department is planning talks in the new year between bureaucrats and those who work in child care, both in the regulated and unregulated sectors, to see what more can be done, particularly in helping more day cares move into the regulated system.

"We've been dialoguing with some of them already and understand some of the barriers. If there is red tape that's unnecessary, if we can eliminate some of those barriers, that's what we intend to do," Osborne said.

The Liberals' plan is to fund 8,000 \$25-a-day spaces, although as the operating grant system is entirely voluntary, it's unclear at the moment as to how many child-care operators will avail of it.

The plan is set to roll out in January and cost between \$12 million and \$15 million annually, depending on uptake, with \$3 million budgeted for the first quarter of 2021.

Region: Newfoundland [3]

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