

# Alberta government rolling out one-time \$561 child-care benefit for working parents <sup>[1]</sup>

The benefit will be available to families starting March 1 with a combined income of up to \$100,000 per year who had their children enrolled in child care between April 1 and Dec. 31, 2020.

**Author:** Johnson, Lisa

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPT

Some Alberta parents with kids in child care will receive a one-time \$561 per-child payment from the provincial government.

Starting March 1, families with a household income of up to \$100,000 per year who had children registered in licensed or unlicensed child care between April 1 and Dec. 31, 2020 can apply online for the new Working Parents Benefit.

Children's Services Minister Rebecca Schulz announced the program Wednesday, saying the pandemic has created a significant amount of stress for working families, many of whom are essential workers.

"This past year, we recognize the stress and anxiety families continue to face. That's why we've chosen to return these dollars back into the pockets of hard-working Alberta parents who have been working to fuel our economy over the last year," said Schulz.

She added that enrolment at child-care centres has been down significantly because of the pandemic, and the benefit comes from an unspent \$108 million in the Children's Services 2020-21 budget that would have normally gone to child-care subsidies.

Families who have registered in licensed or unlicensed daycare, day homes, out-of-school care, or preschool programs will be eligible for the new benefit. They will need to show their receipts to qualify, and an MyAlberta digital ID to apply.

The announcement comes one day before the government tables its budget for 2021-22, and after months of questions from the NDP Opposition about why the ministry was withholding more than \$100 million in cash during the pandemic.

In October, Schulz told Postmedia that the government was aiming to be flexible before the end of the fiscal year and make sure that the cash was going where it was needed most, based on consultations.

## 'Embarrassingly ineffective'

NDP children's services critic Rakhi Pancholi said in a statement Wednesday the benefit will only give families temporary support.

"Parents need affordable child care every month, not just when the UCP has a budget to sell," Pancholi said, adding the money was withheld for almost a year.

"This is an embarrassingly ineffective way to address the crisis in child care. The economic imperative in this moment is to get Albertans back to work. No parent is going to be able to return to work or school based on half a month's worth of child-care fees."

The UCP began phasing out the former NDP government's \$25-a-day pilot program for early learning and child-care centres (ELCC), last year and introduced a revamped subsidy program.

The government estimated that 16,000 low-income families would 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 less than \$75,000 per year in household income.

The NDP has estimated that bringing back its \$25-per-day child-care program would cost \$900 million per year, but economists have pointed out that such low-fee programs generate government revenue that can more than cover the additional system costs.

Throughout the pandemic last year, child-care centres in Alberta got three phases of restart funding from the province totalling \$17.8 million.

**Region:** Alberta <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** parents <sup>[4]</sup>

benefit <sup>[5]</sup>

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