

# Rates will rise as childcare pilot program comes to staggered end

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## EXCERPTS

The end of a provincial program to lower the cost of childcare is set to come to an end this month, though parents who use two local centres will see a measure of relief as rates rise.

On Monday the YMCA of Medicine Hat announced it will be part of a new government funding program that will see cost increases phased in at its centres in the city.

That comes at the end of a four-year-old program to offer \$25 per day childcare at certain not-for-profit centres across the province.

On April 1, the monthly charge at the John Miller and Crescent Heights centres moves to \$794 per month for toddlers aged 18 months to five years who attend full time.

That is up from about \$500 in an average month under the \$25 program – a difference of about \$300 per month, and roughly \$400 more for infants younger than 18 months.

A YMCA release states those rates are “well below market rates” and is possible because they were selected among 13 centres around the province with bridge funding to help parents adjust to new costs.

“We believe that childcare is an essential service that is the foundation of our economy,” said Sharon Hayward, the head of the local YMCA. “This transitional funding is an excellent step toward ensuring all families have access to high quality and affordable childcare in our province.”

The previous NDP government announced the pilots as part of childcare strategy in 2017 that selected non-profit and community-run centres with a high percentage of low income earners accessing the service. That was expanded to more centres the following year.

The United Conservative Party has been critical of the program that doesn’t require a means test for the subsidy that was paid to centre operators, then passed on to all clients.

The first round of centres see the program dropped on March 31, but another 100 centres across Alberta in a second phase will see the program end this June.

The recent provincial budget includes a one-time \$561 “working parents benefit” to those who apply by the end of March, have an income less than \$100,000 and had children in care between April 2020 and the end of the year.

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