

Distribute federal child-care funds with municipalities in mind: Waterloo regional councillor ^[1]

Local mom hopes Ottawa's budget, which pledges \$30B over 5 years, will give parents 'a fighting chance'

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EXCERPTS

A Waterloo regional councillor hopes the newly announced federal funding for child-care supports won't get held up at the provincial level, and municipalities will have a say in how cash is distributed.

"I think it's encouraging. I'm not dancing in the street yet, but I think what the Liberals have done is listen to what child-care experts have been saying is needed and what many economists have been saying is needed," Elizabeth Clarke, councillor in the Ontario region and chief executive operator of YWCA Kitchener-Waterloo, told CBC Kitchener-Waterloo's The Morning Edition.

The federal government announced Monday a commitment of about \$30 billion over five years to help make child care and early learning more affordable.

The average monthly cost of child care in Kitchener in 2019 was \$1,186, according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. The plan suggests Canadians will see a 50 per cent cut in daycare costs by the end of 2022, further reduced to about \$10 a day by 2025-26.

Clarke said promises of a national child-care plan have been made for decades, and she worries it may be delayed when it trickles down to the provincial level.

"These announcements have been made before, they haven't survived federal elections and we've also seen similar announcements get hung up at the provincial level because child care is, after all, a jurisdiction of the province and provinces often don't like to be told what to do and I can see some details in the federal plan that may be sticking points for the Ontario government," she said.

"There's a strong economic argument now and I think we probably have a better chance now than we've had ever of getting it through, but we'll see how it looks when it actually hits the ground," she added.

Municipalities at the table

Clarke said municipalities have a better understanding of what's needed locally and can provide insights on how some funding should be distributed.

"My recommendation to the feds and to the province is let the local municipalities who are doing the work, who are closest to the families and children who need the help, let them have more of a significant role in planning how this is going to look," said Clarke.

The first point of order, she said, should be pouring money into current child care operators that are experiencing financial losses due to the pandemic.

"They're dealing with significantly decreased fees because enrolment is low ... but at the same time ... they're dealing with increased expenses related to COVID," said Clarke. "We need to find a way to support those centres so that they can stay open."

The federal government pledged to allocate \$8.3 billion a year after the initial funding finishes to create new programs, money that will also be used to hire more educators and improve quality in years to come.

Supporting women in workforce

The investment is also meant to bring more women and caregivers into the workforce. The government estimates the pandemic has driven at least 16,000 women out of the workforce, while the male labour force has grown by thousands.

Michelle Hrabí is a local parent who's remaining at home as a result of the pandemic.

"My hope is that it will also give people who want to return to work full time a fighting chance," said Hrabí in a message to CBC K-W.

"The problem now is that there are too many inconsistencies between different daycare programs and it can often be nearly impossible to find a space, and if you can find a space, it might not be at a daycare you are comfortable with," said Hrabí. As a result, "you're forced into

these terrible situations about whether to go back to work and do something you're not fully comfortable with or stay home and lose out on job and economic opportunities," she said.

The budget also allots \$2.5 billion for Indigenous early learning and child care services, to help create new spaces and support existing centres.

Ottawa said it also plans to make more than 400 existing centres more accessible for children with disabilities.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: federal budget ^[4]
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