

Foothills childcare providers advocate for \$10 a day program ^[1]

Daycare, day home providers hope the Province will step up to match the federal \$30-billion commitment to affordable childcare

Author: Conrad, Krista

Source: Okotoks Daily

Format: Article

Publication Date: 26 Apr 2021

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

An announcement of funding for universal affordable childcare has day home and day-care providers advocating for their families as Alberta balks at the proposal.

The 2021 federal budget, which came down April 19, included an investment of nearly \$30 billion over five years aimed at reducing childcare by half by the end of 2022, with a goal of \$10-per-day care by 2025-26 in all licensed facilities across the country.

Key to the proposed program was province buy-in, as the subsidized childcare would be split 50-50 between federal and provincial governments.

Premier Jason Kenney initially dismissed the program the day after it was announced by the federal Liberals.

“If it is, as it appears to be, a cookie-cutter approach – 9-to-5, government-run, union-operated, largely urban care that excludes shift workers, largely excludes rural people, excludes informal forms of childcare – that would not meet the needs of Albertans,” Kenney said in legislature April 20.

Julia Gwyn-Morris owns Daydreams Early Learning and Child Care Centres Ltd., which operates a non-profit day-care facility and private out-of-school programs. It will be opening over-night care next month to accommodate shift workers in the Foothills region who require irregular hours.

She said the premier’s comments about the federal affordable childcare program are unfounded.

“There’s a misunderstanding, a lot of misinformation going around about what the budget did or did not say,” said Gwyn-Morris, who has been in meetings with national and provincial childcare associations for the past week dissecting the information.

“One of the biggest misinformation that parents need to know, everybody needs to know, is this: this is for private and non-profit daycare centres, out-of-school centres, and family day homes. This is not restricted to non-profit only.”

She said the \$10-a-day program could be beneficial to many parents.

When the provincial NDP government launched its pilot \$25-per-day program three years ago she jumped on board and said it made a huge difference for many families.

“I’ve seen the help it has given parents,” said Gwyn-Morris.

That program came to an end March 31, and it’s been a struggle already, she said.

She said Alberta should be joining other provinces and show a willingness to negotiate the terms of the program to help families in the province.

“If it’s not accepted or if they don’t want to enter into any agreements with the federal government, we will lose that opportunity as a province,” said Gwyn-Morris.

There could be further benefits to offering the affordable childcare, such as encouraging some private day homes to become licensed facilities in order to take part in the subsidy, she said.

Being able to provide \$10-per-day care could help push some caregivers to get their licence and become family day home educators, which would provide them with program supports, education and training opportunities, and allows families to apply for subsidized care and providers to apply for wage top-up opportunities, she said.

“This may be that incentive to become licensed because there are benefits,” said Gwyn-Morris.

Brandy Walker-Schneider has operated a day home in Okotoks since 2013 after working in a low-income daycare for five years. She said the government funding has been a long time coming.

“I actually got to see some of the issues with the prices of daycare,” said Walker-Schneider. “I’ve been waiting for this for a long time.” She just became licensed in 2020 and would be able to offer the \$10-per-day care.

With the potential subsidized care, she’s thankful for the leap made during the pandemic and expects others may follow suit.

“If you’re a private day home and you’re not getting subsidized by the government, why would anyone come to you and pay \$900 when they can pay \$10 a day?” said Walker-Schneider. “Something will have to happen with these private operators.”

She said Kenney’s comments were concerning and left her feeling as though the program doesn’t have much promise in Alberta.

“They clearly don’t like it, and they just haven’t done their research,” said Walker-Schneider. “This is good for all daycares.”

Some of the parents who have children in her care have indicated the savings would make a huge difference, she said, from being able to book a vacation to having another child, buying a new house or vehicle, or putting more in the bank.

Paying \$10 per day would be far better than an average of \$1,000 per child per month, especially for those with more than two who require full-time or out-of-school care, she said.

It could encourage parents who have stayed home due to the high cost of childcare to get back into the workforce, she said. There are a few moms she knows of who opted to stay home because at the end of the month, after paying for daycare, they averaged a take-home of \$200 or less.

“What’s the point of having someone else take care of your children when you’re not bringing anything home?” said Walker-Schneider. “It could push parents – mothers, specifically – back to work if they want to. That’s the benefit of this – they get to have a choice.”

Foothills MP John Barlow said he’s curious to see what happens with the proposed childcare program, which is similar to promises made by previous Liberal governments that never came to fruition.

Earmarking \$30 billion over five years is a substantial commitment, he said, but the key is having the provincial stamps of approval and that could be difficult in 2021.

“The provinces are broke after COVID, so I’m not sure the provinces will have the resources in order to commit to make this program happen,” said Barlow. “If you don’t have the partnership, which could take years to happen, then it’s another broken promise.”

Region: Alberta ^[3]

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