

# Town of Westlock will lobby MLA to endorse national child-care plan <sup>[1]</sup>

Child care society executive director asks council for support

**Author:** Blais, George

**Source:** Town and Country Today

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 23 Jun 2021

## AVAILABILITY

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

## EXCERPTS

**WESTLOCK** – The Town of Westlock supports the federal government's \$30 billion five-year plan to offset the cost of early learning and child-care services and will petition the local MLA in the hopes of getting the province onside.

At their June 14 meeting, town councillors voted 6-0 (mayor Ralph Leriger was absent) to pen a letter to MLA Glenn van Dijken asking for his government's support as the federal plan will require a 50-50 split with provinces. The funding was announced as part of the federal government's budget April 19 and includes \$9 billion annually following the first five years. A day after the announcement Premier Jason Kenney balked at the policy, saying that at first glance it looked like an "Ottawa-style" program that wouldn't work for Albertans and called it "kind of cookie-cutter, nine-to-five, urban, government, and union-run institutional daycare options, which excludes the vast majority of parents."

Westlock Child Care Society executive director Christine Villeneuve asked for council's support during her 10-minute presentation, saying in an e-mail to CAO Simone Wiley she worries, as do many of her colleagues, that this plan will not come to Alberta unless families, programs, and communities advocate for this plan. Currently, Villeneuve says they're full within their limited cohorts (no more than 30 staff and children in one space) and have three cohorts (two at 30, one at 10) so the federal plan would support the expansion of the society to meet the needs of many more families, as well as employ additional staff and boost the local economy.

"Several municipalities have already voiced their support and they believe in a united effort to rally communities across Alberta during the recovery from the pandemic," said Villeneuve.

"The creation of a national child-care system of unparalleled proportion will help reduce poverty, address the workforce shortages in qualified child-care staffing and boost our rural economy. Our communities need a national child-care plan for economic stability encouraging women to enter or re-enter the workforce and for community growth."

Coun. Murtaza Jamaly, who's sat on the society board, attended the daycare as a child and as a parent enrolled his children at the facility, lauded the facility and called it "an asset" for the community. Jamaly noted that child care has also been a talking point at the regional economic development committee due to its importance for working families.

"Child care has a tangible economic benefit to our community. People who are on the fence if they should go back to work or stay at home with the kids don't necessarily have to weigh out the financial side of it," said Jamaly.

"I'm a believer that this program works and it is part of the economic plan for the community and that we should support this wholeheartedly knowing that we have a great facility in our community."

Villeneuve pointed to the success of the \$25-a-day daycare pilot program rolled out by the province in 2017 – Westlock was one of 22 daycares selected to take part in the \$10-million project. The Alberta government announced in January 2020 it would not renew the first phase of the program, which initially had a planned end-date of March 2020, though the UCP did extend it to July 31.

Villeneuve noted in her e-mail that during most months of that program, the Westlock Child Care Society had a waitlist of 100 children – most were full-time, while approximately 40 per cent were part-time or casual. Single parents who would not ordinarily enter the workforce due to the cost of child care paid \$0 per month which "provided human capital to boost the local economy."

"Insurmountable data has been collected over the previous four years showing the impact the \$25-a-day program had for families who were enrolled. While we agree the pilot program should have been available to every family now is the opportunity to ensure all of our families will be able to access a quality and licensed program," she told council.

"Programing supports of this magnitude allowed for parents to have diversity of care, utilize part-time spaces and flexible hours. This afforded families the ability of choice to enroll their children in a quality program that met their needs. Parents could choose to enter the

workforce, return to school or just take a mental health day. It also provided opportunity for career diversification especially with declines in oil and gas resources and supported new families moving into our community knowing they could afford child care.”

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

**Tags:** federal budget <sup>[4]</sup>

advocacy <sup>[5]</sup>

---

**Source URL (modified on 29 Jun 2021):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/06/town-westlock-will-lobby-mla-endorse-national-child-care-plan>

#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/06/town-westlock-will-lobby-mla-endorse-national-child-care-plan> <sup>[2]</sup>

<https://www.townandcountrytoday.com/local-news/town-of-westlock-will-lobby-mla-to-endorse-national-child-care-plan-3899310> <sup>[3]</sup>

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7859> <sup>[4]</sup> <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-budget> <sup>[5]</sup>

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy>