

What needs to be fixed in Quebec's daycare system ^[1]

CBC Quebec has spent the past month digging deep into some of the biggest challenges, and successes of the day

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EXCERPTS

Quebec Family minister Mathieu Lacombe says the daycare system needs to be "put back on track" and he wants to "complete the system" which was first introduced in 1997 by Parti Québécois Family Minister Pauline Marois. He promises to table a new bill in the fall.

According to the Family Ministry, there are 51,000 children on waiting lists, mostly for subsidized spots. Several parents, mothers especially, have reported being unable to return to work because they can't find child care after their parental leaves.

Those who are invested in the system agree it should offer quality care to children, and that everyone who wants a spot should be able to get one.

CBC's Quebec AM and Breakaway have done a series of interviews exploring the current system — its successes and what needs to improve.

Here is a compilation of those conversations:

Private daycares ready to offer subsidized spots

In mid-June, Lacombe held two days of public consultations about child-care services.

One group representing about 600 private daycares, the Coalition des garderies privées non subventionnées du Québec, presented a brief saying they are ready to be converted into Centres de la petite enfance (CPE) or offer subsidized spots.

They also called for a moratorium on any new private daycares. Private daycare owner and board member, Anto Khoren spoke with Alison Brunette

CPEs say staff shortage forcing closure of groups

CPEs are often referred to in research as the best quality daycare within Quebec's system. They offer \$8.50 per day spots and tend to have the most resources, including for children of vulnerable backgrounds and with special needs.

Isabelle Lebrun is a CPE and co-ordinating bureau director and she sits on the board of the Quebec council for early childhood education services.

Earlier this year she had to call the parents of a little boy with special needs to say he had to stay home because she didn't have staff to care for him.

"When you work in this job, it's the worst thing, you know. We are there to offer quality services."

She says colleagues have closed whole groups or even daycares due to a lack of staff.

Lebrun spoke to Quebec AM's Alison Brunette.

Vulnerable children or with special needs poorly served, says union

During the public consultations, the minister heard from several groups who said children who come from vulnerable backgrounds or have special needs receive unequal care depending on the kind of daycare they attend.

The CSQ union branch that represents daycare workers says more funding is needed to serve vulnerable children, and that the rules and even language around requests for services for special-needs children need to change.

Vice-president of the CSQ, Anne Dionne spoke with Breakaway guest host, Peter Tardif.

The numbers

Subsidized spots cost \$8.50 per child per day. There are three kinds of subsidized daycare, and two kinds of private daycare where parents

can get a tax deduction for up to \$38 of fees per day per child. The return is based on family income and does not take into account the number of children per family in care.

According to the Family Ministry, as of March 31, there were 307,490 recognized daycare spots in Quebec:

32 percent, or 98,014 spots in CPEs.

15 percent, or 47,789 spots in subsidized daycares.

30 percent, or 91,604 spots in subsidized family-run daycares.

23 percent, or 70,083 spots in private unsubsidized daycares.

Thousands of children also attend home daycares that are not recognized and are less regulated by the Family Ministry.

Anxiety and sleepless nights over lack of subsidized spots

Beyond the numbers, there are parents barely coping with the reality of daycare shortages.

Catherine Lévesque-Matte said the night before having to shell out \$1,500 for two weeks worth of daycare for her three kids, she couldn't sleep. She knew her family couldn't afford it and the only option left was for her to quit her job working as a legal translator for the Quebec government.

It's a job she says she worked hard to get, and loves. If she quit, her family would lose the benefits that come with the position, and their house — they can't afford it on her partner's salary alone.

So stepping on her ego, she drafted a Facebook post and called out for help. She told Alison Brunette what happened next and why she is so frustrated with the current situation.

Everyone wants quality childcare but what does that mean?

When universal daycare was first introduced by Pauline Marois in 1997, its goal was to provide equal care to all children in Quebec.

But Prof. Christa Japel, a psychologist and researcher at a Quebec early childhood think tank, the Observatoire des tout-petits, says the system has failed at that goal.

She joined host Alison Brunette to explain what quality care means and where Quebec's system most needs to improve.

A solution: when a municipality and a CPE work together

Both the Federation of Municipalities of Quebec and the Union of Municipalities of Quebec say the Family Ministry should be collaborating more closely with communities when determining daycare needs in the regions.

One community that has done just that is Ste-Martine, south of Montreal.

It donated land for a CPE in exchange for evening access to a conference room the children use as a gym during the day.

More recently, the CPE installed a play module in the municipal park rather than a closed yard so all residents could have access to it.

Counc. Mélanie Lefort spoke to Marika Wheeler on Quebec AM.

Government invests in family-run daycares to get spots open fast

Those working in the daycare system say a major staffing shortage, exacerbated by low wages and few new recruits is one of the main challenges to offering more subsidized spots.

In early June, the family minister announced \$200 million over five years to try to convince family-run daycares to open and stay open. The Family Ministry is counting on the relatively quick timeline in creating subsidized spots to make a dent in the shortage.

CBC journalist Marika Wheeler explains why the ministry is counting on these operators to fill the void, but also explores the challenging work conditions that are driving daycare operators to shut down.

Provincial investment in daycare pays off big time says economist

Economist Pierre Fortin says investing in daycare has a big payoff and both Quebec and Canadian coffers benefit. For every \$100 invested, he says, \$175 come back to the government via sales taxes, income taxes, and money saved on child-care credits.

He also says it's an important program that allows about 100,000 women to participate in the Quebec workforce who couldn't otherwise, all while shoring up their long-term economic security.

He explained to Peter Tardif why the government should invest even more in subsidized, quality daycare in Quebec.

Region: Quebec ^[3]

Tags: child care ^[4]

subsidy ^[5]

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/07/what-needs-be-fixed-quebecs-daycare-system>

[2] <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-daycare-problems-1.6096763>

[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7855>

[4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care>

[5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/subsidy>