

Opinion: Federal child-care plan an opportunity that Alberta can't miss ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Albertans know that child care, along with many other important services, has suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Child care in Alberta has become increasingly uncertain as some centres have closed, early childhood educators have lost their jobs, and children and families have lost access to trusted and safe spaces for their children.

Many of us, child-care providers, child-care users, and child-care advocates, have pleaded with the provincial government to provide robust support during this uncertain time. At Child Care Now Alberta, we recognize that \$130 million has been injected to help buoy child care.

Over the past 16 months, funding to help child-care centres continue providing services include:

- \$8 million in May 2020 to help approved family day homes and child-care centres stay open (Provincial funding).
- \$45 Million granted (July 2020) for investment in lower-income child-care spaces, and to offset COVID-19 closings and re-openings (federal funding).
- \$7 million from the Critical Worker Benefit, a combination of both provincial and federal dollars, to help frontline workers.

This list does not include the money child-care operators received through the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), which was essential in keeping centres afloat while they operated at 50-60 per cent capacity while staffing at 70 per cent.

The overall funding provided has been a collaboration between the federal government and the provincial government to keep child-care centres safely open during the pandemic.

But there is more work to do. If the Alberta economy is to recover without leaving children, women and families behind, we need significant investment in creating an Alberta child-care system. A system focused on providing licensed, high-quality, equitable and accessible child care for all families who choose it.

In fact, a report by the Centre for Future for Work on the benefits a universal child-care system across Canada, over 10 years, includes wins such as:

- An increase in the annual GDP between \$63 to \$107 billion;
- Over 200,000 new direct jobs in child-care centres;
- 100,000 more jobs in industries which support and supply the ELCC sector;
- Increase in employment of up to 725,000 Canadian women in prime parenting years.

Canada is on the cusp of developing a nationwide system of equitable and accessible child care. The 2021 Federal budget made a clear commitment to building a child-care system in each province with a significant investment of \$30 billion over the next five years and at least \$9.2 billion annually after 2026. Provinces are being invited to partner with the federal government to build this system, 50 years since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended it.

In fact, on July 8, the province of B.C. and the Government of Canada entered into the first bilateral agreement that will see 3.2 billion federal dollars invested in child care over the next five years, with the promise of 30,000 new regulated early-learning and child-care spaces for children under the age of six within five years. An opportunity to build this kind of system sits at Alberta's door step. Alberta must be a part of this broader plan — Premier Jason Kenney and Children's Services Minister Rebecca Schulz must work with the federal government to ensure Albertans benefit from the way other provinces already are.

This is simply an opportunity that cannot be missed. Child Care Now Alberta believes Albertans deserve this system, for both our children and for the economy. We are urging Premier Kenney and Minister Schulz to work with the federal government to ensure Alberta receives adequate funding to make high-quality, licensed, equitable and accessible child care in Alberta a reality.

Albertans can join this plea by adding their names to an open public letter asking Kenney and Schulz to reach an agreement with the

federal government that makes use of the billions of dollars on the table.

Region: Alberta ^[3]

Tags: federal programs ^[4]

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