

'It would be life-changing': Advocates push for Alberta to sign on to \$10/day federal child care program ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A growing list of provinces are signing on to the federal's \$10/day childcare plan, and advocates in Alberta are hoping the provincial government will follow suit.

The federal government is vowing to bring down the cost of childcare to \$10/day by spending \$30 billion over the next five years. So far B.C. and Nova Scotia have signed on to the plan.

"Parents are paying the equivalent of a mortgage for child care, and we know that if we could bring it down to \$10 it would be life-changing for families," said Public Interest Alberta Executive Director Bradley Lafortune.

Lafortune says currently there is only space for one out of every seven kids in Alberta childcare facilities.

Childcare in Edmonton costs around \$1,000 per infant a month. That price is one reason why some parents like Carmen North make alternate arrangements as their maternity leave comes to an end.

"You just end up working to pay for child care, which would have been the case in our situation," said North. "My husband is going to stay home with them."

North says she would need to understand what the federal program would look like, but thinks that many families would benefit from affordable childcare.

"Just being able to have something more affordable so that everyone can access it is definitely of benefit. Hopefully it allows parents to be at ease when they are working and providing for their family."

There have been promises for national universal childcare for decades in Canada. With tens of thousands of Canadian women leaving the workforce during the pandemic advocates say now is the time for change.

"With child care, women can make those choices to reenter the workforce more easily," said Lafortune.

He says caregivers, parents, grandparents and childcare providers need to pressure the provincial government to show there's strong demand for the \$10/day program.

"We're not optimistic at this point in time that the provincial government is taking seriously this opportunity," said Lafortune. "This will have positive generational impacts for everyone."

The UCP says it's negotiating with the Liberals, but at the time of the announcement Premier Jason Kenney said: "If it's a take-it-or-leave it, Ottawa-style cookie cutter program. I don't think that satisfies the demands or expectations of Albertans."

Kenney went on to say that he thought the program left out rural Albertans, Indigenous communities and parents doing shift work.

In a statement, Minister of Children's Services press secretary Becca Polak said: "Minister Schulz has always indicated her willingness to work with the federal government on an agreement that benefits all Albertans."

It goes on to say: "The negotiation process has begun and we look forward to a deal that ensures access to affordable, high-quality child care for working parents."

With a possible federal election looming, the child-care plan is largely seen as a campaign style promise.

"Trudeau wants to win seats in urban Calgary and Edmonton, so an agreement with Kenney would be a huge political win for Trudeau. I don't think Kenney is ready to give him that political mileage," said Chaldeans Mensah, a political science professor at MacEwan University.

"It's time for politicians to put away their differences and deal with this issue."

Region: Alberta ^[3]

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