

Alberta parents could save thousands under federal \$10-a-day child-care plan, new data shows ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Parents in Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge could save thousands of dollars next year and in subsequent years if the provincial and federal government strike a deal on child-care funding, new data shows.

The analysis comes as the province is in talks with the federal government on its plan to halve the cost of child-care fees by next year and reduce the cost of child care to \$10 a day by 2026.

"If this plan were implemented in Alberta, it would mean substantial savings for parents," said David Macdonald, senior economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

Calgary parents could save the most in Alberta, with parents saving on average \$7,800 next year and nearly \$13,000 per year by 2026 once the \$10-a-day model moves forward, the CCPA analysis found.

Edmonton parents could save about \$6,300 in 2022 for an infant in daycare. The estimates are based on data from the CCPA 2020 child-care fee survey.

"It would make a huge difference for the parents of young families in terms of reducing their child-care fees," said Macdonald.

Ongoing discussions

But to get average child-care fees down to that lower level, provinces and territories would have to kick in more funding.

Alberta's provincial government ended a pilot offering \$25-a-day child care earlier this year, but there are plans to bring in a new program with federal funding.

Rebecca Polak, press secretary to Children's Services Minister Rebecca Schulz, told CBC News last week that negotiations with Ottawa have started.

"[Minister Schulz] has spoken with the federal minister multiple times since this funding was announced and he has indicated his willingness to work with us and ensure flexibility in any agreement," Polak said in an emailed statement.

Mikaela Harrison, a press secretary with the federal government's Office of the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, said in an email they are in discussions and "remain optimistic that we will come to an agreement that is affordable, accessible, inclusive and high quality for Alberta families."

In the past, Premier Jason Kenney has said he feared the federal proposal around child-care funding is too narrow.

"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 child care — that would not meet the needs of most Albertans," Kenney said in April.

More than just reducing fees: experts

Jennifer Usher, with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta, said reducing fees should be only one part of the discussion.

"The biggest part for me is that quality piece and thinking about the early childhood educators and how they are supported in the work that they do with children and families," she said.

Macdonald and Usher agree that more daycare spaces will be needed if child-care fees come down.

If more spaces open up, more educators will be in further demand, they both said.

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there's been a real drop in the number of educators who are working in the field so we definitely want to see those numbers rise again," said Usher.

She said other considerations like after-school care and preschool should also be discussed as part of the child-care funding deal.

"I think really looking at the whole gamut of what kind of services we offer in early learning and child-care will be the ticket," Usher said.

There is no timeline yet as to when — and if — an agreement between the province and federal governments will be reached.

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