

One in four children in Nova Scotia live in poverty and child care advocates want to change that ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

KJIPUKTUK (Halifax) – Roughly three weeks out from election day in Nova Scotia, one organization is challenging parties to take meaningful action on child care in the province.

Child Care Now Nova Scotia is a non-profit organization advocating a universal, affordable, accessible, quality childcare system in Nova Scotia. The organization is made up of a wide range of stakeholders in child care, including early childhood educators, researchers, parents, grandparents, and community members that hope to revitalize the funding, delivery, and management of child care in the province.

With one in four children living in poverty in Nova Scotia and a minimum wage (\$12.95) offering only about two-thirds of a livable wage, the situation is dire, the organization warns.

The provincial government announced earlier this month a plan that would see childcare costs cut by 50 percent in 2022, and an average cost of \$10 per day by 2026. The announcement also called for an additional 9,500 child care spaces across the province.

Many families in the province are choosing between groceries, rent, water, and power bills. A \$10 per day average cost of child care is still out of reach for those who need it most.

Christine Saulnier, a member of the organization's steering committee and director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia, says it's time for the province to overhaul its child care policies.

While Saulnier says the work and advocacy around the issue of child care has been happening for likely 40 years, Child Care Now Nova Scotia, the formal advocacy group, launched two years ago.

"A plan should be in place where we have free learning and child care for all children," Saulnier says. "But we absolutely are advocating for \$10 to be the cap, so \$10 per child per day."

Saulnier cites child care as one of the leading barriers to getting into the workforce and working full-time.

Staying in the workforce depends on getting access to child care, and whether that access to child care is affordable.

"Those two things are not necessarily the same and we want to ensure that families actually get access to affordable child care," she said.

Another aspect of the organization's advocacy looks at increasing the number of spaces available for childcare across the province.

"Even if you were to decrease the cost of spaces, you need more. Very few families can get access to regulated licensed quality programs in their community," Saulnier said.

Saulnier says the highest poverty rates in families are those who have children under the age of six.

The highest cost of child care is for children under the age of two, because of the additional staffing required to support a baby. Saulnier says 74 per cent of mothers who have babies under the age of two are in the workforce right now, many of them not able to work full-time and at very low wages.

"We also know that the highest poverty rates are single mothers, and because of pay and equity issues, it is women who still earn less," Saulnier said.

It's not just families struggling to earn a livable wage, so are the early childhood educators who provide care.

The steering committee is also advocating for higher wages and compensation benefits for early childhood educators, who Saulnier says are currently paid \$17 per hour as a median, meaning about half of them are paid even less.

Not only are wages low, Saulnier says, "it's that they don't have access to the benefits, they don't have access to paid sick time, they don't have access to pensions." She says early childhood educators across Nova Scotia are "retiring into poverty."

“We’ve come a long way to recognize the kind of skills that it takes to do this very important work in our community, and now we need to properly compensate them.”

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

Tags: child poverty ^[4]

advocacy ^[5]

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