

# Does Newfoundland and Labrador have enough educators and daycares to match the \$10-per-day child care demand? <sup>[1]</sup>

New federal-provincial deal aims to make things easier for parents by 2023, but there are still concerns about availability of ECEs and operators

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Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

ST. JOHN'S, N.L. — Isobella Hurley tried 17 different daycares over the span of four months before she finally landed a spot for her two-year-old daughter, Matilda.

She's one of the lucky ones.

"Finding a spot for a two-year-old is extremely difficult. People are putting their children on waitlists as soon as they're pregnant," the single parent said Wednesday, July 28.

"I know people looking for child care for 2023 right now."

Hurley lives in Conception Bay South, but the daycare is in Holyrood, so she has a half-hour drive to get Matilda settled before she can start her job as a home-care worker.

Parents such as Hurley were the target of the July 28 announcement of a federal-provincial deal that aims to see \$10-per-day child care in Newfoundland and Labrador at regulated operators by 2023. The cost will move to \$15 per day starting Jan. 1, 2022.

The province already offers subsidized daycare at \$25 per day.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Premier Andrew Furey introduced the deal during a news conference at the College of the North Atlantic campus in St. John's.

"For parents, this agreement is huge," Trudeau told attendees. "And it represents real change for hardworking families."

The \$247 million is part of the federal government's recently announced plan to establish a Canada-wide early learning and child-care system.

Deals have been reached with three other provinces — P.E.I., Nova Scotia and B.C. — but Trudeau said Newfoundland's timeline for reaching the \$10-per-day mark is the earliest.

The plan also calls for the creation of more than 5,800 new child-care spaces over the five-year period.

The province will also introduce a new pre-kindergarten program that will be available to all four-year-olds by 2025-26.

"This will not only create more child-care spaces, it will provide children with a strong foundation entering kindergarten the year after," Education Minister Tom Osborne said.

## 'Domino effect'

Chelsea Thomas, an early childhood educator (ECE) in Torbay, says affordable daycare is only half the equation.

"Everybody would like to see \$10-a-day child care, but it's the domino effect that it's going to cause that's the issue," she said.

Thomas has a 13-month-old daughter, and says it's difficult to get toddlers into daycare because ECEs need a special type of training for them.

"... it's the domino effect that it's going to cause that's the issue." — Chelsea Thomas

Her maternity leave has run out, and the COVID-19 pandemic assistance program she is on expires in September. At that point, she and her fiancé will have to rely on his salary, and he is also an ECE, she said.

“Early childhood educators don’t make enough money to get by on one income,” Thomas told The Telegram.

During the July 28 news conference, Osborne acknowledged wages are a big part of attracting more people to the field.

“We will undertake work with a consultant to conduct labour force adjustment analysis specific to early learning and child-care educators, or ECEs,” he said. “Their work will inform the creation of a wage grid for ECEs by the end of 2022, with full implementation by 2023.”

### Hard to compete

The problem for parents such as Thomas is that the province’s subsidized care has already caused a shift in the system that makes daycare spaces extremely hard to find.

This has always been a problem in some regions — especially in Labrador, where operators can’t offer high enough wages to compete — but the St. John’s metro region is now seeing the crunch.

“We’re seeing that a lot of unregulated child-care centres and day homes are starting to close. The reason being they can’t offer \$25 a day,” said Thomas, who recently started a petition to hold off on daycare subsidies until capacity and wages were properly addressed.

“There is a demand for child care, but the issue is trying to keep up with the prices,” she said.

“I do think the focus needs to be on incentivizing people to become early childhood educators, and also making the process a little bit easier.

ECE wages currently range from \$14 to \$18 an hour, she said, which is not enough to encourage people to enter the field if they have a two-year, full-time program ahead of them, not including the need to upgrade.

Hurley said she is happy to be in the system because the \$50 to \$80 per day charged by most private operators would be completely out of the question.

“It wouldn’t be worth it to go back to work,” she said.

**Region:** Newfoundland <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** workforce <sup>[4]</sup>

bilateral agreement <sup>[5]</sup>

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