

Province increases eligibility for child-care subsidy, introduces wage top-up for early childhood educators ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

More Alberta families will be eligible for child-care subsidies under new funding allotments announced Monday.

Last week, the province announced the renewal of child-care funding agreements with the federal government to the tune of \$45 million.

Now, families using licensed child care that earn a household income up to \$90,000 can receive a child-care subsidy, up from the previous \$75,000 threshold.

The funding changes also include added support for families with children attending licenced preschools, where previously it was only available to children in licensed daycares, family day-homes and out-of-school care programs. Eligible parents using preschool services can now receive \$125 a month for child care costs.

Rebecca Schulz, Alberta minister of children's services, said the addition is part of "levelling the playing field for preschools and the parents who use them," adding lower- and middle-income families will now pay less than half what they previously paid for preschool fees.

"Child care is without a doubt a key part of Alberta's economic recovery and we hear more and more that working parents are looking for responsive, flexible and accessible early learning and child care programs," Schulz said Monday. "We also know that affordability is a barrier for some families."

Additionally, the province said it would be putting \$4 million of the funding to giving as many as 1,300 early childhood educators a wage top-up as part of the "first step in our long-term strategy" to support the field.

"In the early days of the pandemic, child care operators, preschool operators, out-of-school operators had to deal with nonstop challenges like closures, isolation and staffing issues. But you were resilient," Schulz said.

"Preschool was the one area of licensed early learning and child care that did not receive a wage top-up for early childhood educators. ... And we thought this was a great time to level the playing field, to support our workforce and our operators right across Alberta."

Earlier this month, the province of B.C. and the federal government promised to introduce a \$10-a-day child-care program in the next five years. Schulz said negotiations between the feds and the Alberta government are underway and she's optimistic this announcement is a positive step in those talks.

"We have said from the beginning that one of the things we agree with the federal government on is the importance of early learning and child care for our economic recovery," she said.

"We need a flexible deal that meets the needs of Alberta operators within our mixed market system but also meets the unique needs of parents right across Alberta. And I think that this announcement and the flexibility that we're seeing and how these dollars are being invested is a really great sign for what's to come."

In a statement Monday afternoon, NDP Leader Rachel Notley called the funding announcement "inadequate," adding the provincial government needs to work harder to solidify a deal with the federal government.

"Two provinces and one territory have gotten an agreement signed with the feds," Notley said. "Alberta parents should be looking forward to \$10-a-day child care instead of listening to their government make excuses. It's time for Jason Kenney to do his job and get this deal done for Alberta parents."

Region: Alberta ^[3]

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