

Province formally launches new tool to improve access to early learning and child-care services for families ^[1]

Additional enhancements planned to help parents and child-care facilities: Squires

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

The Manitoba government is formally launching a new tool with enhanced features to help families more easily access early learning and child-care services, Families Minister Rochelle Squires announced today.

“We have heard from parents through the Child Care Parent Advisory Committee and a recent survey on early learning and child-care modernization, and we know they want a simple, intuitive and effective tool that connects families with facilities that meet their specific needs,” said Squires. “The Manitoba Child Care Search was introduced in August 2020 in response to the needs of families during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has proven to be the effective and easy-to-use tool parents have been asking for.”

The Manitoba Child Care Search (MCCS) is a user-friendly online tool that connects families with licensed child-care facilities to meet their immediate or future needs. The MCCS lists up-to-date information on licensed child-care centre vacancies, hours of operation and locations.

“I am pleased to celebrate the creation of a new and improved tool, which parents have long identified as a need. We anticipate that families will welcome this simplified version of what has been, up until now, a complicated system to navigate,” said Bonnie Ash, executive director, Morrow Early Learning and Child Development, Programs for Families. “Many years ago, after listening to the voices in our community and relying on strong partnerships, our centre had a vision of how to best support our families. This government listened and supported us.”

The minister said key features of the MCCS, which is planned to go live by Aug. 30, include:

- An interactive map that makes it easier to browse facilities and find providers near a desired location. Users can filter the map by care type, facility type, vacancies and availability.
- Expanded facility information to help families make decisions prior to contacting a provider including contact information, hours of operation, languages of care, highlights of programming, enrolment policies and for-profit versus non-profit status.
- Links to facilities’ licences to allow parents to find out whether a child-care centre has a licence in good standing or a provisional licence, and to let them see the maximum number of children allowed at a facility, the period of the licence and any conditions applicable to the facility before making a decision about placement.
- Information on the timing of data updates to ensure parents know whether vacancies posted and programming details are current.

The minister noted the province’s Online Child Care Registry (OCCR) is outdated, difficult to use and ineffective, and will be retired on Aug. 30.

“The OCCR was used inconsistently by licensed early learning and child-care facilities, and registrations were regularly outdated. It didn’t provide an accurate picture of vacancies and wasn’t meeting the needs of parents,” said Squires. “Attempts were made to improve it, but it became clear a new system is needed.”

Children currently enrolled in child-care spaces through the OCCR will not lose their spots during the transition to the new system.

To further support providers, the minister noted a total of up to \$958,000 will be available to all child-care facilities to access a one-time Child Care Administration and Management Software Support Benefit to cover their costs of annual subscriptions and training for management of registrations and wait lists. Centres are eligible for up to \$1,200, and homes and nursery schools are eligible for up to \$400 to purchase a software or spreadsheet application. Facilities with existing platforms to manage wait lists can apply the new funds to existing software and additional training to facilitate data reporting requirements of the Department of Families.

The minister also provided an update on the Child Care Sustainability Trust, which was announced earlier this year. The trust provides one-time grants to support innovative projects that enhance access and inclusivity at child-care facilities.

The province is providing funding to an additional 37 centres and seven family child-care homes that met the trust’s eligibility criteria and submitted strong proposals in the first intake. An additional 38 centres and 13 homes will have their applications considered as part of

future intakes when the trust's funds become available again in early 2022. All facilities will be notified about the status of their applications in the next two weeks and will not have to reapply.

Moving forward, the Child Care Sustainability Trust will have an annual intake with funding levels determined by the annual interest earned on the initial investment, the minister said.

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

Tags: accessibility ^[4]

Source URL (modified on 3 Aug 2021): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/21/08/province-formally-launches-new-tool-improve-access-early>

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