

Alberta pushes for child care funding, Ottawa says it still needs province's action plan ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

EDMONTON -- The federal government says Alberta is not willing to meet standards set by Ottawa to qualify for federal funding to subsidize \$10-a-day child care as part of the Canada-wide early learning and child care plan.

The federal budget laid out three criteria for funding: that invested dollars would "primarily" support not-for-profit early learning centres; develop more training opportunities for child care providers to support the "quality" of the system; and money would need to reduce costs for child care to \$10-a-day or less by 2026.

Mikaela Harrison, press secretary for the federal ministry of families, children, and social development, told CTV News Edmonton in a statement that Alberta had demonstrated its commitment to \$10-a-day child care for the "first time" on Thursday.

Rebecca Schulz, Alberta's minister of children's services, said in a statement on Thursday that the agreement Quebec and the federal government reached on subsidized early learning and child care was unfair since Alberta made the same arrangement but was "rejected."

"Apparently, one province is more equal than others," Premier Jason Kenney said in a news conference on Friday. "It is indefensible."

Schulz told CTV News Edmonton in an interview Friday that the deal Quebec signed was "disappointing."

"Just the day before, we had a conversation with the federal government who said that no province would be receiving any agreement when it came to these child care funds with no conditions," she said.

"Albertans want to see these dollars come back to Alberta," she added. "We want to invest them in child care. We know that child care is absolutely vital."

The minister said the province was seeking "flexibility" from Ottawa on how best to use those funds as Alberta has a combination of for-profit day homes, day cares, and relatives that provide early learning for children.

Alberta not willing to meet criteria set by Ottawa: Harrison

Harrison added that "regional differences" within the child care plan were always at the core of building Canada's early learning and child care programming.

"Of the six bilateral agreements we have already signed with provinces and territories, no two agreements are identical," Harrison said.

According to her, what "unites" all the agreements is a "shared commitment" to an average of \$10-a-day for child care or better, for all regulated spaces to guarantee affordability, building more inclusive spaces, and investments into childhood educators.

"To date, the Alberta government has not been willing to meet those demands," Harrison said. "Despite being one of the first to sign an extension to the previous child care bilateral agreement, they have not yet presented a plan to the federal government."

Following the federal budget unveiling in April, Schulz said the province received a letter and had a phone call meeting where they signalled Alberta wanted to negotiate.

"I've worked really hard to build a strong working relationship with my federal counterpart," Schulz said.

"As we saw other provinces sign other agreements, we still hadn't received our term sheets – which kicks off those negotiations," she said.

The main worry for Schulz is that a federal election gets called for the fall and leaves the province without any opportunity to secure subsidized day care funding that other jurisdictions will.

Schulz provided CTV News Edmonton with two letters sent to the federal government in July where it outlined it was committed to begin negotiations to receive funding to support child care. The letters did not detail how Alberta intended to meet the targets and criteria set out by Ottawa.

“We are pleased to hear that the Alberta government is now committed to \$10/day or less child care for families, as well as meeting the requirement of cutting fees by half on average by next year,” Harrison said.

“We look forward to seeing these details clearly outlined in their action plan so that we can work together and give every child in Alberta the best start in life.”

Region: Alberta ^[3]

Tags: bilateral agreement ^[4]
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