

New \$10-per-day plan a breath of fresh air: Manitoba Child Care Association ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The news that Manitoba has signed on to the federal government's \$10-per-day child-care plan is music to the ears of the Manitoba Child Care Association.

Executive director Jodie Kehl, who has worked in the sector for three decades, said it's a good day for early learning and child care in the province.

"It has been really evident that there are systemic gaps in child care," Kehl told 680 CJOB.

"Unlike other public systems, like education or health care, child care has always sort of had these fragile roots – very vulnerable, all the complexities that affect things can lead it to become very easily uprooted.

"Today it feels like our roots have been a little bit more grounded here in child care in Manitoba."

As part of the plan, Manitoba will receive \$1.2 billion over five years, with the goal of \$10-per-day per child daycare a reality by 2023 for parents of children aged six and under.

The plan will also aim to create an additional 23,000 spaces with 1,700 extended-hour spaces in the province, said federal families minister Ahmed Hussen, who made the announcement in Winnipeg on Monday with his provincial counterpart Rochelle Squires.

Kehl said the goals of expanding care spaces and the workforce to support them are positive steps for the often-overlooked sector, especially setting a wage threshold of \$25 per hour for workers who have their Early Childhood Educator II classification.

"We're going to look at approximately another 2,800 trained early childhood educators... it's an ambitious goal," she said.

"I think that absolutely we're moving in the right direction of recruitment and retention of \$25 an hour – that's going to be what is going to be critical."

The next step, she said, will be looking to the Manitoba government to fund care spaces for school-age children, because parents often still need help after kids are in full-day classes.

"Children do not stop becoming children at six years of age, so we'd like to see to direction and investment from our provincial government into those school-age spaces to continue that quality care when children age out of child care," she said.

Tracey Hewklo, a mother of two young children, told 680 CJOB the significance of the deal is huge for families.

"I think we're in a really privileged spot that we're in a dual-income household, but I know at the centre my children attend, not everyone has that luxury," said Hewklo.

"The pandemic certainly has highlighted the need for reliable and accessible care, and seeing that number ... this care is extremely important and it needs to be accessible to everybody, and I think that \$10 a day is going to be huge for some families."

Hewklo said seeing a wage increase for the dedicated workers who look after kids is also a positive.

"I think the most important part that I took away from this announcement – it has been way too long since the federal government has taken an interest in understanding just how important investing in this workforce is.

"We've had people who are caring for our greatest assets – our children – being paid well below what's sustainable for paying their bills."

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