

# 'Feels like Christmas morning': \$1.1B in federal funds confirmed for Sask. child care just days before writ drop <sup>[1]</sup>

The funds announced Friday will support the creation of 28,000 new regulated early learning and child care spaces for children under six years old.

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## EXCERPTS

Cara Steiner believes the newly announced federal funding for child care in Saskatchewan will be a huge benefit to working families.

"I'm so excited about it," said Steiner, the executive director of Prairie Lily Early Learning Centre in Regina, during a phone interview on Friday. "It feels like Christmas morning."

"To think that this money that's being announced will just be so transformative for the lives of so many families in Saskatchewan, and thinking about what parents are going to save is just going to change the standard of living that they'll be able to have," said Steiner.

During a press conference Friday morning at Hope's Home Regina North, the federal government announced a deal with the Saskatchewan government that will see close to \$1.1 billion in federal funding flow into the province over the next five years to support reductions in the cost of child care.

The funds will support the creation of 28,000 new regulated early learning and child care spaces for children under six years old. Saskatchewan families can expect a 50-per-cent reduction in average parent fees for children under age six in regulated child care by the end of 2022. The goal is to support an average cost of \$10 a day for child care by the end of 2025-26.

Steiner said an infant child care spot in Saskatchewan costs, on average, \$800 a month, but that price rises in larger cities. In Regina and Saskatoon, an infant spot can cost up to \$1,300 a month. Steiner said she recently spoke with a woman on social media who said having an infant and preschooler in licensed care in Regina was going to cost her \$1,925 a month.

usan Delanoy, advocate and chair of Child Care Now Saskatchewan, called the news historic and a relief.

"This funding will build a much needed system of equitable, accessible, affordable, and culturally safe child care for Saskatchewan families," said Delanoy in a press release.

Ahmed Hussen, the federal minister of families, children and social development, said the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly hard for parents trying to navigate work and child care.

"Parents, especially mothers, have had to make the difficult choice between going back to work to provide for their children and staying at home to take care of them. And how is that a real choice for them? They shouldn't be put in that position," said Hussen.

The announcement comes just days before the expected dissolution of parliament. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is reportedly planning to call an election for Sept. 20.

The Saskatchewan NDP said it was thankful for the agreement, but accused the province of stalling.

"This took multiple proposals from this government, as the first did not even try to meet the federal requirements, and we are pleased that the Sask. Party government finally saw the writing on the wall, put the politics aside and that Saskatchewan children and families were put first," read a statement from the NDP caucus.

While the Sask. Party government is frequently at odds with the federal government, Friday's event was free of any partisan barbs. Chrystia Freeland, deputy prime minister and minister of finance for the Government of Canada, said the announcement was a change of pace for a sometimes rocky relationship.

"We don't agree on everything with the Government of Saskatchewan. We're friends today, but there's a lot of issues where we are not 100 per cent aligned. But you know what? We are 100 per cent aligned on early learning and childcare," said Freeland.

Dustin Duncan, Saskatchewan's minister of education, said the initial exchange of information between the two parties began in late June,

early July.

“Really this is an over a billion dollar agreement that was negotiated over the course of a couple of weeks,” said Duncan.

The federal government is also providing Saskatchewan with a one-time investment of more than \$17 million to support the early childhood workforce. Duncan said this would increase staff compensation in 2021-22 up to \$3 per hour.

Andrew Scheer, shadow minister for infrastructure and communities and Conservative MP for Regina-Qu’Appelle, criticized the announcement as being motivated by the impending election.

“Trudeau waited six years to make these last minute announcements on child care and it’s no surprise that this comes days before a possible election. The Liberals have made child-care promises in eight previous elections since 1993 and they have consistently broken every one. Why should Canadians believe the Liberals now?,” said Scheer in a statement.

**Region:** Saskatchewan [3]

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