

Quebec to invest \$3B in daycare system, create 37,000 more subsidized spots by 2025 ^[1]

Province announces major reforms to attract staff, give every child a place in the system

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EXCERPTS

The Quebec government announced it is investing at least \$3 billion in the province's daycare system with the main objective of creating 37,000 additional subsidized spots by March 31, 2025 to complete the network.

In an effort to improve access to child-care services and increase the efficiency of the system, some 19,000 places are already in the works and the government is looking to create 17,000 more, as well as 1,000 in Indigenous territories.

Quebec already has 212,497 subsidized spaces in recognized child-care services and is committing, for the very first time, that every child in the province will be accommodated.

"All parents in Quebec who wish to send their child to daycare will have the opportunity to do so," said Premier François Legault at a Thursday news conference alongside Family Minister Mathieu Lacombe.

The action plan includes the conversion of 3,500 non-subsidized spots through a pilot project already underway.

Included in the \$3 billion is \$1.8 billion in new spending to implement 45 concrete measures by 2025 to reorganize the system, including an increase in the tax credit for child-care expenses.

Lacombe tabled the first bill of the Coalition Avenir Québec government's new legislative session Thursday, which announced the major reforms to the publicly-funded daycare system.

If passed, Bill 1 would increase the limits on the number of subsidized spaces in daycare, to 100 up from 80. Child-care centres and private daycares would also no longer have a cap on the number of facilities they can have.

The proposed legislation would also give the government special powers to fill necessary gaps in the system, like creating new subsidized spaces when supply doesn't meet demand in a given territory.

Bill 1 highlights the right to child-care for all children — from birth until they enter school.

Children living in precarious socio-economic situations would be given special attention, under the new law.

Lacombe emphasized wanting to establish greater financial equity between parents who have access to public and private networks.

A new one-stop shop for daycare services

A new centralized daycare web portal will replace La Place 0-5 and be controlled by the government. Legault says centralizing the system is important for transparency and to ensure a first-come first-served process.

Parents will be able to find out their real rank on a waiting list for each daycare service they register their children for.

"[The current system] is a real nightmare for a lot of parents," said Lacombe. "We're going to change that."

The province has also confirmed its intention to invite unsubsidized family-run child-care services, which currently are not recognized by the government, to become part of the network.

Shortage of early childhood educators

Meanwhile, the child-care network is grappling with a major staffing crisis, which is contributing to the backlog of children waiting for daycare spots. There are more than 50,000 children on waiting lists, mostly for subsidized spots.

The province estimates that there is a shortage of around 17,800 educators to meet the needs of the system.

In response, Legault announced the creation of a new work-study program to train and hire more than 17,000 educators by March 2025.

The program will allow educators to join the labour market more quickly, Legault stressed.

The province also announced last week it will give early childhood educators in public daycares a raise of 12 to 17 per cent starting in mid-November, as daycare staff continue to strike and protest across the province amidst negotiations of a new contract.

Treasury Board President Sonia LeBel has said the current salary isn't attracting new educators into the system or contributing to retaining them. She says the government is working on offers to settle daycare workers' contracts

"We're working on that at so many levels right now and we have given some priorities in some sectors...in this round of negotiations," Lebel said.

The province says it expects the program and the salary increase to attract enough workers in time for the scheduled scaling-up of the system.

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