

# Experts demand daycare plan docs <sup>[1]</sup>

Province told to show proof of commitment to \$10/day program

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Child-care advocates have gone from praising a historic promise to drop fees to \$10 per day to wondering why Ottawa and Manitoba haven't published plans they signed months ago.

"Their failure to produce these should be troubling for everybody who wants to see clear and transparent government and reporting," said University of Manitoba Prof. Susan Prentice, who is one of Canada's leading child-care experts.

Manitoba was in line with most provinces when it signed an agreement for its share of a \$30-billion federal agreement. More than three months later, that agreement is nowhere in sight, with Ottawa chalking it up to red tape.

The agreement is supposed to include benchmarks for boosting the number of child-care spaces, targets for getting more people into training for day care jobs, and what terms are attached to promised federal funding.

Prentice said the details are key to achieving the government 2025 goal of an average of \$10-per-day child care — and a more immediate pledge to halve the average fee by the end of 2022.

"We can be very confident that there will be positive economic effects from this development, but it will have to be done well," she said. "Right now, we have no idea how the province is planning to proceed."

Federal Families Minister Karina Gould said Ottawa is legally required to not publish documents until they're available in both official languages, but provinces can release the agreements as soon as they're signed.

"Provinces can actually post them whenever they want to; it's just the federal government has the translation requirement," Gould told the Free Press.

"We believe that we need that accountability when it comes to the objectives we have over the next five years. That's something we feel very strongly about at the federal level."

The non-profit Childcare Resource and Research Unit is tracking the deals, and found the Yukon and four provinces have already posted their agreements online.

Yet, the Manitoba government blamed Ottawa for holding things up.

"The Manitoba government is prepared to release the agreement, though we are waiting for the federal government to finalize it and approve its release," a spokesperson wrote.

Conservative families critic Laila Goodridge said the mixed messages don't add up.

"I can understand that translation and formatting can take a little bit of time — but three months seems like an excessive amount of time," said the Alberta MP, who argued the agreements can help parents budget child-care expenses.

"There's clearly a need for transparency here, to help families plan out their lives."

Prentice said it's important to see Manitoba's agreement in particular, because the PC and Liberals have proposed drastically different visions of child care.

Manitoba has capped parental fees for decades, but has also frozen most operating grants since the PCs took office 2016. Advocates argue that leads to stagnant wages that draw qualified daycare workers into better paying jobs, such as educational assistants.

The agreement Manitoba signed in August is supposed to set an hourly wage threshold of \$25, but it's still unclear when that would apply.

Meanwhile, the PC government has encouraged commercial operators to provide child care, and suggested it might raise fees after a post-pandemic economic recovery to raise fees. Yet, Ottawa has largely focused on non-profit spaces and cutting costs.

"How they will reconcile these incompatible policy presences — the answer's going to be in this document, so it's super important to see what it says," said Prentice.

**Region:** Manitoba <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** \$10 a day <sup>[4]</sup>

federal agreement <sup>[5]</sup>

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