

N.W.T. expected to sign federal child care deal this week ^[1]

Deal expected to halve the cost of child care next year

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EXCERPTS

The Northwest Territories and the federal governments are expected to announce a child care deal this week.

The expected deal is the next in a string of deals announced over the last few months between federal and provincial or territorial governments.

The deals aim to cut the cost of child care in Canada in half by the end of 2022, and reduce child care fees to \$10 a day by 2025-2026.

The median monthly cost of child care in Yellowknife in 2020 was \$990 a month per child.

The deal with the N.W.T. will be worth about \$51.1 million over five years, a senior federal government official told CBC News.

The government official said the deal would help create hundreds of child care spaces in the territory.

Money for early childhood educators, which includes fair wages and aims to ensure high quality care for children, is a core component, said Mohammad Hussain, a spokesperson for Minister of Families, Children and Social

What N.W.T. parents face

Laura Meinert lives in Yellowknife. She has two children under the age of three.

Meinert said finding a child care spot has been her biggest concern.

She put her first child on a waiting list when she was six weeks pregnant. She said by the time she had given birth to her child and was ready to return to work, she was still number 36 on the wait list.

That child, now two-and-a-half, currently has a spot, but the child care provider is leaving town. Meinert now needs to find a spots for both her children soon.

"You have this deadline coming. I have to go back to work, I want to go back to work, but I can't find someone to watch my children," she said.

"Unless you sign up when you are trying to conceive, I'm not sure how this works out," she said.

Meinert was supposed to return to work in the spring, but extended her second maternity leave by five months because of the wait lists.

"Any more spots in town would be a blessing," she said.

She said she thinks this element of the plan will matter most to people here.

Krista Quinn's child had already been on the wait list at the Yellowknife Daycare Association for several months before the baby was born in July.

Quinn is hoping to return to work in the next month. She recently learned her baby is number 37 on the wait list. She has tried other daycares, but the best possibility she has found is a daycare with availability beginning in August 2022.

"Financially, it is a struggle," she said. It costs more just to heat a home in the North and maternity benefits are not enough, she said.

"Bills are piling up and I do need to get back to work. I'm not really sure what I'm going to do," she added.

The spaces are a dominant concern and she hopes the governments have a plan to ensure the jobs that the extra spaces will create are

filled. Lower childcare fees would also help her family a lot, she said.

Conversations between governments 'very positive'

The federal budget allocated \$27.2 billion over five years to the provinces and territories, starting this fiscal year. The budget also earmarked \$2.5 billion for the Indigenous early learning and child care system.

Gould said conversations with the territorial government have been "very positive."

She told reporters during a press briefing announcing the child care deal between the federal government and New Brunswick on Monday that she is "very confident that we will soon be able to announce something" in relation to the N.W.T. deal.

Territorial officials were unwilling to reveal details of the plan before the official announcement, which is expected in the coming days.

N.W.T. Premier Caroline Cochrane is in Ottawa this week and will be meeting with Prime Minister Trudeau on Dec. 15.

Region: Northwest Territories ^[3]

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