

Manitoba publishes early learning and child-care agreement with federal government ^[1]

Agreement and Action Plan Confirmed to Bring \$10-a-Day Average Child-Care Fees to Families in 2023: Squires

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EXCERPTS

The Canada-Manitoba Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CW-ELCC) Agreement, including the province's action plan to achieve a \$10-a-day average for out-of-pocket child-care fees, has been published today, paving the way for more affordable regulated early learning and child-care services in Manitoba, Families Minister Rochelle Squires announced today.

"Parents should not have to struggle to get safe, high-quality and responsive care for their children if they go back to work or attend training or education programs," said Squires. "This agreement makes child care more accessible by creating spaces needed for children in Manitoba and by making them more affordable for parents, particularly low-income and middle-income households. Over the next five years, we will work hard to implement the action plan initiatives under the agreement through five key priority areas: accessibility, affordability, quality, inclusivity and diversity, and reporting."

"Every child deserves the best possible start in life," said federal Families, Children and Social Development Minister Karina Gould. "Our vision for early learning and child care is ambitious, and the publication of the agreement with Manitoba is another step on the path to ensuring all families have access to high-quality, affordable, flexible and inclusive child care. This is good news for families and children across the province."

Under the agreement, the Manitoba government will begin working toward a significant reduction in out-of-pocket parent fees by adjusting an income threshold and allowable deductions for subsidy, Squires said, adding that details continue to be worked out and will be announced in the new year.

Squires noted that by expanding eligibility, the result could be an immediate reduction in out-of-pocket parent fees for thousands of additional children and lower-income families. The Department of Families is also working to simplify and streamline the subsidy application process to further improve access for low-income and middle-income families.

"The subsidy rates have stayed the same for nearly 10 years, meaning fewer families have been supported by the subsidy program," said Squires. "Our increase to net household incomes qualifying for subsidy will give support to many more families, ensuring low-income and middle-income families can get the child care they need and participate in building our provincial economy."

This work will enable ELCC providers to continue to care for children and offer high-quality programming in safe environments that promote positive early child development to set the stage for life-long well-being. In addition, the agreement includes the development of a minimum wage grid, which will help ensure wages are consistent provincially and encourage recruitment and retention in the ELCC workforce.

"The Canada-Manitoba Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement being published today is a foundational step in the government's modernization of the early learning and child-care system," said Bonnie Ash, co-chair, Early Learning and Child Care Minister's Consultation Table. "This is a day of celebration for children and their families as this investment will enable greater affordability and the creation of new regulated child-care spaces."

The department will continue consultations with the early learning and child-care sector and parent groups to move toward implementation, and more information will be shared as details are finalized.

"The advisory committee is extremely pleased with today's announcement and the positive impacts this will bring for Manitoba families," said Laura Matlashewski, a member of the province's Child Care Parent Advisory Committee. "We believe these measures meet the demands and expectations of parents and provide a strong framework for the industry and services."

Manitoba entered the CW-ELCC Agreement with the federal government on Aug. 9, 2021, and will receive \$1.2 billion over five-years, with \$326.6 million allocated in the first two years.

Squires noted the agreement and its associated action plan comprise one of two federal-provincial agreements on early learning and child care that will inform Manitoba's roadmap for transforming its current ELCC system.

The other agreement, the extended Canada-Manitoba ELCC Agreement that will include a one-time early childhood workforce funding allocation, is in the final stages of negotiations and will be shared once finalized.

Manitoba's federal-provincial ELCC agreements and associated action plans include initiatives that incorporate reconciliation to compliment the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework. This will help achieve a shared vision that all Indigenous children have the opportunity to experience high-quality, culturally rooted early learning and child-care programs.

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