

# Nova Scotia child-care fees to be reduced ahead of schedule <sup>[1]</sup>

Fees will be cut by 25 per cent at beginning of April

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## AVAILABILITY

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

## EXCERPTS

Nova Scotia parents with children in regulated daycares will see their fees reduced by 25 per cent beginning April 1.

Premier Tim Houston and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Friday that the move to reduce fees is happening ahead of schedule as part of the affordable child-care agreement the province and Ottawa signed last year.

With the change, parents will see fees reduced retroactive to Jan. 1 of this year. However, it will not apply after March for people using a for-profit daycare centre that hasn't signed on to be part of the Canada-wide early learning agreement.

In April, when the change in fees takes hold, parents will have the option of getting a cheque for the savings from the previous three months or having it applied as a credit for their child care.

The province also announced that 1,500 new not-for-profit child-care spaces would be available beginning this fall as part of the promised 9,500 new spaces that come through the five-year federal-provincial agreement.

### Giving kids a head start

"The impact of this will be felt for generations," Houston said during a virtual news conference.

"This is going to help more children get the best possible start in life. It will help address child poverty and it will support women and families who are wanting to get back into the workforce."

Houston said plans remain on track for fees at non-profit sites to be reduced by 50 per cent by the end of this year, and for an average of \$10 per day child care to be available by 2026.

Karina Gould, the federal minister of families, children and social development, said the additional spaces and lower fees will mean more choice for families who often struggle to find any child care at all.

"They're just really often taking the place that offers them the first spot on the wait-list," she said.

### Work continues on salary, benefits structure

Part of the agreement signed last year by Trudeau and the former Nova Scotia Liberal government called for a framework to be in place by 2022 to address the need for increased wages and benefits for early childhood educators.

Nova Scotia Education Minister Becky Druhan said work continues on the framework and it will be complete later this year.

Druhan did not have details on Friday about what kind of increases people working in the sector could expect, but said it would include benefits.

Meanwhile, the province is giving licensed, for-profit child-care centres the option of changing their business model to be able to offer reduced fees to parents and offer staff wages and benefits that will be in line with the framework the government is creating.

According to a document the Education Department shared this week with commercial licence holders, centres have until the end of March to decide whether to continue with their current approach or transition to become part of the Canada-Nova Scotia Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement or operate as a non-profit centre.

If they make the switch, the centres would fall under the management of a new central organization the Education Department is creating to manage the system.

### Ramifications of 'historic change'

Centres considering a change can get a grant of \$15,000 by Jan. 18 to be used for professional advisory services to help them make a final decision.



Any centres that choose not to make the transition will lose provincial funding and will be ineligible to offer the child-care subsidy program to families. Those that do make the change will receive a one-time lump sum transition payment.

Houston acknowledged it won't be an easy choice for some operators, but said the government is creating a stable child-care system that for-profit operators have the option to join.

"We understand the gravity of the decisions that are before them and we want to support them through those decisions," he said.

"But this is an historic change. Every time you make an historic change there are ramifications and we're sympathetic to that and we apologize for that, but we're going to work with them to get them in the best possible place that they can be."

### A call for more time

Liberal MLA Ben Jessome said it's an exciting time for the child-care sector and families trying to access it, but he thinks for-profit operators need more time before making such a life-altering decision. He said as much in a letter to Houston and Druhan on Friday, which he shared with CBC News.

"For decades, childcare has been made possible because of the passion and dedication of our private operators, a strong majority of whom are women entrepreneurs and childcare experts. They have built their life's work around providing our children with the resources they need to develop during their early years."

Jessome said the timeline the government has in place is unrealistic, given what business operators must consider and the complexity of the issue.

"Considering that year-end is quickly approaching and the professional services they need to employ are at their busiest time of year, and operators themselves are caring for our children day-to-day, there is too much to consider in a few short weeks. I would be remiss if I didn't add that the workforce is stretched even more thinly due to the impact of COVID-19, and many operators presently are spending the majority of their time caring for children directly."

**Region:** Nova Scotia <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** child care fees <sup>[4]</sup>

affordability <sup>[5]</sup>

\$10 a day <sup>[6]</sup>

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**Source URL (modified on 18 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/01/nova-scotia-child-care-fees-be-reduced-ahead-schedule>

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