

Help on the way for parents struggling with childcare options ^[1]

"I think it was a huge relief"

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EXCERPTS

Families with children in care are getting help with paying to keep their spot in a childcare centre even if they are not using it right now.

"That will no longer be a concern," Jennifer Nangreaves, executive director of the Early Childhood Development Association of P.E.I., told Island Morning host Mitch Cormier Thursday.

"Families, if they want to make different arrangements, will be supported to do so. With that, they can still apply for a childcare allowance if they wanted to do an alternative source of care."

Many families have been keeping their children at home because of fears over COVID-19 outbreaks in child care centres, but in order to hold their child's spot they needed to keep paying fees.

Now the government will pay for those spots directly to the centre, and parents can find alternative sources of care if it works for them.

The association hopes this alleviates some of the high numbers of children in centres right now, said Nangreaves.

No plans to restrict numbers

Nangreaves was one of 300 participants in a virtual meeting Wednesday night that also included childcare centre operators, members of the Chief Public Health Office and other officials from government.

"I think it was a huge relief," Nangreaves said.

"Just making it easier — the freedom. If you are keeping your child home, for whatever reason, your space is secure and there are options for you."

There is no plan to restrict the number of children in centres right now, she said.

A letter that will be circulated to parents through childcare centres also says fees will be covered if a centre has to close because of an outbreak.

"Parents will not be charged for any absent child between January 19-31, 2022, and every child's space secure for the same period," the letter says.

The province is also looking for substitute teachers who are willing to work in childcare centres, to help offset any staffing shortages, said Nangreaves.

Parents say announcement a 'step in the right direction'

Megan Beirsto has a seven year old and a two year old. She and her husband work in the restaurant sector.

Following Tuesday's announcement of further restrictions for the industry, Beirsto's family decided to take their younger child out of daycare, given that they will now be spending more time at home.

"The announcement that they're going to cover daycare costs ... for parents that are choosing to have their kids home, that's going to be a big help," she said.

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"A lot of parents can't afford to keep their kid out of daycare and not work. I know that's not a situation a lot of people can do."

Erica Baker agrees. Her partner was laid off temporarily due to COVID-19 restrictions. With three children under six to take care of, one of

which has special needs, she said the announcement will provide much-needed relief for her family.

"As everyone knows, daycare spots are so hard to come by. And when we have to in the centre, the price adds up. So it's awesome, and especially for the families that feel they have to send their kids because they have to go to work," Baker said.

"I know it's not ideal for every family ... but I definitely think it's a step in the right direction."

Allowance expanded

The move is part of a series of measures aimed at helping Islanders with young children cope with the pandemic.

The province's Child Care Allowance is also being expanded for families of infant children affected by public health restrictions, including those who chose not to use regular licensed child care due to COVID-19 and require a babysitter.

The allowance provides \$125 per child while schools are closed to help with child care costs. Families with children attending a licensed school-age centre do not have to go through the application process.

P.E.I. will also continue covering parent fees at licensed early-learning centres in cases they're closed due to COVID-19.

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