

These Toronto-based companies are letting their employees expense daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A pandemic-pushed shift in work, paired with a labour shortage across Canada, has paved the way for a new resource available to employees, specifically aimed at easing parental stress — a daycare benefit.

Similar to dental or vision coverage, some Toronto-based companies are adding daycare to the list of employee benefits.

“A lot of people have either chosen to stay home, chosen to ramp down their work responsibilities, or chosen to quit their job because they simply can’t manage the uncertainties of trying to manage daycare and their jobs,” said Sarah Kaplan, director of the Institute for Gender and the Economy at the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management.

“I think the pandemic has really created a lot more awareness around the issue,” Kaplan added, pointing to women and single parents who are often in a position where they are forced to make these difficult decisions.

In response, Kaplan said employers are finding ways to attract employees back into the workforce. “If the primary barrier is the lack of affordable day care or available child care, either way, employers can make a difference by making that a benefit.”

In Ontario, the average cost of child care is currently \$12,800 per child per year or about \$53 per day. However, in Toronto, the median fee is more than \$1,800 per month. Ontario remains the only jurisdiction in the country that has not signed a \$10 a day child-care deal with the federal government.

At Scotiabank, employees can dip into their wellbeing accounts to pay for daycare and other child-care expenses such as diapers, booster seats, baby monitors and children’s camps. Elder care expenses, such as retirement homes and Meals on Wheels, are also eligible to employees.

“This is in addition to discounted child-care rates, a guaranteed spot at one of the provider’s locations close to them within six months of registration (or sooner), access to an at-home resource centre with online programming as well as assistance with nanny and eldercare placements,” said Clancy Zeifman, senior manager of Scotiabank media relations.

Toronto Dominion (TD) Bank is also adding daycare and eldercare to employees’ wellness accounts, along with coverage for fertility, reproductive treatments and adoption costs. For employees mourning the loss of a pregnancy, bereavement leave will also be available beginning on March 1.

Klick Health – an independent health agency in Toronto – has partnered with the child-care provider Kids & Company to expedite the often lengthy process of getting a spot in a daycare program.

“Our plan also gives our people 10 emergency drop-off days, and with locations across Canada, they can choose the daycare location nearest them for added convenience,” said Glenn Zujew, Chief People Officer of Klick Health.

Since 1969, the University of Toronto has been providing on-campus childcare services, which were initially disrupted by the pandemic, but were able to resume in September 2020.

“This has been critically important during the COVID-19 pandemic and we’re committed to supporting our faculty, librarians, staff and students during this difficult time,” a university spokesperson said.

While large companies and organizations are beginning to shape their benefit plans around current parental needs, Kaplan said more than 90 per cent of private employees work for companies with fewer than 500 workers. Meaning, these new offerings may be limited to a small portion of the working population.

However, Kaplan said some small and medium sized enterprises are beginning to consider how they can band together to jointly support local child-care centres that can serve their employees’ needs.

“This whole issue of affordable child care is really important,” Kaplan said. “But when we talk about child care we really need to make sure it’s not just about parking the kids somewhere so that the parents can work, that it really is focused on early childhood learning. I think that’s often a missing component.”

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: affordability ^[4]

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