

More funding on the way for child care centres as the province moves towards \$10 a day child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The province has announced additional funding to help Nova Scotia's child care centres offset costs associated with the move towards \$10 a day child care by 2026.

The funding includes a \$1 million one-time grant for child care centres to help support rising operational costs and offset the freeze on parent fees.

An additional \$35 million in federal dollars will be used to help providers offset the 25% fee reduction for parents (retroactive to January 1) that was announced as part of the Nova Scotia Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement last month.

"As a result of the early implementation of the 25% reduction, not only will all families across the province be seeing a reduction in child care fees, but we'll have over 500 families who are relying on subsidies right now whose fees will be reduced to zero," Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Becky Druhan told reporters on Friday morning.

The province announced the new agreement will be offered to all child care providers, including licensed centres that were previously unfunded or partially funded.

In a media release the province said the fee reductions have led to an increased interest in child care. As a result, they've asked for a commitment from operators to accept children where they can as part of this new agreement.

When the joint provincial-federal announcement was made last month, many for-profit child care centres expressed concerns.

Among them was the imposition of a March 18 deadline to choose from several options provided by the province. Centres that opted out of the provincial-federal agreement were told they'd be ineligible to offer the child care subsidy to families.

Licensed operators are being asked to sign the new funding agreement by April 1.

"We're embarking on a five-year transformational journey, but what we've heard very clearly from the sector is they need some stability throughout that," Druhan told reporters.

"This funding package that is provided today is exactly that. It's intended to and designed to provide that stability as we all work together to build towards our new system."

Druhan said Nova Scotia is one of only three provinces that includes space for for-profit operators. She said they'll continue to prioritize not-for-profit expansion in the first stages of the rollout, adding that they're on target to open 1,500 new, not-for-profit spaces this fall.

"The question is what is best for all Nova Scotians? We're going to be working with ... all of our operators to make sure we understand all of their perspectives," Druhan said when asked if this not-for-profit only initial expansion was fair to private (for-profit) operators.

"We hear their voice and we built that into the new system that we're creating. There is a space in the system for our for-profit operators, and we're very, very pleased with that."

In what the province described as an effort to ensure all voices in the sector are heard, it also announced the creation of a table to advise Druhan on the "transformation of child care." More details about what that table looks like will be made in the coming weeks.

Druhan assured those who won't be at that table that they'll find ways to ensure their voices are also heard.

"We have small operators who operate out of homes. We have large operators who have multiple centres, hundreds of children," Druhan told reporters. "We want to make sure that that diversity is reflected, and that we hear representation from the entire spectrum."

There are 330 licensed child care centres in Nova Scotia and 14 licensed family home child care agencies.

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

Tags: parent fees ^[4]
affordability ^[5]
funding ^[6]
universal system ^[7]
federal agreement ^[8]

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Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/02/more-funding-way-child-care-centres-province-moves-towards-10-day> [2]
<https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/featured/more-funding-on-the-way-for-child-care-centres-as-the-province-moves-towards-10-a-day-child-care/> [3]
<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7853> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/parent-fees> [5]
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [7]
<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9083> [8] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9148>