

# Federal-provincial plan delivers much-needed help to child-care sector <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Manitoba's strained child-care sector got a \$98-million boost from the federal and provincial governments Tuesday.

They announced a four-year deal to enhance recruitment and retention, along with higher wages and support for training and pensions. It's separate from the bilateral child-care agreement Manitoba signed with Ottawa in August.

Help for the underfunded sector was announced by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister Wayne Ewasko and federal Families Minister Karina Gould — 19 days after they announced a bilateral agreement to triple the number of subsidized spaces and reduce child-care fees for families in the province by 50 per cent by the end of the year.

"Our government recognizes child-care workers have faced difficult work conditions, especially during the pandemic," said Gould, who participated virtually. "The true value of your work has not been recognized."

Ewasko said \$15.5 million will be put toward ongoing commitments such as operating grants for 1,800 child-care spaces and support diversity and inclusion programs and northern and rural spaces. A renovation grant will allow non-profit centres to expand spaces and subsidies will increase training opportunities for the 40-hour child-care assistant certification course.

Another \$19.2 million will beef up wages for the lowest-paid workers in the sector and provide a top-up of the percentage offered by Manitoba to the pension plan for centres and the RRSP program for home-based daycares. It will provide facilities with funding for staff to make a one-time investment in a tax-free savings account.

The rest of the funds will be used to provide tuition reimbursements to early childhood educators enrolled in or recently graduated from a training program, fund training programs and help child-care assistants seeking early childhood education certification.

The executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association said the initiatives will address some of the "systemic challenges" in the sector.

"What we've heard is 30 per cent of facilities are running on provisional licences because they're unable to attract and retain qualified educated (early childhood educators)," said Jodie Kehl. The biggest barrier has been salary, she said.

"It's not a surprise to anyone that (staff) have not historically been paid what they deserved to be paid."

The work they do educating "our most precious resource" is critically important, and by moving the early learning child-care file to the education ministry, the provincial government has acknowledged that, she said.

"Children don't start learning the day they go to kindergarten. "The greatest brain development is from zero to five years of age," she said. "The important work that early learning child care offers to young children in many ways is just so critical.

"Today's initiative is one more layer toward supporting our workforce."

Malaya Marcelino, the NDP's critic for the status of women, said it's taken the pandemic for the Progressive Conservative government to recognize the value of reliable child care. "Without it, good jobs are lost, families struggle and the economy suffers," a statement from Marcelino said Tuesday.

"Today's announcement... fails to make up for years of PC cuts and freezes. Families know how valuable Manitoba's early childhood educators are — it's time for the PCs to catch up," she wrote.

**Region:** Manitoba <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** bilateral agreement <sup>[4]</sup>

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