

NDP warns Alberta won't hit \$10-per-day child care target without extra \$200M from UCP ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Alberta NDP is again calling for the province to inject \$200 million into child care staffing this year or risk failing to hit the federal government's goal of \$10-per-day child care within four years.

Alberta and the federal government reached an agreement announced in November to bring the average cost of child care for kids under six down to an average of \$10 a day by the end of 2026, and fees by 50 per cent by the end of 2022.

The YMCA of Northern Alberta has estimated 20 per cent of Alberta's early childhood educators have left the province or are no longer working in the industry. The province's occupational outlook forecasts that by 2028, there will be a shortage of 4,600 early childhood educators across Alberta.

Opposition NDP children's services critic Rakhi Pancholi said at a news conference Monday the province should have put some of its more than \$500-million budget surplus into child care initiatives, while child care providers have been calling on the UCP government to better attract staff, as some parents still struggle to find available child care spaces.

"In order for more families to have access to affordable childcare, they need to be able to go to spaces that are staffed, and we have a staffing problem in this province – that's what I'm hearing from providers from Fort McMurray to Calgary to Edmonton to Grande Prairie to Jasper," Pancholi said.

"If the UCP doesn't invest any additional provincial dollars into childcare, there is no way that all Alberta families will benefit from \$10-per-day childcare by 2026, and the UCP knows this," said Pancholi, who added that while many families are happy to see a reduction in fees, many low-income families are not seeing the reduction that was promised, and the province needs to invest to expand physical capacity and help hire workers.

Andrew Reith, press secretary to Children's Services Minister Rebecca Schulz said in an email the UCP government is firmly committed to implementing all the elements of the \$10-a-day plan.

"While we did see a reduction in the number of early childhood educators during the pandemic, as of December of 2021, we are encouraged to see that the number has increased steadily and is on par with pre-pandemic numbers," he said.

In budget 2022-23, Children Services is spending \$1.076 billion on early learning and child care – \$350 million of which comes from the province.

Federal child-care agreement funding is worth \$666 million in 2022-23, but it's expected to grow to nearly \$1 billion by 2024-25.

The Children's Services operating expense budget, not including the Canada-Alberta Early Learning and Child Care agreement, is \$1.7 billion in 2022-23.

Alberta's budget earmarks a total of \$879 million towards affordability and access and \$197 million towards child care quality and worker supports in 2022-23.

Reith said about \$120 million will be directed towards supporting early childhood educators with wage top-ups, and through the federal agreement.

"Through the Alberta-federal child care agreement, we are investing an additional \$300 million to help child care operators hire more early childhood educators and retain and train the ones already working in the system. We are working with operators to determine the best use of this investment," he said.

Region: Alberta ^[3]

Tags: federal investment ^[4]

\$10-a-day child care ^[5]

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