

# Some B.C. childcare operators warning parents of extra fees in April <sup>[1]</sup>

The provincial Ministry of Children and Family Development is unable to meet a deadline to approve subsidies that many have been receiving until now

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## EXCERPTS

Kelowna childcare operator Amanda Worms says she has been on the phone this week telling parents at her daycare centres they will have to pay \$350 more in monthly fees beginning April 1 because the provincial Ministry of Children and Family Development is unable to meet a deadline to approve subsidies that she has been receiving until now.

“There was a technical glitch in their system. I have been on the phone with them every single day for the last five days and they still can’t figure it out,” Worms said. “Now, I am at a place where I have to tell parents that they have to pay the full fees on April 1 because we cannot survive without that funding.”

B.C. Liberal opposition childcare critic Karin Kirkpatrick said Worms is not alone. Kirkpatrick said she has heard from 45 childcare operators who are facing the same challenge.

“It’s a bureaucratic disaster,” said Kirkpatrick. “All due to the NDP’s inability to process applications submitted by providers two months ago. And they told providers that if they continue to give parents the discount, they do so at their own risk since there’s no guarantee of approval.”

Childcare operators in B.C. are eligible for government subsidies to reduce their fees and to pay higher wages to their early childhood educators. They must apply for the funding annually and meet several criteria. Some operators said the province is regularly unable to meet its own deadlines.

But the province denies those claims. The children’s ministry insists operators like Worms are in the minority.

In a written statement, the ministry said more than 80 per cent of operators that applied to renew their funding have received approvals or temporary approvals. The exception is operators that applied for a fee increase.

“Providers were told in advance that April fee increase requests could not be offered temporary approval because the ministry needs the appropriate time to assess their reasons for raising parents’ fees,” the statement said.

Worms confirmed she applied for an increase for the fee reduction subsidy at three of her five facilities because the province’s new five-day paid sick leave requirement adds \$65,000 to her payroll annually plus inflation. Even though her application was made before the Feb. 17 deadline, she said she was told less than a week ago that she would not be approved for any funding, including operating funding at any of the centres, before April 1.

“It’s a big punch in the gut,” said Worms.

Another operator who has received approval for continued funding under the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative said the ministry is months behind in payments for wage enhancements for early childhood educators.

“That adds up to \$28,000 that I have pre-paid my staff while waiting for the government to provide this lump-sum fee that they were supposed to do in March,” said Leanne Parneta, who runs two childcare centres in South Delta. “I don’t know when I’ll be reimbursed. It’s frustrating to have to sit and wait.”

Parneta has paid her educators the wage enhancement out of her own pocket since September in order to retain staff.

Worms said she also opted to pay her educators the wage top-up to assist those who were taking maternity leaves.

“We decided to pay them and not wait for a lump-sum payment from the province because it would mess up their mat leave because they would get a random lump-sum salary paycheck in the middle of their mat leave,” Worms explained. “To offer wages earned in a different fiscal year makes zero sense.”

The ministry said it released the funds last week for educator hours worked since last September, but Parneta said she has not received a notice.

“The problem is when you phone the ministry, you get a different story every time,” she said.

Parneta and Worms said they remain in the dark about whether the wage subsidy will continue in the new fiscal year, which begins next week.

The ministry statement said childcare providers will be notified sometime in April whether they are approved for the wage enhancement program in 2022. The ministry did not say when approved operators would receive those payments.

“The bottom line is I have to inform my families that they’re paying an extra \$350 a month starting April 1st with barely any notice, and my educators just got a reduction in their wages of \$693 a month because these guys can’t get their act together,” said Worms.

Parneta added the ministry has not reimbursed operators for MSP contributions they have been making since 2020.

The Ministry statement confirmed it will reimburse MSP payments made in 2020 starting next week.

Kirkpatrick believes the government’s inability to roll out its programs in a timely manner is exacerbating the childcare crisis.

“This fiasco will only further escalate B.C.’s childcare space shortage, drive (early childhood education) workers out of the sector, and make life more unaffordable for parents,” she said.

The minister responsible for childcare, Katrina Chen, was not available to comment.

**Region:** [British Columbia](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

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