

# Island MLA says wait-lists still too long for child care on P.E.I. <sup>[1]</sup>

Province says at least 1,500 Island families are on the child care registry awaiting a space

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

An Island MLA says more and more constituents are coming to him in recent months unable to secure child care, particularly for infants — and are unable to return to the workforce as a result.

"It's something I get phone calls on quite regularly," said Cory Deagle, MLA for Montague-Kilmuir with the ruling Progressive Conservatives.

The government says about 1,500 Island families are on the child-care registry waiting for a space, and Deagle said many wait more than a year — something he brought up in the P.E.I. Legislature recently.

"It's just too long," he said.

"How can a parent plan to go back to work if they don't have child care? I know one family is basically having to try and find someone different all the time to look after their child. And it's not good for the child because they don't have a routine."

No quick fix

The Early Childhood Development Association of P.E.I. is fielding these calls as well.

"We're hearing more and more about families not being able to return to work because of child care," said Jennifer Nangreaves, executive director of the association.

"P.E.I. is growing in all sorts of aspects. People are heading back into work now. So there is a need for even more child-care facilities in communities."

She said the problem isn't quick or easy to solve, because training and recruiting early childhood educators (ECEs) takes time, as does establishing new Early Years Centres — or licensing existing ones.

"There should be an announcement here pretty soon of some centres that have achieved the designation. So that means that there's more centres on the registry and that in itself creates more spaces," said Nangreaves.

"But, again, ECEs are at the heart, and we need to continue to have training grants available and methods of study ... available so that they can continue to up-skill and enter our sector."

Nangreaves said that pinning down the number of vacant ECE positions on P.E.I. isn't easy, but that anyone graduating from early childhood education programs on the Island will have their pick of jobs. Many have already secured positions.

Hoping for 25 new centres this year and next

Sonya Hooper, assistant deputy minister of Early Years with the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, said focusing on staff is a large part of addressing the shortage of available child care spaces. She points to increasing wages and the development of a pension plan as steps the department has taken.

She's also optimistic those incentives will attract private family home centres, both new and existing, to become licensed with the department.

"It would be our hope that they would maximize the licence capacity," said Hooper.

Hooper said there are currently 11 applications from centres wishing to become licensed. The goal is to add 10 new centres to the system this year and 15 next year.

She said there's also new hope thanks to a recently signed federal agreement that promised \$27 million to support the Island's child-care system. The five-year agreement has a two-year action plan that Education and Lifelong Learning Minister Natalie Jameson said in the legislature last week would help create 452 new spaces, with 220 additional spaces being funded through the province.

Hooper said she can appreciate how that doesn't help families currently waiting for child care. She said she, too, wishes there were shorter-term solutions.

"We certainly know that two-year and five-year action plans aren't going to address the need for their family's child care today or tomorrow or probably even next week.

"But what we do have on the table now, that we didn't have ever before, is this 27 million additional dollars to work, to build a stronger system, to be able to address the needs for families across P.E.I.. And I think that we're in good shape for starting that work."

She said in addition to focusing on training and recruitment and retention of staff, work is also underway — in collaboration with the Early Childhood Development Association — to develop a toolkit for any individuals or municipalities looking to offer child care. She said part of those federal funds will be used for grants to help new operators establish a business in the sector, especially in areas where the need for child-care spaces is greatest: Charlottetown, Summerside and eastern P.E.I.

**Region:** Prince Edward Island [3]

**Tags:** waitlist [4]

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