

# Some Nova Scotia daycares reducing services to deal with labour shortages <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Some daycare centres across Nova Scotia are being forced to close sporadically or cut operating hours because of labour shortages, which have been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, the head of an association of private daycares said Tuesday.

It has become common for daycares to “alter what they’re able to provide because there’s such a shortage of (early childhood educators) in the province,” Bonnie Minard, chair of the Private License Administrators Association for child care, said in an interview.

Minard, who is also the executive director of the Portland Daycare Centre in Dartmouth, N.S., said there are “many, many” jobs available, but few applicants. The applications that do come in, she added, are rarely from people living in the province.

The vast majority of applications for daycare workers are from outside the Maritimes, particularly Quebec and Ontario, and “those people generally take time to get here, (and) we’re not always sure they’re going to stay,” she said.

Staffing issues in the sector are not new but the situation has been made worse by rising COVID-19 infections that are keeping workers at home, she added.

Minard said it’s been harder to find workers for private daycares since Nova Scotia’s public pre-primary program was launched in 2017 and then expanded to all schools in 2020. The majority of daycares across the province are private.

“They kept increasing (pre-primary) spaces year after year, so of course they kept increasing positions year after year,” she said about the public system. “As positions were rolled out, (daycare) centres would lose staff.”

Many staff who’ve left daycare to work in the school pre-primary setting say they do so for the shorter work hours and time off in the summer, Minard said. The daycare operator said she is hopeful, however, the province’s bursaries and accelerated early childhood educator diploma programs will help grow the workforce, but she said that will take time.

Cathy Montreuil, the deputy minister of early childhood development, told a legislative committee Tuesday that daycare workers who left the sector are expected to return when the new compensation structure is released.

“We know that once we improve the (early childhood educator) compensation framework ECEs can rely on being fairly compensated for their work,” Montreuil told the committee. “We’ve heard from ECEs from the field that they want to come back.”

She said the department is reviewing the compensation structure as part of the province’s deal with the federal Liberal government to create 9,500 public daycare spaces costing \$10 a day, on average, by March 2026. The compensation review is expected to be complete by the end of 2022, she said.

The deadline for private daycares to sign on to the federal-provincial funding deal was dropped in February, following pushback from the sector. As a result, daycares like the one operated by Minard have at least a year to iron out details of the agreement, which will require them to operate as non-profits or lose subsidies.

Minard said she and fellow daycare operators are “cautiously optimistic” about Nova Scotia’s progress toward its affordable daycare plan, adding that she’s glad the process isn’t being rushed.

“We certainly want things to be more affordable for parents, but there’s many unknown factors at this time,” she said.

**Region:** Nova Scotia <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** child care workforce <sup>[4]</sup>

labour shortage <sup>[5]</sup>

care work <sup>[6]</sup>

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