

# Make child-care funds easier to access <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Child care for \$10 a day? To Manitoba parents, the promise governments made in August sounded like a reason for celebration. In the ensuing seven months, however, the optimism has been dampened by a level of red tape that has frustrated some parents and the operators of child-care facilities.

Good intentions abounded when Manitoba signed on to a bilateral childcare funding agreement with the federal government to help lower the cost of child care, with a goal of \$10-a-day care by 2023. Manitoba Minister of Families Rochelle Squires said at the time: "This is a good news deal for kids and it's good news for early learning childcare educators and providers."

It was understandable that the initial announcement didn't include information about how the fees would be reduced. Details were still to be worked out. Provinces hadn't yet decided which method they would choose to implement the national program of \$30 billion in new child-care spending over five years.

As different provinces introduce different methods of distributing the funding, however, it seems Manitoba has chosen a system that leaves a burden of bureaucracy on child-care facility operators.

A relatively simple and transparent model — one which Manitoba could have chosen, but didn't — is called set-fee reduction. Five provinces have chosen this approach, in which the fees are directly reduced so parents are charged less.

Instead, Manitoba is leaving child-care fees as they are and is increasing the fee subsidies given to some parents, based on income. Households with a net income below \$37,116 qualify for a full subsidy, while those below \$82,877 qualify for a partial subsidy. A government spokesperson has said the subsidy-threshold method, with its disproportionate benefit to lower-and-middle-income families, is a first step towards reaching the average \$10-per-day parent fees.

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