

Still waiting for lower cost child care on Hamilton Mountain ^[1]

City officials working on application process for Canada-wide early learning and child care system.

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Source: The Spec

Format: Article

Publication Date: 26 May 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

It looks like it will be several months before Mountain families, using licensed providers, will see a significant reduction in child care costs.

Under the Canada-wide early learning and child care agreement, signed between the federal and Ontario governments in March, child care costs by participating providers are to be trimmed in half by the end of the year with the goal of \$10-a-day child care in the next four years.

Locally, application details are still being hammered out.

"We are currently in the process of developing the application process," said Jessica Chase, director of children's services and neighbourhood development, at the City of Hamilton.

Licensed providers must apply for the new funding through their municipalities by Sept. 1 and parents will eventually receive rebates of up to 25 per cent retroactive to April 1.

"I don't have a definitive timeline when families will receive those retro payments," Chase said. "We're anticipating it is going to take a few months for us to develop those tools and resources."

There are 88 licensed childcare operators in Hamilton which operate 218 licensed childcare centres and 7,749 spaces for children aged up to age six.

A report on the program is expected to go before the city's emergency and community services committee on June 2.

"The province has indicated, the priority is to focus on the affordability components as well as the wage components for (early childhood educators)," Chase said.

Whatever the timeline, it can't come soon enough for Felica Van Dyk, who noted she and her husband currently pay \$900 a month for subsidized daycare for their son.

"The impact will be huge," Van Dyk said. "Life is getting so expensive so fast, this will have an immediate effect on our lives."

Ala Mohamed is an early childhood educator with one of her children in daycare at a cost of \$1,600 a month.

"As a parent it's going to benefit me," Mohamed said. "That (savings) can be put toward their education savings plan."

As a child-care worker, Mohamed noted the agreement also shows that government finally recognizes the important work early childhood educators do, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. "Nobody has recognized that we are essential services," she said. "Nobody has recognized that early childhood educators also have families and we were risking our lives to be here to support everyone else."

Hamilton Mountain MP Lisa Hepfner said the savings could amount to \$6,000 a year per child.

"It's transformative for the country," Hepfner said. "The plan is not just to reduce fees either, it's to make early childhood education a career that is viable and pays a living wage and where there's opportunities for professional development."

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: affordable child care ^[4]

child care expansion ^[5]

Canada-wide agreement ^[6]

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