

As deadline to opt into \$10-a-day child-care program looms, Ontario participation lags ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Child-care operators have until the provincial deadline of Sept. 1, to confirm their intentions to participate in the \$10-a-day child-care program.

Once approved, an operator has 60 days to refund families 25 per cent of fees paid retroactive to April 1 for eligible children.

Of the approximately 900 for-profit operators who are members of the Ontario Association of Independent Childcare Centres (OAICC), “not one” has said it has chosen to opt in so far.

“Some have opted out already. Most are waiting to see what resolution can be reached with the province,” said Maggie Moser, director of OAICC.

Moser said her members would be compromising their businesses if they committed to reducing fees without a contract indicating funding details.

“Without a contract, you’re basically being asked to sign a blank cheque ... We have been told that nothing will be available for 2023,” she said.

Moser called the rollout of the program “a mess.”

“It’s chaos. It’s disorganized. There’s information from all over the province that varies ... Right now we cannot opt in with the information we have. It would basically force us into bankruptcy so we aren’t able to do that,” she said.

More than 200 child-care centres have submitted applications to the City of Toronto to participate in the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system, while nine centres have confirmed their intention to opt-out for 2022.

Shanlee McNamee, general manager of City of Toronto Children’s Services told Global News, “the City is happy with the current pace of applications.”

Aurelia Engstrom of East York is a mother of two. Her youngest will begin daycare in 2023, at which time she hopes it will cost her only \$10 a day, unlike what she is currently paying for her older daughter.

“It’s something that we’ve needed for so long to help women, primary caregivers, get back into the workforce. Especially, I think, at a time where we’ve seen throughout the pandemic how most of the burden has fallen on primary caregivers and mothers to look after their kids,” she said.

Engstrom recalled considering moving to Quebec where daycare is subsidized and costs considerably less than in Ontario.

“I’m optimistic that it’ll eventually get put in place. I’m a little concerned that we’re going to see some sort of backtracking from our government ... I’m concerned we’re going to see something like \$4 billion go missing – as conveniently went missing of pandemic funds. I’m concerned about all of that happening. I don’t have a lot of faith in our provincial government,” said Engstrom.

Ontario’s child-care agreement with the federal government is structured in a way that makes municipalities responsible for enrollment and fund distribution.

When Emeline, now four months old, eventually begins daycare, her big sister will be starting school.

“We eventually will, hopefully, see that 25 per cent reduction, which would make a big difference,” Engstrom said.

Region: Ontario ^[4]

Tags: affordability ^[5]

\$10 a day ^[6]

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