

# New oncologist's arrival on P.E.I. delayed by lack of child care <sup>[1]</sup>

Current wait time for francophone child care is estimated to be 3 years

**Author:** Doria-Brown, Jessica

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## EXCERPTS

A lack of available child-care space has been brought into sharper focus recently because it is interfering with a physician's planned move to P.E.I., says the province's francophone early childhood education association.

Kathleen Couture, executive director of the Association des centres de la petite enfance francophones de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, said the problem isn't new. It's just the latest example of how the Island's limited child-care options make it a challenge to recruit new workers to the province..

"It's a situation that we face, unfortunately, all the time," said Couture.

"We see it on a daily basis. We juggle it on a daily basis. We do our best to fill all of our spots as much as we can. The key to this is we need more educators."

Physician recruiters have been working with her team to find a solution for an oncologist hired to work at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, she said. The physician is looking for French-speaking child care in Charlottetown, and members of the francophone community have been working to find solutions as well. But Couture said despite the clear need for more doctors on the Island, anyone seeking francophone child care has to get on the wait list until a space is available.

There are currently 180 families in line for a space at the centre in Charlottetown, an estimated wait of up to three years, Couture said.

As with any request the association gets from families wishing to relocate to P.E.I. the association is trying to find solutions for this physician. The centre in Rustico may have space, Couture said.

## Offering a living wage

The centre in Charlottetown would like to offer more spaces, said Couture, but it is having trouble recruiting teachers.

Recruitment would be easier, she said, if those educators could be offered higher wages.

"Most of our early childhood educators do not make a living wage in today's economy, with the prices of inflation in Prince Edward Island and the increases in prices in housing," said Couture.

In some cases educators working in francophone early childhood education have to take a second job to cover their expenses, she said, and make use of government subsidies to cover their own child care costs.

"That goes to show you just what the salaries are for an educator," said Couture.

"The province is helping them subsidize their own child care because their salaries are so low."

According to the province, early childhood staff working in designated Early Years Centres are among the highest paid in the country, making between \$15.98 and \$33.37 per hour depending on their qualifications and experience.

Officials with P.E.I.'s Department of Health and Wellness who work in recruitment of medical professionals say they recognize finding doctors to move to the Island is only the first step in the process.

Rebecca Gill, director of recruitment and retention, said once someone has been hired, it can be a struggle to find both housing and child care.

"It is very challenging," said Gill.

"The focus is on the family itself, ensuring from a retention perspective they're happy. We're doing what we can to support them so that they choose to stay in P.E.I."

Dr. Megan Miller, chief physician recruiter with the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island, said in a statement to CBC News that

successful recruitment efforts must help the whole family — including spouses and children — adjust to living and working on P.E.I.

"The recruitment team offers its support however we can, including accessing accommodations or a realtor; education and child-care network; spousal employment support; and other requests that may be unique to a physician and their family," she said.

The solution to attracting and retaining staff relies on collaboration between government departments, community groups, businesses and individuals to meet the needs of new hires, she said.

"The more we work together to create the best possible experience, the more success we will see with our recruitment efforts," she said.

For Couture, there's optimism that recruitment could become a little easier in the months to come, with a planned pay increase for early childhood educators expected to be announced this fall. The association doesn't yet know the dollar amount.

"I'm hoping for substantial," said Couture.

"I'm hoping that we can say that it's the biggest raise we've seen to date."

Until wages for early childhood educators are improved, she said access to child care will remain a challenge for anyone hoping to recruit newcomers to P.E.I.

**Region:** Prince Edward Island <sup>[3]</sup>

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

spaces <sup>[5]</sup>

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