

Child-care costs in Parry Sound district decreasing under new program ^[1]

Costs to be an average of \$10 by September 2025

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EXCERPTS

In March, Ontario secured a deal with the federal government on a national child-care plan for Ontario families. Through the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care program, families are expected to see financial relief through reduced average parent fees every year, with \$10/day average licensed child-care fees for children ages 0-6 by September 2025.

All licensed child-care programs operating in Ontario that serve children under six can apply to the program. However, participation in the program is optional, which means that if a licensed child-care operator does not choose to opt-in to the program, the parents receiving care from that operator would not be eligible for fee reductions through the federal plan.

Throughout the province, applications from licensed child-care operators are being received by local consolidated social services managers and district social services administration boards.

The application period for operators runs from June 30 to Sept. 11; however, this deadline has now been extended to Nov. 1 to allow operators more time to make decisions. Once a licensed operator has been approved, eligible families can expect a 25 per cent child-care fee reduction retroactive to April 1. By Dec. 31, fees are scheduled to be reduced a further 25 per cent by participating operators to 50 per cent. In September 2024, fees will be reduced even further by participating operators, with a final reduction in September 2025 to bring fees down to an average of \$10 per day.

There are currently eight licensed centre-based child care operators in the District of Parry Sound, including four directly operated by the DSSAB, and one privately owned and operated. Of those, six have opted in to the federal program. The DSSAB's Licensed Home Child Care Program has also opted in, meaning families enrolled with agency-approved home child-care providers may be eligible for financial relief through the program.

"Our staff have been in touch with all licensed child-care operators in the district and, based on those conversations, we expect that the majority will opt-in by the November deadline," said Pam Nelson, manager of housing and child care service management for the District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board. "Transitioning into the new system is not without its challenges — one of the largest being the ongoing workforce shortage in child care, which will make it difficult to meet the demand for increased spaces."

In the program, the Ontario government has called for the opening of more child-care spaces, but hiring enough qualified staff to operate programs will be a significant challenge.

"Recruitment of early childhood educators is a huge struggle provincewide and we're seeing those issues here in our own district," said Brenda Wiltshire, manager of directly-operated child-care programs for the DSSAB. "It's going to be a real challenge to meet the increased demand from parents that are going to want to access child care now that it's going to be more affordable."

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: child care ^[4]

costs ^[5]

Canada-wide agreement ^[6]

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